

Walking Trees

In Matthew 16 Jesus says:

You are the rock. On this rock I'll build my Church.

There are significant differences in Matthew and Mark versions of this story.

In Matthew 16 we read:

Now when they came to the district of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, who do people say the son of man is? And they said some, say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. And he said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter said you are the Christ, the son of the living God. Jesus answered him, *Blessed are you ...*

Peter gets his own beatitude. Blessed are the poor, the meek, etc.. Blessed is Simon Peter!

Blessed are you Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one he was the Christ.

From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed. And on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, far be it from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you. But Jesus turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan, you are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

As Catholics, we really like this version. But some biblical scholars will say none of that actually happened. Matthew made it up because Matthew is drawing on Mark's gospel. Remember, most scholars say Mark's gospel comes first.

Now look at another story in Mark 8:22-26. This story is only found in Mark's gospel. It's not found in Matthew, Luke, or John.

And they came to Bethsaida and some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and he led them out of the village. And when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him. Do you see anything? And he looked up and he said, I see people, but they look like trees walking. And Jesus laid his hands on him again. And he opened his eyes and his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home saying, do not even enter the village.

Skeptical scholars will say that story is not found in Matthew or Luke or John because it's such an embarrassing story about Jesus. Jesus was pretty poor healer. He tried to heal the

man, but it didn't take, and so he had to do it over a second time. They say Matthew, Luke, and John are really embarrassed by this, so they leave the story out of their gospels.

Now we read the story of Peter's confession in Mark:

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, who do people say that I am? And they told him John the Baptist and other say Elijah and others, one of the prophets. And he asked him, but who do you say that I am? And Peter answered him. You are the Christ. And he strictly charged him to tell no one about him.

What did Mark leave all this out in his version of Peter's confession?

- Peter does not call Jesus the Son of the living God.
- Jesus doesn't say "Blessed are you, Peter." Peter doesn't get a beatitude.
- No keys! Peter doesn't get the keys.

Why? Some scholars say it's because Matthew made this up. Matthew wanted to add to Peter's prestige, so he made up the details and embellished his account.

So, why does Mark have the story of the healing of the blind man? Who is Mark representing? Where does Mark get his gospel? So why do you think Mark's gospel doesn't have Peter getting his own beatitude? Because Peter didn't go around saying,

"Hey, guess who got the keys and no one else. Guess who got his own beatitude?"

Peter didn't do that. In fact, when you read Mark's gospel, Peter always looks bad. Always. He never looks good, not even one time. But in the gospel of Matthew, suddenly there are positive stories about Peter. Why? Because Mark records the preaching of Peter who learned humility.

But why does Mark have the story of the healing of the blind man before Peter's confession? Because when Peter told the story of his confession, he told it within the context of the blind man because Peter wanted to emphasize that when he confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, he was like the blind man who only had partial vision.

The man was given sight, but it was blurry. Jesus healed him a second time and then he could see clearly. Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah, but he thinks he's some kind of military Messiah, because as soon as Peter hears Jesus is going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter says, "No, I will not let that happen."

And Jesus than says, get behind me Satan. So, Mark wants to emphasize what Peter emphasized, and that is that Peter understood that Jesus was the Messiah, but he only had partial vision of that. Matthew wants to emphasize the momentous nature of Peter's confession, even though it was partial, which he acknowledges, because he goes on to tell the story of get behind me Satan.

Peter wants to put the emphasis elsewhere. Matthew is not adding something, Mark is leaving something out because Peter left it out.

We could look at Paul's letter to the Galatians where he talks about how God revealed his Son to Paul. He goes on to talk about how Peter was given a special commission to go to the Jews and proclaim the gospel. Reading Galatians 1 and 2 carefully, there are many parallels between Matthew 16 and Galatians 1, where even Paul says,

This did not come to me by flesh and blood.

This is the same language Jesus uses with Peter in Matthew 16. Which is written first, Galatians or Mark? Probably Galatians. Matthew is giving us history. It's Mark, who leaves it out because of Peter's humility. And this is where reading the gospel in the light of the Church tradition helps us to see things that you otherwise wouldn't be able to see if you simply approach the gospels with a hermeneutic of suspicion.

As we go through the gospels, we see that they're Greco-Roman biographies, and they emphasize different things. Matthew's going to emphasize Peter's role in a way that Mark plays down, which is what you would expect Mark to do, because that's what you would expect Peter to do.

Luke is going to emphasize mercy. He's going to emphasize even more of the idea of God's peace and reconciliation. Peace on earth is the message of the Christmas story. Luke will lead us in the way of peace, as Simeon will say his Benedictus.

As you read the gospels you to see different stresses, but it's the same gospel because, as we saw at the beginning, it's *the gospel* according to Matthew, *the gospel* according to Mark, *the gospel* according to Luke, and *the gospel* according to John, and they're all going to work together to help us see the fullness of who Christ is because one gospel couldn't contain the mystery.