

Peter's Confession of Faith; The Lord Announces that He will Build His Church

Matthew 16:13-18

Matthew 16:13-18 - *"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* ¹⁴ *So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

¹⁵ *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"* ¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

¹⁷ *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.* ¹⁸ *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*

Background Notes

The Lord and His disciples traveled north into the district of Caesarea Philippi (v13). Caesarea Philippi is in far northern Israel, in the foothills of Mount Hermon. Here the Lord and His disciples were far from the crowds around the Sea of Galilee, and the Lord took this opportunity to ask His disciples what people were saying about His identity. *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* The Lord knew the answer to His question, but He was leading His disciples up to His important question to them, *"But who do **you** say that I am?"* (v15).

How disappointed the Lord must have been to know that relatively few people in Israel recognized Him as the true Messiah. Some thought that He was John the Baptist who had risen from the dead. That was Herod's view (Matthew 14). Some thought that He was Elijah, based on the Elijah prophecy of Malachi 4. Some said that He was Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets – probably based on the prophecy of a "great prophet to come" in Deuteronomy 18. When you really think about it, all of these suggestions were positive comments as to the character of our Lord, but they fell far short of His true identity.

The same lack of recognition is still true today. Most people will admit that Jesus was "a good man" and "a great teacher," but they're not willing to accept Him as the Son of God. And they're certainly not willing to trust Him as their only means of salvation. Have you acknowledged that Jesus Christ is **much more** than just a "good man" or a "great prophet"?

Did you know that it can be shown, by logic, that if Jesus was not more than a good man, then He was not really a good man at all? Why? The answer lies in the fact that the Lord Jesus claimed that He is **God**. He not only claimed to be the

only way to God, but He actually claimed to **be God**. In John 8:58, Jesus said to His Jewish audience, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”* The “I AM” in that statement was a claim to deity. Jesus claimed to be the same God who revealed Himself to Moses as the “I AM” at the burning bush in Exodus 3. The Jews certainly understood that our Lord was claiming to be God, because *“Then they took up stones to throw at Him...”* (John 8:59). Did the Jews try to stone the Lord Jesus to death because He claimed to be a good man or a prophet? No! They picked up stones to kill the Lord because He said **He is God**.

In John 10:30 the Lord said, *“I and My Father are one.”* Here again the Lord Jesus made a claim to deity, and once again the Jews took up stones to kill Him. Why? Was Jesus claiming to be a good man or a prophet? No, He was claiming to be much more! He was claiming to be **God**! The Jews didn’t attempt to stone the Lord because He said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” No! They wanted to kill Him because He claimed to be **God**. And that’s why they crucified Him.

If the Lord was not truly God, as He claimed to be, then He was either deluded, or mentally ill, or else He was an outright liar. And if He actually was any of those, He would certainly not have been a “good” man! So Jesus **had** to be **more** than “a good man.” Peter recognized that Jesus was more than just a good man, and made his great confession of faith in Matthew 16. If you can’t agree with Peter’s great confession of faith in verse 16, you cannot be a true Christian. *“Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”*

Doctrinal Points

1. The Church is not built on Peter.

In verse 18 the Lord said to Peter, *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church....”* Over the years, a lot of discussion has swirled over the proper interpretation of this verse. What is “this rock” on which the Church is built? Is it Peter? Or is it the truth of Peter’s statement *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”*? Or is it the Rock of Jesus Christ Himself?

In the Greek language Peter’s name is *petros*, meaning a “stone.” The word used for “rock” is **not** the same Greek word – it is *petra*, meaning a large or massive rock like a cliff. *Petra* is the word the Lord used when He said, *“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock [Greek – petran] (v24-25).* The same word is used in 1 Corinthians 10:4, *“...and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock [petra] was Christ.”*

So Peter, or “stone,” is not the “rock” – the large, massive, solid rock on which the Church is built. **The Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth about Him, is the Rock on which the Church is built!** He was not just a good man, or just a great prophet - **He is the Christ, the Son of the living God**. The Lord Jesus Christ is the **solid bedrock** on which the Church is built.

All believers are the stones – “living stones.” As a “stone,” Peter is part of the Church that is built on the bedrock of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Peter himself wrote, “*you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 2:5).

Ephesians 2:19-20 says, “*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...*” Peter and the rest of the apostles were important foundational stones in the formation of the Church, but none of them was the **cornerstone** or the **bedrock** on which the Church is built. So Peter was an important stone in the building of the Church, but the Church was not built on Peter.

2. The Church began at Pentecost.

The Lord said, “*I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*” (v18).

Note the future tense – **will** – in this Scripture. Jesus didn’t say, “I will continue to build My Church” because the Church did not begin in the Old Testament. **Israel is not the Church.** The Church is not seen in the Old Testament Scriptures – in fact, the Church is not even predicted in the Old Testament books!

The Church is seen in spiritual pictures (or “types”) in the Old Testament, but it is not mentioned by name. Why? God waited to mention the Church until the nation of Israel officially rejected their Messiah and His offer of the Kingdom, as we’re seeing in the middle chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. Only after the leaders of the nation of Israel rejected the Lord and His offer of the Kingdom – only then did the Lord reveal His plan to build His Church. That’s why the Church is not even mentioned in the Bible until Matthew 16.

And that’s why the Church is called a “mystery” in the New Testament. A biblical “mystery” isn’t a detective novel, or a weird event! It refers to truth that was concealed in the Old Testament, but was revealed in the New Testament. The apostle Paul said that God chose him to bring light and to make all see what is the “*fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 3:9-10).

As a result of the nation of Israel rejecting their King and His offer of the Kingdom, the gospel of God’s grace now goes out to the whole world, and believing Jews and Gentiles, as living stones, form the Church, the body of Christ. The Church began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, and they were baptized into the body of Christ (Acta 2).

So the Church didn’t begin in the Old Testament! The Church is something newly created in Jesus Christ, according to Ephesians 2:15. The Church began at Pentecost. It is the body and bride of Christ. The Church began at Pentecost!

Practical Application

Don't fear the gates of Hades

"...I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (v18).

In the ancient days of walled cities, the gates of a city were well fortified for defensive purposes – so much so that the term “gates of the city” was another way to express the strength or power of that city.

“Hades” is the realm of the dead. So the phrase “the gates of Hades” refers to the power of death. **The Lord made a bold pronouncement** – the powers of death would not overpower the Church that He would build!

When the Lord said that the “gates of Hades” would not prevail against the Church, He meant that the power of death would not overpower or overcome the Church in two ways:

1. The Church would survive all attacks upon it.
2. Death would not be able to prevent the Church from rescuing people for Christ before they die - like branches plucked from the fires of hell.

1 Corinthians 15:26 says, *“The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”* Death is an enemy. But this passage also says that death will be swallowed up in victory because of the work of Christ on the cross when He conquered the power of death. *“Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).*

So if you're a believer, you don't have to fear death. The penalty for sin is death - eternal death. But if you have trusted in Jesus Christ, who died for your sins, you don't have to fear death - because you now have **eternal life!**

Don't fear “the gates of Hades”!