

## Walking Series

### Confidence to Walk with Jesus... to Gates of Hell?

*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

*Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."*

Matthew 16: 13-18

Caesarea Philippi, often referred to as "The City of Pagans," is documented in scripture and history. Both identify the city as one dominated by immoral activities and pagan worship. This walking with Jesus talk is based on the events and conversation between Jesus and his Disciples at the entrance to a cave Jesus refers to as the gates of hades.

The twelve had followed Him on a long thirty plus miles hike from the religious communities of Galilee where to this place where he could make an important point about the presence of evil and paganistic rituals. Jesus saw the opportunity for Disciples to talk about religious practices that were extremely different to the Jewish towns in the region where they were taught by the Rabbi to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel." Indeed, that happened after three years training, they were given the Jesus' authority to go into the world to love the Gentiles in all nations.

Jesus delivered a graduation speech to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi. In that pagan setting, he encouraged his disciples to build a church that would overcome the worst evils. I'll refrain from going into detail here, but trust me, the worship was nowhere near how we like to worship in our churches and synagogues today.

When Jesus brought his disciples to the area, they must have been shocked. Caesarea Philippi was like a red-light district. Devout Jews would have avoided any contact with the despicable acts committed there. When Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter said, "You are the Son of the living God." The disciples were probably stirred by the contrast between Jesus, the true and living God, and the false hopes of the pagans who trusted in "dead" gods. The Rabbi made a point to make them aware of good and evil and how they should deal with the darker side.

One of my absolute favorite stories regarding individuals who overcome evil is Irena Sender. Irena was 98 when she died in 2008, but her story lives on. She lived in Warsaw Poland during WWII and managed to get permission to work in the Warsaw Ghetto. Her job was a plumbing and sewer specialist, but she had ulterior motives. Irena smuggled infants out of the ghetto in the bottom of a toolbox she carried. She kept a dog in the back that she trained to bark when the Nazi soldiers let her in and out of the ghetto. The soldiers wanted nothing to do with the dog, and the barking covered the noises from the children. She was eventually caught, arms and legs broken, and she was severely beaten. By then she had smuggled some 2500 infants and children out of the ghetto. She recorded their names and hid the documents in a jar buried under a tree in her back yard.

My desire is that schools and churches become staging areas rather than fortresses; places that equip God's people to confront a sinful world instead of hiding from it. Jesus knows that the pagan world will resist, but he challenges us to go there anyway. Go there to build his church in those very places that are most morally decayed. Go there so we can know the promise that "all the powers of hell will not conquer us."

*Peace Always,  
Ted*