

Title: Do you realize what this is?
Text: Matthew 16.13-20
Theme: Peter's Confession of Christ
Series: Matthew #84
Prop Stmt: Christ responds to Peter's confession by promising to establish the church and to use Peter in a prominent way in it.

The text we are about to read is the second of two turning points in Matthew's gospel. The first one was in chapter 12 where the scribes and the Pharisees blatantly rejected the obvious miracles of Christ and attributed them to the works of Satan. This was their formal rejection of Christ. In contrast to that, is this text. This is the formal acceptance of Christ. But, the contrast goes much deeper than that. Christ is rejected by the learned and is accepted by the unschooled. He is rejected by the powerful and accepted by the outcasts. He is rejected by the mighty and accepted by the weak. It is no wonder then, that the church that Jesus starts only thrives when we truly realize who He is, what we are, and what this (the church) really is.

Read Text:

When I was about 15, I knew a guy named Sam. Sam bought a car that had been part of the fleet of cars of the Ohio State Police. He repainted it so that it looked like a plain, four-door Chevy. But Sam would love to go out Friday and Saturday nights and pull up to muscle cars and pretend not to pay attention to them, until the light turned green and then, he would light them up. Sam had a lot of fun in that car. He also went through a lot of tires. From the outside, it didn't look like much, but when you looked under the hood, it was a different story.

Within a few months of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, God gave to Moses detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle. This tent was to be set-up in the middle of where the people camped and was the place where God would live. The tabernacle was "God with us." But, from the outside, the tabernacle did not look like much. It was about the most unspectacular and ordinary looking structure possible. 1) It was a tent. 2) It was covered with four layers of cloth and animal skins, with the outside layer being goatskins. But, don't let the outside deceive you. Inside, it was spectacular. The inside was designed to capture the entire creation, particularly, the Garden of Eden. That was the place where God lived with his people before sin came. The tabernacle not only looked back, it looked forward. It looked forward to Christ who is "God with us." Christ would be the means by which creation would eventually be restored to how it was intended to be.

Isaiah spoke of Christ about 750 years before Christ was born and said that he wouldn't look like much. "*He had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.*" (53.2) That is not the picture that artists have painted, is it? Go to the DIA and look at the religious art section and you will see a lot of paintings (beautiful paintings I might add) of Jesus as a baby and what do you see? For one you see blond hair and blue eyes. How many Jewish boys have blond hair and blue eyes? You

will also tend to see a halo over his head. Those images stick in our brains and we tend to allow those images to define our view of Christ, instead of the text. Jesus was not born with a halo. When you got close to Jesus, you did not hear angels singing, nor did you levitate. The fact is, Jesus looked so ordinary, that no one believed that he was the King! Jesus was not the king that people imagined him to be, and therefore, many people then, and now refuse to submit to him.

The result is, that the majority of the people who do follow Christ are not the elite aristocrats, but the ordinary folk. This is plainly evident from our text. The powerful and influential Pharisees and Sadducees reject Christ. The religious elites and the politically connected refuse him because he refuses to play their game. But, the people who follow him are the poor, the broken, the needy, the outcast, and the commoners. Peter was a common man. Peter was a fisherman. Peter did not go to the right schools or belong to the right organizations. And yet, he is chosen by God to play a pivotal role in the founding of the greatest organization in history. The truth is, God generally uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Let's set the stage.

I. **People's Confusion about Jesus** (13-14)

Jesus and the disciples arrive in the region of Caesarea Philippi. How do you think that city got its name? You do not have to look too close do you? Caesarea obviously comes from Caesar and Philippi obviously comes from Philip. Herod Philip re-built this city (along with a pagan shrine) and named it for Caesar Augustus and himself. The city was primarily a Gentile city and was one of the most northern points of the travels of Jesus. He is literally about to turn around and head south to Jerusalem in order to die. After this event, every step that Jesus takes brings him closer to the cross and closer to his death. But, much has to happen before that.

Jesus asks the disciples who the people think that Jesus is? Is his message getting out? Does anyone understand, yet? The answers sadly reveal that the people still do not know who he is. Some think that he is John the Baptist (resurrected) while others think that Jesus is the 2nd appearance of Elijah. Ironically, John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the promise for another Elijah to come. Why Jesus is thought of as being Jeremiah is not as clear. Perhaps because both were known for being sorrowful. It is hard to know for sure. But, Jesus is concerned with what they (his disciples) think. So, he asks them.

II. **Peter's Confession of Christ** (15-16)

Peter's confession is in response to Jesus wanting (demanding) that his disciples verbally profess their faith. We can already make a couple of salient observations. 1) It is not enough for you to have some general noble thoughts about Jesus. The fact that many people have many different opinions about Jesus does not mean that they are valid. In fact, what is obvious is that there is only one valid answer to question of: Who is Jesus? The other observation is that one's view of Jesus is personal but it is not private. Your view of Jesus must be right and it must be personal, in that no one can believe for you. But the fact that your belief about Jesus is personal does not mean that it is private. In

fact, if your belief about Jesus is right and personal, it will not be kept private. Jesus is pressing these guys to say it; verbalize it; stand up, speak out, and plant your flag. So, Peter does. And what he says is nothing short of astounding.

A. You are the Messiah

Here is what is implied in this statement. You, and you alone are the one and only Christ (Christos) Messiah. You are the one who was promised by the prophets to come. You are the one that we have been waiting for all of these hundreds of years. You are the one who is anointed by God. You have God's favor, God's blessing, God's power and God's authority. There is no one else like you.

John the Baptist seemed to know this. Herod feared this at his birth, the demons knew this, but no disciple of Jesus actually said this until this point.

B. You are the Son of the Living God

That is a statement of deity! Peter is declaring to Jesus that Jesus is divine in a literal sense. Peter is calling Jesus, God and Jesus is ecstatic about it because it is true. Peter does not understand the entire picture yet, which will become painfully obvious next week. But this is an amazing confession. Peter, as the spokesman for the group declares that he/they believe that Jesus is not only the Messiah, but is somehow divine. There are two things that Peter focuses on: The identity of Jesus (son of the living God) and the role that Jesus has (Messiah).

III. Christ's Commendation of Peter (17)

You said who and what I am; now I am going to tell you who and what you are.

A. You are Blessed!

Matthew does not tell us if Jesus threw his hands up in the air in celebration, or grabbed Peter by the shoulders with affirmation, but his words make it very clear. Jesus was thrilled! Beloved, this is huge! Somebody finally got it! (e.g. teacher and student) Somebody finally believed that he was whom he had been claiming to be all along. Jesus is ecstatic and pronounces a blessing on Peter. Peter, you have received favor from my Father. Jesus knew this because Peter did not come up with this idea all on his own. No one could.

B. You did not come up with this on your own.

Peter was not smarter than the Pharisees and Sadducees. Peter was not more theologically astute and trained in the Old Testament better than them. What happened? God opened his eyes to the truth of what was standing in front of him. Let me expand on that for just a bit.

Christ is pure love, pure grace as well as perfect righteousness. But grasping that and really believing that is almost impossible because our understanding of love, grace and righteousness is flawed. As much as we may love someone, we have never experienced loving someone perfectly and purely. As much as we may be loved by someone, we have never experienced someone else loving us perfectly and purely. Even the best of marriages are challenged by disease and broken by death. So, when pure love and true grace is standing right in front of you, you have to be introduced to it. It has to be explained and taught, and presented to you. For months now, Jesus has been doing that. He has loved his disciples. He has been revealing himself to them and up until this point they have not formally realized who he was and what his role was. We are so blinded by our sin that we assume that what we see, we see objectively. We see things, from our own perspective but we do not come to right conclusions about them because our vision is skewed. We need God to open the eyes of our hearts so that we can actually see, and that is what God did for Peter. Jesus affirms that.

C. My Father in heaven has revealed this to you.

You are blessed because my Father has been at work in you so that you can see (what others do not see) and believe it! There are a number of things that we do in an effort to help you be free from distractions so that you can listen and absorb what you hear. We try to have comfortable seating, temperature and atmosphere that is conducive to our body gathering together for worship and instruction. But we know that ultimately if you are going to understand the identity of Jesus and understand his role in your rescue, that God must open your eyes to that. That is why we are told to pray for people to be saved. We are asking God to act upon the person because apart from God acting not only circumstantially, but personally, the person will not see with their heart.

Now, notice how verse 18 begins. “And” What does that mean? It means that there is more to come. Jesus does not stop at this point and say, “That’s it Peter, you got it. That’s all that you need to know. Have a good life. Share your boat with Andrew, don’t fish on the Sabbath and I’ll see you in heaven.” No! Peter, what you understand, and have confessed is what I want people all over the world to understand and confess. Not only that but this is the truth that will gather people together as a people from every tribe, language and nation. People will gather together to stand together on this truth, to embrace this truth together, to be defined and formed by this truth, to be known by this truth, to defend this truth, to live by this truth and to die by this truth. Do not miss this now. The means by which the truth about Christ is to be displayed to the nations is through the church. Now Jesus speaks about the church for the very first time. This is all brand new, but you can understand why Jesus does not mention anything about the church until now. These guys were in no position to understand what the church was supposed to be and do, until they understood the foundational element of the church. The foundation of the church is Jesus, the Messiah and the Son of the Living God. He is the Cornerstone. This brings us to these next two verses.

IV. Christ’s Pronouncement about Peter and the Church (18-19)

Many of you grew up in the Roman Catholic tradition. You may therefore, know that one of the major points of disagreement between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism centers on the issue of the pope. The Reformers argued that there is nothing in the Bible that establishes and supports the position of a pope. But, the view of the Roman Catholic Church says that these two verses teach that Peter was the first Pope. Therefore, these verses have received quite a bit of attention. As we will see, this text says nothing about Peter being a pope, nor anything about having successive popes. However, in reaction to that, many Protestants have tried to argue that when Jesus said that he was going to build his church on this “rock” that this “rock” was what Peter said and not Peter himself. However, the fact that Roman Catholicism has tried to make this text say too much, does not mean that we should allow it to say too little. I am arguing that when Jesus says “this rock” that he is referring to Peter AND to what he has said.

A. Christ’s pronouncement about Peter (18)

When you go back to Peter’s confession (v.16) he says two things about Christ: 1) his identity and 2) his role. Jesus is responding in like kind. He identifies him as Peter and then speaks of his role. You are Peter (Petros), which, if you will remember is not only a name that means rock, but it is the name that Jesus gave him! His name was Simon and Jesus calls him Peter (Cephas in Aramaic, Petros in Greek). (John 1.40-42) So Jesus identifies him – you are Peter and then he tells him his role - and on this rock (petra), I will build my church. I.e. you are Peter, and I am going to use you in a strategic manner for the founding of my church. This is done through both the person of Peter and the preaching of Peter. Peter is the ambassador who goes only when the King says to go and who pronounces only what the King has first said. This is exactly what happens. In Act 2, it is Peter who preaches on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people come to faith in Christ and the church is founded. In Acts 8, it was Peter who was the first one to preach to the Samaritans and in Acts 10, it was Peter who was the first one to preach to the Gentiles and it was Peter who gave a biblical defense for the full inclusion of the Gentiles in the church (Acts 15).

But, why is Peter given this special role? Peter was given this role because he was the one who spoke up here in Caesarea Philippi. Does this mean that Peter is given a unique position of authority over the rest of the apostles and the church and that from that time on there is one man who is to rule over all churches? No! And here is why. The founding of the church is something that only happened once and by design and definition can only happen once. Peter was called to function as the focal point of the founding of the church. But, after that took place, his role as the founder gave way to his role as a leader and a fellow elder. Peter never did function as the ultimate leader of the church. James emerges as the pastor of the church in Jerusalem while Peter has a bit more of an itinerant ministry. Peter is sent by the apostles (which certainly implies submission) to Samaria to investigate the rumors of Samaritans becoming believers. Peter is also called out by Paul (Galatians 2) for his double-mindedness on the issue of circumcision. Peter was wrong and Paul was right to confront him on this. Toward the end of his life, Peter identifies himself as a “fellow elder” (1 Peter 5). What Jesus is saying is this: Peter, based on the

truth that you have just confessed I am going to use you in a strategic role for the founding of my church.

B. Christ's pronouncement about the church. (18)

Jesus says, I WILL build my church. When Jesus said this, the church was not yet in existence. Also notice that the church is Jesus'. It is not Peter's; it is not mine or yours. We are members of it, but Christ is the Head. And when I say members, I do not mean members like you are member of a gym, or a member at Sam's Club or Costco. I mean that if you are a genuine follower of Christ that you are member of his body, like my arm is a member of my body. If I were, by some means, to lose my arm, we would call that dismemberment. Here Jesus says that the church is not only his, but that he is the builder. And because he builds it, it will be successful. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

We think of gates as being something that provides protection or defense, while the word "prevail" means to conquer and defeat. Jesus is simply teaching about the indestructibility of the church. The gates of hell (hades) refers to the domain of death. So, no matter how much the church is attacked from without and believers are persecuted and martyred, the church will always endure. You cannot stop the true church because Jesus is the one who is building her. By the way, this exposes the lies of cults like Mormonism and Jehovah Witnesses who say that Christianity was completely lost for centuries and that God started over with them. That is not what Jesus says. He says that in one form or another, the true church has and always will always endure.

C. Christ's pronouncement about the keys. (19)

Here Jesus says that he is giving the keys of the kingdom to Peter. Notice that Jesus said that he is going to build his church on Peter and now he gives to Peter the keys of the kingdom. There is no competition or confusion in the mind of Christ between the church and the kingdom. In fact it is obvious from what Jesus says here that the church is going to be the vehicle through which the kingdom is expanded. In fact, I would argue that the church is the only vehicle through which the kingdom is extended, because the keys of the kingdom were only given to the church. Tuck that away, because Jesus will unpack that more in chapter 18. Keys are used for locking and unlocking, for opening and closing (binding and loosing). Therefore, Peter used the keys (preaching of the gospel) to open up the doors of the kingdom to all who would accept the gospel. But, he also used them for discipline and correction. In Acts 5, it was Peter who called out Ananias and Sapphira for their deceit, which resulted in their death. In Acts 8, Peter exposes the ulterior motives of Simon the magician in the city of Samaria and calls on him to repent.

So, I take all of this to mean that Christ chose Peter to play a pivotal role in the founding of the church. But, the authority that Jesus gave to Peter was given to him as the representative of the apostles, just as I believe that when Peter gave his confession that he was speaking on behalf of the apostles. I think Peter was the recognized leader, though this was obviously argued about from time to time. But, these keys were not given to

Peter to keep. Nor were they given to him alone because in chapter 18, Jesus speaks of the power to bind and loose as being transferred to the church.

This text is part of a greater picture on the issue of authority. How does Jesus use his authority? 1) He is willing to use his authority as leverage that he might humble himself and serve others – Phil.2 and John 13. 2) Jesus uses his authority as leverage that he might die for others – Mark 10.45 3) Jesus gives his authority away to others – Peter (Matthew 16) and the disciples (Matthew 28). 4) Jesus commands them to give that authority to the church (Matthew 18 and Ephesians 4). Authority is never ours to own or to protect. It is ours to steward and to use for the good of others.

Therefore, the authority was eventually transferred to all like Peter, who believe in Christ and are then part of the church. The church (think people) who believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of the living God have the authority to open the doors of the kingdom of Jesus to all by means of preaching the gospel. Giving people the gospel is the only way that we can open the doors of the kingdom, but we can open the doors of the kingdom. At the same time, we have been vested with the authority to do what Jesus would do if he were here physically. That means that we have the responsibility and authority to not only admit those who truly believe, but we also have the responsibility and authority to deny admittance into the church (kingdom) those who do not profess faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of the living God.

V. **Christ's Warning** (20)

Peter and the disciples did not yet understand the whole picture and were not in a position to go shooting off their mouths about it. That time would come, but that time was not yet here. However, a major step has been made. Peter, and presumably the others realize who Jesus is. Therefore, a major goal has been accomplished by Christ. Now, he sets his sights on the next one. From this point on, he turns and heads south. He is going to Jerusalem. He is going to die.

Two summary thoughts:

- 1) Do you realize who this is?

Jesus is the Son of the living God. He is God, with all of the authority, power and rights that come with it. He will finish what he starts and will do what he promises. It is not my job to make the church successful (how arrogant to think that I could do what Jesus said he would do). It is my/our task to keep the church true to her mission, which is to be a visible display of the gospel and of our Lord to one another, our families, our community and to the nations.

2) Do you realize what this (the church) is?

The (true) church is the kingdom of God made visible. (therefore)

The (true) church is on earth backed by the authority of heaven. (therefore)

- encouraging in the face of opposition because nothing can stop her
- warning to follow the whole counsel of God, but not to go beyond it

The church is indestructible and will be successful. (therefore)

She is worth your commitment because Jesus is worth a beautiful bride.