

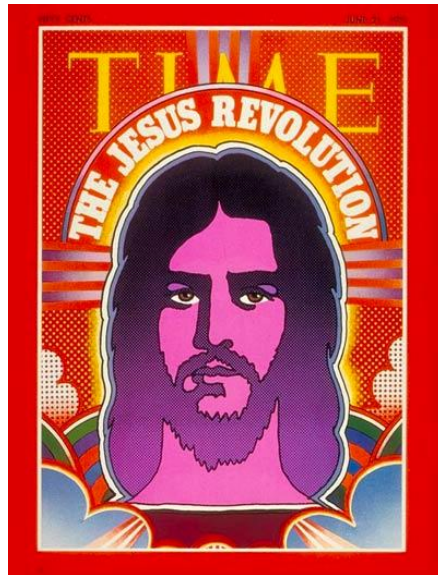
Romans 10:6-13 Matthew 16:13-20 August 23, 2020
Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

A DECLARATION OF FAITH

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

According to my research, although he has never been Time magazine's "Person of the Year," Jesus had appeared on Time's cover twenty-three times from 1923 – 2014. I couldn't find any evidence he has been on the magazine cover between 2014 and 2020, but I may be wrong. As of 2014, Jesus was #7 on the list, between Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford.

Jesus appeared on the cover of Time on June 21, 1971. It looked like this:



The cover story began this way:

WANTED
JESUS CHRIST

ALIAS: THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD, KING OF KINGS,
LORD OF LORDS, PRINCE OF PEACE, ETC.

Notorious leader of an underground liberation movement

Wanted for the following charges:

- Practicing medicine, winemaking and food distribution without a license
- Interfering with businessmen in the temple
- Associating with known criminals, radicals, subversives, prostitutes and street people
- Claiming to have the authority to make people into God's children

APPEARANCE: Typical hippie type - long hair, beard, robe, sandals. Hangs around slum areas, few rich friends, often sneaks out into the desert.

BEWARE: This man is extremely dangerous. His insidiously inflammatory message is particularly dangerous to young people who haven't been taught to ignore him yet. He changes men and claims to set them free.

WARNING: HE IS STILL AT LARGE!

As they were traveling through the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" That question has been debated and argued for 2,000 years. What kinds of answers would you expect from a person-on-the-street interview in, say, New York City, to the question: "Who is Jesus Christ?" The responses might range from the aliases listed in the 1971 Time cover story (all taken from the Bible, by the way) to a good man, a great teacher, a martyr for a cause, a misguided zealot, a liar, a deluded person, a fraud, even a myth. Matthew limits the disciples' answers to John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. But that list seems to be representative of 1st century popular opinion across the board.

Then Jesus personalized his question for his disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" You can't see or hear it in English, but Jesus pressed the issue with his disciples. He said, "But **YOU**, who do **YOU** say that I am?" Jesus' first question about what the crowds thought about him sounds like information gathering. His second question of his disciples gets at the core of their relationship with Jesus and what kind of life they will lead.

As is typical of Simon in the gospels, he appears to answer for all of the disciples: "You are the Messiah/the Christ, the Son of the living God." He makes a declaration of faith there in Caesarea Philippi. Actually, he makes **the** declaration of faith. What follows after his declaration of faith was life changing for him . . . and for us.

Do you know who Dwayne Johnson is? Some of you might recognize that name, but many more of you might know him as The Rock. According to an article about how Dwayne Johnson got his nickname, "When he first began pro wrestling, the athlete used the name Rocky Maivia to honor his father, Rocky Johnson, and grandfather,

Peter Maivia. This was later shortened to The Rock as befits his charisma and ringside popularity.”

That story is similar to how Roberto Balboa got his nickname. You don't know who Roberto Balboa is? How about “Rocky”? A source says, “Inspired by his father to be physical because he wasn't smart, Rocky Balboa grew up idolizing boxers, and took his nickname Rocky from the famous Rocky Marciano. While Rocky's name is never revealed on screen, the boxer's real first name is revealed in an early draft of the *Rocky II* script.”

We know the chief disciple as “Peter,” but that's really his nickname. Jesus said to Simon, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” (Matthew 16:18) Jesus is “punning” with Peter – the Greek word for “rock” is *petra*; for “Peter” it's *Petros*. If The Rock and Rocky describe Dwayne Johnson and Roberto Balboa in the ring, “Rock” or “Rocky” are meant to describe Simon son of Jonah's responsibility and calling in and for the church.

As we say, nobody's perfect. But if you were searching for the ideal candidate to be “The Rock” upon which to build your church, would you choose a man who: asked to walk on water but then began to sink because he doubted you and got scared? rebuked you like a child when you told him what was awaiting you in Jerusalem and what kind of Messiah you really were? refused your offer to wash his feet at the Last Supper? impulsively pulled out his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant in the garden, despite all of your teachings about turning the other cheek and loving your enemies? denied even knowing you when you were on trial for your life, not just once, not just twice, but three times?

But that's who Rocky is in the gospels! And as this story and so many other stories about Peter and the other disciples in the gospels show us, it's not enough simply to say the right words when you make a declaration of faith. You must declare your faith in your actions. Literally, it's quite easy to say “You are the Messiah/Christ, the Son of the living God.” It's another thing to demonstrate how your declaration of faith shapes and guides your life. Fortunately, for Simon “Rocky” Peter and for us, Jesus doesn't abandon us or reject us for ministry, even with all of our shortcomings and faults.

As Mark Twain supposedly said, “Actions speak louder than words, but not nearly as often.” More biblical examples can be found in James 2:14, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?” and 1 John 3:17, “How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”

Today's epistle lesson from Romans 10 tells us, “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.” That is the bedrock foundation of our faith – we are saved by God's grace through Jesus Christ. But if that declaration of faith is not backed up by the way we live as disciples of Jesus Christ, the declaration of faith will be nothing more than “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Corinthians 13:1)

I am currently auditing a 16-week online course in Biblical Greek Syntax through Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville. Not only am I strengthening my Greek language skills, I am also enjoying the professor's theological insights as he explains the grammar and syntax of New Testament verses. We are translating 1 John for our practical exercises. This past week we looked at a series of what are called "3rd Class Conditional Statements," which are "if-then" sentences. In the opening sentences of the letter, John poses some hypothetical situations about the faith and actions of believers. They might be hypothetical from a grammatical and syntactical perspective, but, realistically, they aren't always hypothetical in our Christian lives.

Dr. Plummer asked us to imagine the disconnect between a declaration of faith and everyday behavior as we translated the following verses:

- If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, (then) we lie and do not do what is true. (1 John 1:6)
- If we say that we have no sin, (then) we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)
- If we say that we have not sinned, (then) we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:10)

Jesus asked his disciples, "But you, who do YOU say that I am? Matthew probably was asking the believers in his church some fifty years later the same question – "Who do you think Jesus is?" And it's ***THE*** question that each of us must answer every day, not only in our declaration of faith from our mouth but especially in our declaration of faith in how we live and walk with our Lord Jesus – "But you, who do ***YOU*** say that I am?"

What is our answer? And how will people know?

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, we seek signs that you are with us, rather than recognizing Your presence is with us in all times. Help us to be brave and to move forward in faith, knowing you are with us. Guide us in wisdom and insight, to follow you, for you are the way, the truth, and the life. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

NOTES

¹Lisa Chant, "How did The Rock get his nickname?" March 30, 2012 at www.whatcanilearntoday.wordpress.com/2012/03/30/how-did-the-rock-get-his-nickname/

²M. Carter, "12 Facts You Need to Know about Rocky Balboa: 10 – Rocky's Name is Roberto," November 27, 2015 at www.screenrant.com.