

[Slide 1] *Before sermon begins*

[Slide 2] *Scripture readings*

Exodus 1:8-2:10, Psalm 124, Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20

[Slide 3] *Big idea*

SERMON CENTER: God's mercy does not stop with rescuing individuals. In Christ, mercy forms a holy people who resist fear, renew their minds, preserve life, and offer their gifts together.

Opener: Who Is Jesus?

[Slide 4] *Historical geography: Caesarea Philippi*

There are places in Scripture that seem to ask a question before anyone speaks. Caesarea Philippi was such a place. North of the Sea of Galilee, near Mount Hermon and springs feeding the Jordan, it was beautiful terrain crowded with rival claims about God, power, and life.

Jesus brings his disciples into a district long associated with Pan. Sacred niches were carved into the rock. Herod the Great built a temple honoring Augustus nearby; Philip enlarged the city and named it Caesarea Philippi, joining Caesar's name to his own. The landscape announced: Caesar rules. The old gods remain. Power belongs to the strong.

Matthew does not identify the exact spot, but we can imagine Jesus and his disciples somewhere along a ridge or path overlooking the sanctuary. Below stood Pan's niches, Caesar's temple, and a city bearing Philip's name—human monuments built to make temporary powers appear eternal.

[Slide 5] *Who stands above whom?*

But who was really standing above whom?

The temples appeared permanent. Jesus appeared to be an ordinary teacher surrounded by ordinary men. Yet standing there was **the eternal Son of the living God**—the One through whom mountain, spring, stone, and every human life were made. Caesar's glory would fade. Pan's sanctuary would become a ruin. But the living Christ would build a people whom even the gates of death could not overcome.

[Slide 6] *Who is Jesus?*

There Jesus **asks the question at the center of everything**. Our first question is not, “*Who am I?*” It is, “Who is Jesus?” Only when Jesus is rightly confessed can the church understand who it is.

[Slide 7] *Matthew 16:13–20*

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 16:13-20

Hear the Word of the Lord from Matthew 16:13-20.

Introduction: A Confession Among Rival Claims

This moment marks a turn in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus has been teaching, healing, confronting hollow religion, and extending mercy beyond expected boundaries. NOW, right here, just after **Peter's confession**, he speaks plainly about Jerusalem, suffering, death, and resurrection... The disciples can name him **Messiah**, but must learn what kind of Messiah he is. He will not follow Caesar's methods; he will overcome evil through faithful, self-giving love.

The disciples begin with public opinion: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet. These are respectful, even religious answers. But borrowed opinions cannot become a **living confession**. Jesus asks, “**But what about you? Who do you say I am?**”

[Slide 8] *Peter's confession*

Peter answers, “**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**” Near shrines to old gods, Peter names the living God. In a city carrying Caesar's name, Peter identifies another King—the Christ whose kingdom comes through mercy, obedience, a cross, and resurrection.

[Slide 9] *I will build my church*

Jesus says this **Great Confession** is not produced by human cleverness; **the Father reveals it**. Then Jesus says, “**I will build my church.**”

Whatever debates surround the word **rock**, the central point is **Jesus**: He builds the church, and the church belongs to Him. The language of keys, binding, and loosing is not permission to dominate; **it describes a community entrusted to discern and live faithfully under the Messiah's reign.**

The church does not begin by advertising itself, defending itself, or asking how it can appear successful. It begins by confessing Jesus... **From that confession, a people is formed. Mercy received becomes a life offered.**

Get it? Understand, right?

Now listen for what happens when forgotten mercy becomes fear, policy, and violence—and ordinary people preserve life.

[Slide 10] *Exodus 1:8–22; 2:1–10*

SCRIPTURE READING: Exodus 1:8-22; 2:1-10

[Slide 11] *When fear becomes a system*

Takeaway: When Fear Becomes a System

Exodus begins with a chilling sentence: a new king arose who did not know Joseph. Last week, Joseph used power to preserve the brothers who wounded him. Now Joseph has been

forgotten. Pharaoh uses power to preserve himself. Joseph sees hungry people and makes room for mercy; Pharaoh sees a growing people and imagines a threat.

The Israelites had first entered Egypt as Joseph's extended family, welcomed during famine because God had used Joseph to preserve the nation. Generations passed, and that family became a numerous people. The new king's refusal to "know Joseph" is more than a missing history lesson. Egypt no longer honors the story of mercy that made their shared life possible. **Once gratitude disappears, neighbors can quickly be recast as threats.**

Fear rarely remains private... When it is nursed, rewarded, and organized, FEAR becomes a system. Pharaoh's fear becomes forced labor; forced labor becomes violence; violence becomes a command to kill children. The ruler desperate to preserve what he think is his... will destroy anyone he cannot control.

[Slide 12] *Women preserve life*

Yet the Pharaoh's command does not go unanswered. Shiphrah and Puah fear God more than Pharaoh. A mother hides her child. A sister watches beside the river. Pharaoh's daughter sees his vulnerability and chooses compassion. The first resistance in Exodus comes not from an army but through midwives, a mother, a sister, and a daughter who refuse to let fear have the final word.

This is mercy taking a body. Mercy becomes hands that deliver a child, arms that hide him, eyes that keep watch, and courage that draws him from the water. God is already preserving the life through which many lives will one day be delivered. Mercy received becomes a life offered.

[Slide 13] *Psalm 124*

SCRIPTURE READING Psalm 124

In Psalm 124, we hear Israel remember that deliverance was not self-made. Their life together rests upon the mercy of God.

The psalm does not praise Israel's strength. "If the Lord had not been on our side," the waters would have overwhelmed them. The snare was broken because God acted.

Remembered mercy keeps a people from imagining they saved themselves. Yet rescue is not the end. God rescues a people so their life reveals the character of their Deliverer.

[Slide 14] Romans 12:1-8

SCRIPTURE READING Romans 12:1-8

In Romans 12, we hear how Paul describes the life growing from God's mercy: offered bodies, renewed minds, and many gifts within one body.

[Slide 15] Mercy Takes a Body

Takeaway: Mercy Takes a Body

Paul begins with “Therefore.” **Everything he asks grows from what he has proclaimed:** God has acted in Christ. Grace has met sinners. Mercy has opened a way for Jew and Gentile alike. Therefore, “in view of God's mercy,” offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Christian obedience is not payment for mercy; it is our response. God does not say, “Offer yourself so that I might love you.” In Christ, God says, “*I have shown you mercy; now let mercy take shape in your life.*” Our worship becomes embodied in our time, habits, relationships, work, money, speech, attention, and strength.

That is why Paul speaks of the renewed mind. Pharaoh's violence began in a mind captured by fear. He saw neighbors as enemies, growth as danger, and power as permission to control. God's people must not be pressed into that pattern. Christ renews our minds so we can recognize what fear distorts and **discern** what love requires.

Paul then moves from each believer's offered body to the one body of the church. We do not have the same function, but we belong to one another in Christ. Mercy does not erase our differences; it consecrates them. Teaching, serving, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy become gifts offered together. No one carries the whole ministry, and no faithful gift is unnecessary.

[Slide 16] A holy people in Christ

Concluding: A Holy People in Christ

Now the thread becomes clear. **In Exodus**, a holy people resists fear and preserves life. **In the psalm**, a rescued people remembers God's help. **In Romans**, a worshiping people renews its mind and offers its gifts. **In Matthew**, Jesus stands at the center and tells us whose people this is: “*I will build my church.*”

When fear tells us to tighten our grip, mercy teaches us to preserve life. When the world presses us into its mold, Christ renews our minds. When isolation says faith is private, the Spirit joins us to a body. When we think our gift, do not matter, Grace says, “Oh yeah?” Well, offer it.

We may have fears about health, family, finances, the future, the church, and the world around us. Jesus does not ask us to pretend danger is unreal. He asks us not to let fear become our lord. Pharaoh built **a people** around fear. Jesus builds a people around this confession: he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

[Slide 17] Open Worship / conclusion

Invitation to Open Worship

I cannot know every burden carried into worship this morning or every direction from which fear has been speaking. But Christ knows. Before we ask what to do, let's return to the living Center and hear his question: “*Who do you say I am?*”

If Jesus is merely one voice among many, we will arrange our lives around whichever voice frightens us most. But if Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, fear is not our master, Caesar is not our lord, and self-preservation is not our highest calling. Because we truly belong to Christ, we belong to one another.

As we enter open worship, let Jesus' question rest before you. Perhaps he will reveal a fear shaping your mind, **a life you are called to protect, a pattern you must resist, or a gift you have withheld**. Do not force an answer. Wait before the living **Christ, and** let mercy become obedience... [Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. In him, God's mercy forms a holy people who resist fear, renew their minds, preserve life, and offer their gifts together. Mercy received becomes a life offered].