

Peter's Confession

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[0 : 00] Our sermon today is from Matthew 16. We're looking today at verses 13 through 20. So if you have Bibles there, wherever you are, open up your Bibles and let's look together at Matthew chapter 16 and again verses 13 through 20.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

And they said, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah, one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter replied, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, bless are you, Simon Barjona, 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, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

[1 : 14] Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. Well, that's our text today. Just want to remind you of what we've seen so far as we've been going through this section of Matthew.

We kind of talked about there being a transition after Matthew 13 with the parables of the kingdom. That Matthew 13 through 16 we see a movement of greater rejection of Jesus by the crowds, but we also see that the disciples are coming to a greater knowledge of who Jesus is.

And so Peter's confession in this section really forms the highlight of the disciples' growing knowledge. His confession shows just how far they've come in terms of their faith and understanding who Jesus is.

That's not to say that they're not going to falter some as the day draws closer to his death. In fact, the next section deals with Jesus predicting or foretelling his own death and resurrection. And they're going to struggle with these things, but we hit this high point of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah.

And the Christ. Now, as we read through this, you may realize that there's been great debates and arguments over much that's in this passage. But I think the most important parts are crystal clear for us.

[2 : 29] They are easy for us to understand. And I'd really say the most important part is Peter's confession. Now, part of the problem with there being debates raging about this kind of thing is that I feel like my sermon, most of our time, is going to end up being spent on us working through these various views and what is the proper view of understanding this chapter or this section of Matthew 16.

But what I want us to really focus on, what I don't want you to miss, is that the most important thing is Peter's confession. And it's really clear what he's saying about Jesus and how far they've come. And I think that's the most important part.

So I want to start by looking at Peter's confession, and then I'm going to look at two of the controversial parts of this passage and then make some final application. So first, let's look at Peter's confession.

Now, we see what Peter says, or the disciples are saying. Jesus asks, who do they say the Son of Man is? They say some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Now, you may remember just back in chapter 14, verses 1 through 12, that Herod, in particular, was one who thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected from the dead.

[3 : 38] Jesus' miracles were powerful. You can understand why someone might think he's a prophet or even to try to explain how can a man do the kind of works he does. Well, he has to be somehow supernatural.

Maybe he's raised from the dead. But Herod feared that John the Baptist had been resurrected and was basically out to get him. He was worried about John the Baptist. But no doubt there are probably others who are saying this as well, rumors spreading that this is John the Baptist raised from the dead.

So they mention that. They mention Elijah. You may be familiar. Malachi chapter 4, verses 5 through 6 predicted that Elijah would return.

And now we see Jesus actually explaining in the Gospels that that was actually fulfilled in John the Baptist. It wasn't literally Elijah coming back, but that one would rise in the spirit of Elijah who would precede the coming of the Messiah.

That's exactly what we see in John the Baptist. But you can understand as well that people are looking for a great prophet to come. There's been 400 years of silence. And they've been longing for someone to speak to them.

[4 : 40] And now here comes Jesus on the scene that some people might draw the connection. Well, this must be the Elijah that was prophesied in Malachi 4, 5 through 6. Others say Jeremiah.

He's the only one that's specifically mentioned other than Elijah. But Jeremiah in the book of, see, the first or second Maccabees, which is not a book of the Bible, but was a book written by people recording the history kind of in that 400 years of silence.

But in the book of Maccabees, it mentions the idea of Jeremiah returning in some form. And again, not the word of God, but nonetheless, some would have been familiar with that. And maybe they think this is Jeremiah.

But either way, there are a lot of people who think this is some prophet that's come to them. And this is what the crowd is saying about them. And so they recount that. Now, first application or observation of this passage, I'd say, is it's really remarkable that these really aren't bad views.

These are really quite high views of Jesus. People look at him and they're assuming either he's John the Baptist, raised from the dead. I mean, that's pretty powerful. Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

[5 : 50] And so to think of Jesus in that way is a very high view of Jesus. But it's wrong. And I think that's even a remarkable point as we consider this, that it's possible to have a very high view of Jesus and yet still be wrong about who he is and still be headed for hell.

Right? Believing that Jesus is Elijah or even saying that he's a great prophet doesn't get you to heaven. In fact, we know that there are a number of religions that would claim that Jesus is a great prophet. All right.

Islam, for one, would say that Jesus is a great prophet. But it's not enough to save you. They're not believing he's the Messiah. They are nowhere near the confession that Peter's about to make of who Jesus is.

But we see that there's some good and really honoring opinions of Jesus, but they're wrong. So again, it's possible to think highly of Jesus.

But if we haven't trusted in him, if we haven't believed he's truly the Messiah, then that's not enough to save us just thinking highly of Jesus. Now, we have seen this with the crowds rejecting him and opposition growing, that they're not believing him to be the Messiah.

[7 : 02] They're challenging that. In fact, some were looking for him to be the Messiah in terms of a political sense and when he's not openly challenging Rome or also the idea that he hasn't continued to provide food for them, like the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000.

But either way, the crowd's growing opposition is continuing and they're opposing him more and more. He didn't meet their expectations of what the Messiah would be. So he might be a great prophet.

He's a good teacher, but he's not what they expected the Messiah to be. I think, again, as we consider how we understand this passage and apply it to us, that there are sometimes people who are going to reject Christ because they don't meet his expectations.

They want it to look a lot different or Jesus to look a lot different than he does. And because he doesn't meet their expectations, they're willing to reject him. And as we look at this, and this is going to be important later on as well, but Jesus says, who do you say that I am?

And we even see in verse 15, they said, he said to them, but who do you say that I am? The you there is plural. You know that I'm from Georgia. I'm always irritated that we don't really keep the y'all in places.

[8 : 18] When you do the Greek, the Greek actually differentiates between you plural and you singular. And in the English Bibles, we just have you. And so you read that. It's not openly obvious to us what's going on.

But Jesus said to them, who do y'all, you got that now, who do y'all say that I am? And so there's a you plural here. He's asking them together as a group, who do they say he is?

And it's Simon Peter who replies. Now this ought not surprise us because we see many times in the Gospels that it's Peter who ends up speaking for the group.

There's at least three more times in Matthew alone. I saw a list that was in the teens of how many times Peter speaks for the group of the disciples. But Peter's not speaking only for himself. He's the representative.

There's probably been lots of discussion over days, months, maybe even years that they've been talking about. Who is this Jesus? And so Peter speaking, he knows what they believe and what they've come to understand.

[9 : 23] And so we see Peter's answer. He plainly states that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Christ in verse 16. You are the Christ. And then he goes on and says, the Son of the living God.

Now there's a lot to unpack here. But the main thing I want you to see is that his confession is correct. He's understood. Jesus says later where that kind of understanding comes from. But to be the Messiah, to be the Christ is to be the promised one.

All the way from Genesis 3, 15 in the curse on the serpent. All the way through all of the Old Testament. All the covenants looking forward to the fulfillment in the person of the Davidic king or the offspring of Abraham who would end up being a blessing to all the earth.

I mean, even as we look through each one of these promises all along, it's looking for the Messiah. And to some extent, all the Jews were understanding that there's a coming Messiah that's going to do something powerful.

So what he's professing is, you're that Messiah. You're the one that's been promised in all the Old Testament. And so that really in itself is a powerful confession. But he goes on and identifies Jesus really as being divine.

[10 : 31] He calls him the Son of the living God. Now, the Son of the living God, we can think of, there are times in which all of Israel is referred to as sons of God. They're God's children in a sense.

And is that what Peter's saying? Is Peter just saying, well, you're a child of God? Well, no. Greek actually distinguishes this pretty well, even as we have it here in English. But in this short phrase, four times we have the definite article.

And so there's an emphasis on the idea that you are the Son of God. The one Son of God. And so what he's professing here is that Jesus is distinctly divine. He is God himself.

And Jesus' response makes clear to us that this is beyond human comprehension. This is not something that we naturally come to. Look at verse 17. And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And so this kind of understanding is beyond human comprehension and has to be given to us by the Father. We understand even now in terms of where we are in redemptive history that it's given by the Father.

[11 : 41] It's applied to us by the Spirit. The Spirit works to bring that knowledge. It works in our heart. But this kind of knowledge is a gift from God. It comes from the Father. And we understand that that's not just true of Simon or Peter.

This is something that's always true of this kind of spiritual understanding. This kind of understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, that he's God, the kind of belief that would result in trust and faith in Jesus Christ, is always a gift of God.

It doesn't come to us naturally. 1 Corinthians 2, 14. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are falling to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

And so, likewise, that we understand Jesus and who he is, his identity, is something that's spiritually discerned. It's not physically or mentally discerned.

It's spiritually discerned. And so what we need to understand who Jesus really is is not just some kind of proof, a list of evidence of this is what shows us that Jesus is truly the Son of God and that he's the Messiah.

[12 : 50] What we need is a spiritual heart change. And man can't do that on his own. We can't change our heart, our thinking. We need God by his Spirit to work that work in us.

And that's exactly what Jesus is communicating here. Peter, you're blessed. And again, that's an important term. Blessed. Why? Because you received a gift that many have longed for.

And obviously, most in Israel have not gotten because they're still wondering if he's Elijah or John the Baptist or Jeremiah or some other prophet. But you understand rightly who Jesus is.

What a blessing of God that is. God has given you that kind of understanding. We'll talk more about this in my closing application. But I think that puts Peter and all of us in a place of humility.

And it puts God in a place of honor and glory. And as I said, we'll talk more about that. And so, in my opinion, this is what's significant about this passage. Peter's made this confession.

[13 : 53] He's come a really long way. And he's come to this position, not because of anything in himself, but because of what God, by his Spirit, has worked to accomplish.

And secondly, I want to look at this idea of the rock of the church. So, you see Jesus' words to him. In verse 18, 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.

Now, what does this mean? And again, this is one of the places where there's been lots of differing opinions over church history. There's been great argumentation about this. We have to begin by understanding that Peter's name actually means rock.

And so, Jesus is making a play on words here. I always thought that if we tried to understand this in the English language, if it would have been directly translated instead of using the name, like it would have been really interesting. And I tell you, you are the rock, and on this rock, I mean, you see, the play on words is really obvious.

We miss it because maybe we're not aware of Peter's name and what it means. So, Peter is Petros, which is the masculine gender of basically rock.

[15 : 02] I've seen differing. Petros can sometimes mean stone. And Petra, which is what Jesus then used, you are the rock upon which I build a church, may mean rock or even a cliff. There are varying meanings of this, but I don't want to overemphasize this as though the varying meanings are some major purpose in those meanings.

More than likely for Jesus to use the term rock as it refers to Peter. With Peter being a male, he would have used the masculine. The generic term, he would have used the feminine. So, I don't know if there's a great distinction here, but he is actually using slightly different variations, Petros and Petros, as he says that you are the rock, and upon this rock, I'll build my church.

And so, what I want you to see is there's a play on words here, and Jesus is meaning that on purpose. Maybe somewhat of humor, but you may remember that Jesus is the one that actually gave Simon that name, that he would be called the rock, and now he's using this as a play on words.

A lot has been made on the idea of Peter being the rock. I just want to say that there's also another play of words on Peter's name, and it actually comes in the next part, and we're going to look at that, Lord willing, next week.

But the following verses, Jesus actually tells Peter that he's a stumbling block. And again, it's that same kind of play on words. You're the rock upon which I'm going to build a church, but then Peter says something else.

[16 : 27] He says, you're a stumbling block. Now, interestingly enough, there are no religions that I know of that have been formed around the idea of Peter being the stumbling block of the church, but we know that Roman Catholic theology has been greatly impacted by the idea of Peter being the rock of the church.

But we see this movement in Jesus' teaching. Instead of a foundation rock, he's later calling him a stumbling block, and so he's using this play on words in Peter's name, I think, to help Peter and the disciples to understand some things, to realize what's going on.

Now, I've already mentioned this a little bit, but you know that we've, I imagine most of you know, we're in a Catholic town, but the Roman Catholic view is that Jesus made Peter and his successors head of the church.

That that's the implied meaning of what Jesus is saying is, you're the rock, and upon this rock I'll build my church. What he really meant was, Peter himself was the head of the church, and everyone who follows directly in a line after Peter takes on that headship of the church, and we know that that term that they use for that would be the pope.

Now, interestingly enough, how the successors determined is by cardinals getting together and voting on who they think this guy is, but I imagine a lot of you guys who are listening probably grew up being taught this and are familiar with this view.

[17 : 47] Now, as we look at this text, I think it's important that we note that this text, nor any other, says anything about Peter's or his successors infallibility or their exclusive authority.

And so the whole premise of this is the idea that they have this infallible and exclusive authority over the church. Now, I know that infallibility only applies when they speak on certain matters, but nonetheless, when they speak on certain matters in relation to the church, matters of doctrine, then they're infallible.

They think they cannot be wrong. In addition, they have an exclusive authority, a universal authority over the church, and there's really none of that in this passage. And so this whole doctrine has been developed far beyond anything that God's word, I think, clearly states to us.

Peter's the foundation. Let me say this first. There's probably a few ways that we can understand this. Honestly, I've seen multiple ways of trying to understand what's going on here. I'm going to give you a few.

I think they're helpful for us to consider. None of the views that I'm going to present would be in agreement with the Roman Catholic view. I think it's very clear that the Roman Catholics have gone too far in saying that Peter himself is the foundation, exclusively the one person of Peter and then those who follow directly in this line, that there's no such headship or hierarchy in the church that's been developed, nor that would continue perpetually for generations in the future.

[19 : 12] So what could this mean? Well, one possibility is that Peter is the foundation as representative of the larger group of the apostles who were the forerunners and foundations of the church.

Now, I think there's a great deal of support for this view, and probably the most strongest one of the ones I'm going to present. But I've already shown you that Jesus says to them, plural, who do y'all say that I am?

And Simon's answering representatively. And Jesus then directly says, Simon Barjona, using his last name, you are blessed for this understanding. But if we understand that he's speaking cumulatively or representatively for all the disciples, we can understand as well that they too have come to this knowledge that has been given to them.

And so this view is saying Jesus is actually calling Peter the foundation, but only as a representative of the group of the apostles who then later, we understand, are the foundation of the Christian church as it grows and expands under Christ.

But they're the foundation in the sense that they're the forerunners, they're the first ones to believe. They're the foundation of the teachers. We even think of the gifts of the apostles as they go and teach and spread the word, that they do actually become the foundation upon which Jesus builds his church.

[20 : 32] And so some scripture passages that would support this. Ephesians 2, 19 through 20. Paul writes, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

So he's speaking to these in Ephesus and saying, you've been brought into the family of God, you've been made one with them. So you are saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

And so they have been built into one people, the church. And what's the foundation of the church? The apostles and the prophets. So the Old Testament spiritual leaders, we could say the New Testament spiritual leaders, the church is being built upon that foundation.

So again, what we see here, and I'll say just one more time, that nowhere else in the New Testament do we see reference back to Peter being referred to as the church being built upon Peter.

It doesn't say that anywhere. Nor do we see Peter claiming such authority in any of his writings or his preaching. But what we do see is Paul referencing that the church has been built upon the prophets and the apostles.

[21 : 48] And so, again, with this view, what we'd be saying is Peter is the rock upon which the church is built in the sense of he is one of the apostles and he's in the line of the prophets.

And cumulatively, there's this foundation of, we could think of the prophets as those who wrote the Old Testament, the apostles as those who gave us the New Testament. So it's built upon the foundation of the word and these spiritual leaders.

But ultimately, notice how Paul puts it, and Christ is the chief cornerstone. He's the capstone. He's the one with the authority, not Peter, not a pope, not any man that would follow.

But we're built upon this foundation with Christ as the chief cornerstone. Again, this would fit with what we see in Revelation 21, 14. And the wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the 12 names of the 12 apostles of the land.

And so we have this picture of the spiritual Jerusalem, the new, if we want to call it heaven, but the new earth, this creation, this city. And we're also told that this Jerusalem is representative of God's people, the church.

[22 : 52] And so the foundation of the walls of this city are the 12 apostles. Again, it's not Peter. You know, it could have been, we would have this figurative language and say, this, the church itself, this picture of the new Jerusalem is built upon the foundation of Peter.

That's not what it says. It says of the apostles. And likewise, we see in Revelation, around the throne, we have this picture of the 12 prophets and the 12 apostles gathered around the throne.

And so there's some importance that's given to them cumulatively or corporately, but never to Peter by himself. And I think that's significant. So if we want to take the view that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, we can take that view as long as we understand that that doesn't mean that he had absolute authority or exclusive authority, or that he's infallible, or that that's been passed on to other men who then reign and rule over all the church.

That's a wrong view and a dangerous view. If we say that Peter's the foundation of the church, we understand it as him being representative of the group of the apostles who fit in with the prophets, who are the foundation upon which the Christian church has been built.

All right. So that's one view. And again, that's probably the most clear view, especially when he says, you are the rock upon which I build the church. Two other possible views that I think would be helpful.

[24 : 12] The second one is this, that Jesus may be calling Peter's confession the foundation and not Peter himself. There are a lot of Christians that have held to this. In fact, many of the early church fathers, this was their view.

Now, interestingly enough, this idea of the Pope and there being one exclusive authority didn't come to hundreds of years later. It's not as though there was this smooth session where Peter said, okay, I choose you to be the guy who's going to be the next Pope.

Didn't happen. Many of the early church fathers' belief was Peter's confession, what he said here, this belief that you are the Messiah, the son of the living God. Upon that kind of confession, that kind of belief, that kind of profession of faith is what the whole church is going to be built upon.

And so for example, Christosystem, 347 AD to 407 AD, he said, on this rock, that is on the faith of his confession.

He did not say upon Peter, for it was not upon man, but upon his faith. And so he's making a good, I think, and careful distinction here, that the foundation of the church is never upon one man, and we would be wrong to understand that, but upon the faith of that one man.

[25 : 21] And so he's saying, it's the confession, not the man that the church is built upon. And then likewise, oh, I'm sorry.

So there's one example from the early church fathers. A similar view, and taking this a little bit further, would be, that the rock that's being spoken of here, may not be Peter's confession, but what Peter confessed, namely Jesus Christ.

And so Peter's confessing who Jesus is, and what he's confessed could be the foundation of the church. Uh, another, uh, early church father, Augustine, had this view. Augustine was three, 54 to 430.

So again, we're now moving to, uh, close to 400 years after Jesus. And even at this point, probably the greatest theologian of the early church, he gives this paraphrase of Matthew 16, 18.

He says, thou art Petros. And on this Petra, which thou has confessed saying, thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. Will I build my church?

[26 : 27] That is to say, on myself, I will build thee on myself, not myself on thee. So Augustine, even all these years later is making this distinction that his view was that, and again, as a representative theologian for the church.

And at that point, the church was the Catholic church, that the church, his representative view, he's saying, uh, it's not upon Peter, but what Jesus is saying is it's built upon me.

It's built upon what you're confessing, what you believe, which is that I am the foundation stone. And so some scripture passages that would help support this Matthew 7, 24 and 25.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been found on the rock.

Well, you may remember back in Matthew 7, Jesus is making clear that he's the rock of that foundation. And so he's speaking here of your faith. Your faith is built upon the rock of Jesus Christ, that it's secure, but if it's built upon anything else, it's not.

[27 : 31] And so we have at least one example of at least a Christian faith being built upon the foundation, and the foundation being Jesus Christ. And then you may remember the parable of the tenants.

We're moving in that direction. That's in Matthew 21. But in 21, 42, Jesus said to them, have you never read in the scriptures? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This was the Lord's doing, and it's marvelous in our eyes. And again, though it's not the foundation, but the idea of the cornerstone is Jesus. And we saw that even back in Revelation 21 that we quoted earlier.

And so there's good argument for the possibility at least that it's Jesus or some confession of who Jesus is. Now, I think an important question for us as we consider this is, how did Peter understand this?

And I think we have some answer to that. I've already said that Peter, nowhere, he never claims to be the rock on which the church is built. Now, if that were true of someone, you think this would be reiterated in God's teaching?

[28 : 34] In the word, Peter would say this at some point. Interestingly enough, even when Peter and Paul have disagreements over views on scripture, Peter doesn't pull that as the trump card. Whoa, whoa, Paul, who do you think I am?

Who do you think you are? I'm the rock upon which the church is built. Peter doesn't say that. He doesn't say like he's infallible, that he's got it right. No, in fact, Paul's the one who has it right. Peter's rebuked, and he repents.

And so we don't see, first of all, Peter making this argument. But then we have other examples, Acts 4, verses 8 through 12. In Peter's preaching, we read, Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed?

Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which you must be saved.

[29 : 46] And so, again, Peter has this opportunity, this crippled man has been healed. By what authority have you healed him? And Peter doesn't say, it's because I'm the rock.

You know, I'm the rock. I can do what I want to do. I'm the foundation. No, he says, it's because of Jesus Christ. He is that cornerstone upon which the church is built. Later, 1 Peter 2, 4-7, Peter writes, as you come to him, Jesus, a living stone rejected by men, but built in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture, behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him, will not be put to shame.

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone. And so Peter, now, I realize we understand a foundation's under a building.

The cornerstone is what we think of, the capstone that holds it together. And so, maybe this is difficult for us, and as we look to these passages, that call Jesus the cornerstone, maybe we think, well, that's not saying he's the foundation.

[31 : 03] But what's interesting in 1 Peter 2, is that Peter's only interpretation of this, he says, that the Christians, well, he says, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

You yourselves, like living stones, are being built together. So he's picturing the church here. He says, each one of you is like a stone, and you're being built together, into the church. And what he says to us is that, he makes reference here of, Jesus Christ.

At the very beginning, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious. And then he goes on, that he is, behold, I'm laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious.

Whoever believes in him, will not be put in shame. And so Peter has opportunity here to say, you know, you're being built together as a church upon me, upon the rock. But that would be wrong.

And for people later, hundreds of years later, to then go back and claim, well, that's what, that's what Jesus meant, is that it's going to be built upon Peter, is equally wrong. What Peter says is that it's built upon Jesus.

[32 : 14] He's the cornerstone upon which the church is built. And then he, again, makes that same reference, the stone that the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone. And so everywhere we see this idea of the rock, it's really in reference to Jesus, not in reference to Peter.

So Peter says, Jesus is the foundation stone of the church, and that through him, all believers have become living stones, being built upon Christ. And so that's how I would address that first, controversial argumentative topic, is that we have to understand that, at the very least, it does not mean that the church is built upon Peter himself.

If we want to take the strongest possible view, in that direction, we'd say it's built upon the apostles and the prophets. And there's some truth to that, as we've seen in God's word. But there's also some truth upon the fact that the church is built upon Jesus Christ, and to some extent, the confession that Peter's confessing, that Jesus is the Christ.

And maybe there's some truth in some combination of all those ways, that God uses those latter three, but we have to reject the idea that Peter, or that there's a modern-day Pope, that's reigning over the church, and there's some hierarchy to God's church in that sense.

I think that has to be rejected. So that's how to handle the first one. The second one, again, that's difficult for us to understand. Verse 18, So what does it mean that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it?

[33 : 40] Well, I think very clearly, the shortest summary I would give is that demonic attacks against the church will fail. They're not ultimately going to conquer the church. The church is indestructible.

It won't be defeated. Now, one thing that we oftentimes miss as we look at this, is that it says, and the gates of hell will not triumph against it. What do we think of when we think of gates?

Well, gates go to a wall, and so gates are a defensive tool, they're not a offensive tool. And so he doesn't say, and the swords of hell will not triumph against it.

We would obviously think of swords as being an offensive tool. But he says the gates of hell. And, those of you who have been tracking along for a long time in Matthew, you know what we've seen already.

I can't go back and rehash it all today. But what I would argue is that what Jesus is saying is that the gospel is going to advance. The kingdom is going to advance. And that's what we saw in the kingdom parables.

[34 : 41] It's what we've seen already in the gospel. But the advance of the gospel is going to go to the very ends of the earth. That in missionary work, we're going to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, and there will be people who will believe from every tribe, tongue, and language.

And what's being said is that up until this point, and again, I'm getting maybe really deep into the theology of this, but up until this point in history, the world has belonged to Satan. There's been a small group of believers narrowly in Israel.

A few here and there outside at different times in history. But most of the world has belonged to Satan. It's been his domain. But now he's building his church. And what does it mean for Christ to build his church?

It means that the gospel is going to go forth. The kingdom is going to advance into Satan's territory. We're going to storm the gates, as it were, and those gates will not prevail against us. And so I think it's important even that we understand this in an offensive sense in our part as Christians, that we're taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and that Satan can't stop us.

It's inevitable. The kingdom is going to advance. And though it's been 2,000 years, and I was just working on a report this week that argues there's still 1,400 unreached people groups.

[35 : 54] But those are waning. The gospel is going to them. Satan's power over them is coming to an end. And so the gospel is going to triumph.

And the nations will be reached with the gospel because the church is built on Christ. And Christ is invincible. The gospel is going to advance, and we're going to defeat Satan because we're built on Peter.

What hope is there in that? But it's invincible because it's built upon Jesus Christ. And it wages war against demonic powers in all these dark places with the power that Christ supplies.

So really it's Christ who's the rock that I would argue even protects Peter against demonic forces. Think later on.

Luke 22. This is verses 31 through 32. These are Jesus' words to Peter. Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat.

[37 : 06] But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. And so, again, it's not as though Peter's going to, Peter's a rock upon which the church is built, and the gates of hell won't prevail against it.

No, far from that, what Jesus says, if I had not prayed for you, Satan would have already had you by now. He would have sifted you like wheat. But I prayed for you. And again, I think we're encouraged that it's Christ that's this foundation for us.

And then again, it goes on. Verse 19. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Now, as we look at this, we understand, again, the wrong view, the Roman Catholic view, has been that the Pope has some exclusive power to get people in and out of heaven.

And in light of how I've already explained this passage, we're obviously rejecting such an idea. It's not some exclusive power for Peter and for his successors to determine who will and who will not enter heaven.

[38 : 14] Rather, the kingdom is opened and shut by the preaching of the gospel. And that's exactly what we see happening as we continue on in the New Testament. Basically, you can proclaim you, not just Peter or the apostles, you can proclaim someone loose in heaven if they believe the truth of the gospel that you've shared with them.

Or you can proclaim them bound in heaven if they continue to reject that truth that we can say someone's headed for hell. That's where they're going.

If they will continue to reject the truth of who Christ is. The Heidelberg Catechism deals with this in question and answer 84. Here's the question.

How does preaching the holy gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven? Here's the answer in the Catechism. According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers, each and every one, that as often as they accept the gospel promise and true faith, God, because of Christ's merit, truly forgives all their sins.

The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that as long as they do not repent, the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rests on them.

[39 : 31] God's judgment both in this life and in the life to come is based on this gospel testimony. So what determines if someone gets into heaven or hell? It's not the proclamation of any man.

The keys of the kingdom are the proclamation of the gospel. If you receive, and this is true for all of you who are listening today, if you receive and accept the gospel, if you believe in that gospel, then heaven's been opened to you.

The gates have been opened up, the keys turn, whatever you want to say, you're into heaven. That's all it takes is belief in Jesus Christ. And likewise, if you've done that, then no man can say to you, well, you're not getting into heaven.

I'm kicking you out. No man has such authority. But likewise, we understand that in the preaching of the gospel, if you continue to reject the gospel, and again, examine your heart today, where are you?

This is who Christ is. Do you see Peter's confession? Do you believe that? Do you accept that? If you reject that, then heaven's shut to you. You're bound in heaven.

[40 : 33] You're headed for hell. And that's a warning to all of us. And again, that's not the power of any man, but that's the truth of the proclamation, the power of the gospel for salvation to all who believe.

Now, I would go further and say, I think there's also some truth in the fact that there is church discipline, but it's not given to man, it's given to the church.

And so there are times in which the church, cumulatively, and I would go so far to say, even, it's not the elders of the church, it's not the pastor of the church who does this, and it's certainly not the pope or any cardinal, but it's the church cumulative.

The local church can proclaim someone to be under church discipline. And again, that doesn't eternally condemn them, but it's just saying that if we were to excommunicate someone, it's saying that though you profess faith in Jesus Christ, you're walking in a way that's inconsistent with that, and it looks like you're not really converted.

So by all outward things, we have to say, we don't believe you're saved. And the encouragement is this, repent. And believe if you're not a Christian. If you are a Christian, repent and go to God for forgiveness, but again, there is church discipline, but we don't believe that it has eternal power other than to proclaim what God's already done or what's already happened in the gospel.

[41 : 48] So it's a proclamation of the fact of what's happened in relation to the keys of the kingdom. It's not the keys to the kingdom itself. And then finally, Jesus charges them in verse 20, he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

I'm just going to briefly mention this. Sometimes people wonder, why does Jesus do this? Well, I think he demands secrecy because of the messianic misunderstandings that are going on.

We've already seen that the people are misunderstanding who he is. They believe he's Elijah or John the Baptist or Jeremiah or some other prophet. But we also have seen that they misunderstood what the Messiah should be.

And so this messianic secret that Jesus is telling people, don't tell people that I'm the Messiah, that completely ends after the resurrection. Right?

We don't see the apostles continuing in this. No, they then begin to tell people that Jesus is the Christ. But Jesus is moving toward the cross. And if you look at verse 20, and we haven't read the next verses, but verse 21, we're immediately moving into Jesus foretelling that he's going to die and be resurrected.

[42 : 56] And so Jesus says, don't tell people I'm the Christ, hey, by the way, I'm headed for the cross and I'm going to be resurrected. And I think, again, there's significance in this because what Jesus is hinting at is that if you tell people I'm the Christ, the timeline gets off.

People are going to get upset. They're going to want to put me to death. And there's this divine timeline that Jesus is working on and his time has not yet come. And when the time comes, it will be made known and he'll be put to death.

And then as he's resurrected, that truth will be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. So as we read this, I want to just be clear. This isn't a abiding command upon you. Maybe some Christians out there, it seems like they live their life based as if this were the command.

Jesus has commanded me not to tell anybody he's the Messiah. Right? That's not true for us. We're to tell people. And we ought to be encouraged in that way. Now I want to close just with a final few points of application.

I've said already that I think the most important part of this passage, and again, I apologize because I spent more time on what I think are the least important parts of the passage, but the most important part is Peter's confession.

[44 : 08] And Jesus is questioning him, but who do you say that I am? And so I think for application, what we have to consider is how do we answer that question?

If we understand that Jesus is asking the apostles, that question is also true for us and for probably all people who have ever lived. Who do you say that Jesus is? And just take a moment to think about that.

How would you answer that question? I think what Peter answers for the apostles is true for us today, that all around us there are people with all kinds of answers on who Jesus is.

If I were to ask you, who do people say that Jesus is, you could come up with all kinds of things because in our day and age there's a lot of different explanations of who Jesus is. But ultimately, that doesn't matter.

What matters for you and for eternity is who do you say that Jesus is? And I think the truth is that we have to come to the same understanding as Peter.

[45 : 09] We have to understand that Jesus is the Christ. He's the Messiah. He's the one that's been promised throughout all the Old Testament. And he's the fulfillment of all those Old Testament promises. But also that he is the Son of God, that he is divine, that he is God incarnate.

In the next passage, as I've said, he's going to speak of his going to the cross. And it's truly the fact that he is God. His being God is why his death has infinite worth for us. It's why his death is enough to pay for our sins.

And it's also why the grave cannot hold him, why he will be resurrected. But if we understand the idea that Jesus takes away our sins, it's because he's God.

No man can do that just as no man can be the leader solely of the church. Now, secondly, I want to encourage you that if you don't believe this today, if you have not accepted Jesus Christ in this way that you believe he's the Messiah, that you believe he's the Son of God, if you do not believe this, pray that God would help you to believe, that God the Father would give you that kind of spiritual understanding.

And I just want to put it out there in terms of just a challenge for you. Maybe you're out there today and you're listening and you think, well, I don't believe that. And if it's not true, let's just hypothetically say for a moment, let's say it's all a lie.

[46 : 34] What harm will it do you today to pray asking God the Father to open your eyes? But what if what I've explained to you today is true? And what we see, based on Jesus' response to Peter, is this, that none of us will believe that Jesus is the Christ unless God opens our eyes, unless he changes our heart.

Then what we need right now is not greater evidence or proof. What we need is a change of the heart. And the only way that's going to happen is by God doing it. And so I want to encourage you, pray. Just ask God, will you change my heart today?

I haven't trusted in Jesus yet, but I'm asking you, change my heart. Pray earnestly, asking that, and see if God won't make that change, if he won't work in you, if he won't give you that understanding.

And if you come to that understanding, be encouraged. The benediction on Peter is true for you as well. He says, Simon Barjona, blessed are you.

And I think that's a benediction for all of us. If we truly believed, blessed are we to have believed in Jesus Christ. Matthew 13, 16. He says, but blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear.

[47 : 49] Spiritual understanding. Jesus was explaining the kingdom parables there and the crowds kept getting it wrong and he's saying to the disciples, but blessed are you because your eyes see and your ears hear. And what he's saying is there's spiritual discernment that you have that was given to you by God the Father and that's a blessing.

Maybe we use blessed a lot these days, but what we, what's really meant by blessed is that you've been given a gift that you don't deserve. And so if you understand that today, understand that it's a blessing.

And we must never forget that faith and belief and understanding of God's word is a blessing given from God. How is it a blessing you might ask?

Well, John 17, 3 gives us an answer. This is eternal life that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you've sent. And so my greatest answer for how is it a blessing for us to know who Christ is is because it's in knowing God the Father and in knowing Christ Jesus that we have eternal life.

but I think we also have to be encouraged and to know that to know Jesus Christ is a blessing in all of life.

[48 : 57] There's nothing that we're going to face in which knowing Jesus Christ doesn't turn out to be a blessing for us. Even if it's suffering for the name of Christ, yet we're blessed in knowing Jesus Christ and facing hardship and suffering.

Whatever we face in life, if we face it with Jesus Christ, we're blessed. And so we're encouraged with Peter that it's a blessing to know and trust in Jesus Christ. Thirdly and finally, I want to say that regardless of how you understand the foundation upon which Jesus will build his church, I think one important point that we have to take from this is that Jesus will build his church.

even if we don't agree on what the foundation may be, whether it be the apostles or whether it be the confession of who Christ is or whether it be Christ himself, whatever the foundation is, Jesus is building his church and that's what we're living in today.

That's what's going on in our lifetime. Jesus is building his church. It is his own. It's been bought by his own precious blood. And that's why the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Romans 16, 20 says, the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The God of peace will crush Satan. It's the crushing of Satan that we have peace but what I want you to see is that he will soon be crushed under your feet.

[50 : 15] And we're living in the day and age which that's happened. Christ is bound, his influence is limited and even now he is being crushed under our feet as the gospel goes to the ends of the earth. And I think this gives perspective to our service to God and it also gives us boldness in service because we know ultimately the work won't fail.

I mean, we may not be successful in sharing the gospel with one person but ultimately his kingdom will advance. The gospel will go to the ends of the earth and we will not fail in the work. Not because we're strong, not because we're great but because it's Christ's church and he's building his church.

That's what he's doing in this age. And so, we're dependent upon Christ not our own ability and Jesus is the one who guarantees that the church will be built.

And so, I want to encourage you to have boldness in the proclamation of the gospel and that we ought to as a church have boldness in missions and sending people to the ends of the earth because we've been encouraged, we've been told, we've been guaranteed that the gospel will advance and that Christ will build his church.

Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are building your church. And Lord, we pray that you give us understanding as we've acknowledged there are a number of difficult things to comprehend in this passage and especially that the difficulty has been complicated by false religions that have made claims that are blatantly wrong.

[51 : 49] And Lord, we pray that you'd help us to have discernment, to know what's true and what's right. And Lord, even if we don't fully comprehend which of these things is the foundation, we pray that we would know and understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and that he's your son, and he's divine.

And that beyond that, what we would understand is that Jesus is building his church. And Lord, we pray that you would help all of us in this room to have spiritual discernment, open our eyes, open our ears, change our heart that we may believe in Christ.

And we pray that in believing in him that we might have boldness in taking that gospel and working to advance the kingdom, knowing that the work will not fail, that your kingdom will advance.

So Lord, we pray for the Christians to give us boldness and courage. And we pray for all who are here that you would give us spiritual understanding. We pray this all in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. lawsuitng Linda Amen.

[53 : 44] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.