

WBC 134th Anniversary Sunday: established April 9, 1878

Main Idea: The hope and future of the church rests on two unchanging realities, two *anchors*, according to Matthew 16:16-20.

- I. The hope of WBC rests on the person of Jesus (16-17).
 - A. Many people exhibit confusion.
 - B. Peter exhibited the right confession (16).
 1. Jesus is the answer.
 2. Jesus is the Son of the living God.
 - C. Jesus responded with a commendation (17).
 1. Peter didn't come up with this on his own.
 2. The Father revealed it to him.
- II. The hope of WBC rests on the promise of Jesus (18-20).
 - A. His promise was to a person (18a).
 1. The focus really isn't on Peter.
 2. The focus is on Peter's confession.
 - B. His promise involves a plan (18b).
 1. Jesus is the contractor of the church.
 2. Jesus is the owner of the church.
 3. Jesus is the protector of the church.
 - C. His promise involves a prospect (19).
 1. It doesn't authorize confession and penance.
 2. It authorizes the preaching of the gospel.

The Bottom Line: The future of the church is certain because of Christ.

I will build my church. Jesus made that incredible statement nearly two thousand years ago, and He's been doing exactly what He said ever since.

He started His building project in Jerusalem, then moved throughout Judea, and by the end of the first century He had put His church in place throughout the Middle East and all over the Roman Empire. In the centuries that followed, the Master Builder established His Church all over Europe and eventually moved across the Atlantic Ocean into the Americas, as well as across the Pacific into Asia.

In the spring of 1878 the Sovereign Lord added living stones to His edifice in Wheelersburg, Ohio. By the way, it was just fifty years earlier, in 1820, when the pioneers first settled in our little town.² They called it Concord, but in 1826 they changed the name to Wheelersburg in honor of Major Porter Wheeler, "an early settler, a noted Indian fighter, and a soldier in the war of 1812."³

On Tuesday, April 9, 1878, Jesus did something that demonstrates His amazing love for sinners. He assembled some of His followers in a meeting. There was Pastor E. W. Lloyd, who chaired the meeting. There was W. L. Malone who was chosen clerk. And there were about thirty men and women who loved Jesus and believed He wanted to add another local church to His project in Wheelersburg. Pastor Lloyd preached a sermon, the New Hampshire Articles of Faith were read and adopted, and the assembly adopted a motion to start a Regular Baptist Church.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message, preached for the WBC 134th anniversary, was adapted from an earlier study conducted at WBC on 12/2/01.

² According to records, there were 2,274 people living in Porter Township in 1880. See <http://files.usgwarchives.net/oh/history/1884/chapt17a.txt>

³ *A History of Scioto County & Pioneer Record* (published 1903)

The following Sunday, April 14, 1878, this newly formed church met at 2:00 p.m. for a worship service. Pastor I. N. Clark preached from Luke 14:17, “Come, for all things are now ready.” On motion the trustees were instructed to take the necessary steps to build a church Edifice.⁴

I’ve read the church records, and in short, here is what happened. The church appointed a building committee and authorized that committee to “complete any arrangements now under consideration towards the building of a church house in Wheelersburg.”

“It was also decided that Levi Smith superintend the carpenters’ work and painting, that Robert Ellioth superintend the stone work, that Harris Dodge superintend the removing of the old building and clearing off the lot preparatory to building, and that John C. Malone superintend the subscriptions and the collection of moneys.”

Although the record does not specify, apparently the first church facility was built and completed the summer and fall of 1878. The lot cost \$300, paid to a Mrs. Cooper. Altogether the church house cost \$1,828.01.

On the evening of February 2, 1879, six people were baptized. On February 6, two more were baptized. On March 1, “There was enough money collected to buy 4 ½ gallons of oil; Bro. Smith donated a 5 gallon can and agreed to see that the can was filled.”

In June 1880, the church’s first pastor, J. A. Roberts, “expressed his willingness to accept the salary of \$125 for the ensuing year.” The following June, 1881, an organ was donated to the church by Mary Lambert and Louella Hall, and the minutes record that at the time the church was “laboring under heavy debt.”

Interestingly, according to the minutes of April 14, 1883, the church “resolved that we tender the use of our church house to the Methodist brethren to hold their regular meetings in, while their building is in the course of erection, subject to the following condition—that they are to have use of the house only when not occupied by us.”

In April 1884, the church decided to reorganize a weekly prayer meeting. In March 1887 the church appointed a committee for the purchase of Hymn books for church and Sunday School use.

On February 28, 1896, “Miss Clara Lamb was elected organist and given charge of church music.” Ironically, the following day, on March 1, Clara Lamb and two others were baptized.

It’s been 134 years since that first meeting. And here we are today, meeting to worship the same Savior, to study the same Book, and to celebrate the same gospel.

I believe in the church of Jesus Christ. No, the church can’t take you to heaven, as some would assert. But the church is God’s primary agenda for exalting Himself and bringing hope to the world in this age.

In our day some are down on the church, but I believe the church of Jesus Christ should be priory in your life and mine. Not because it’s perfect, for it’s often flawed, but because of what Jesus Himself said about it.

⁴ The book, *A History of Scioto County* [published in 1986], says that I. M. Clark [notice the differing initial] was the pastor in 1875 of what today is known as Temple Baptist Church in Portsmouth. It also indicates that Rev. Clark and the Portsmouth congregation helped organize the Baptist church in Wheelersburg in 1879 [notice that the date differs from the one in the *WBC Minutes*].

When it comes to the subject of the church perhaps no text in all of God's Word is more foundational than the one to which we turn now, Matthew 16:16-20. According to Jesus, the hope and future of the church, of WBC, rests on two unchanging realities.

I. The hope of WBC rests on the person of Jesus (16-17).

Matthew was one of Jesus' 12 apostles. Matthew recorded the gospel that bears his name to provide Jewish readers initially, and the rest of the world eventually, with a portrait of Jesus the Messiah, the promised one God sent to save His people from their sins (1:21).

By the time we reach chapter sixteen, Jesus' popularity has peaked. He's preached the Sermon on the Mount (ch 5-7). He's already performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000 (ch 14). He's healed the lame, given sight to the blind, and the crowds praised the God of Israel (15:31). But not everyone was singing. The opposition of the Jewish religious leaders was mounting.

So in chapter sixteen Jesus took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi (13). That location is significant. That's Gentile territory. That's 120 miles from Jerusalem in the northern part of Israel, an area known for its pagan religions. It had been a center for Baal worship. The Greek god Pan had shrines there. Herod the Great had built a temple there to honor Augustus Caesar.⁵

It was there, in this very pagan environment that Jesus taught His disciples about the entity by which He would rescue sinners out of this pagan world. He told them about the *ekklasia*, the called out ones, the *church*.

That brings us to the first anchor. The hope of the church rests on the person of Jesus.

Jesus asked a question of His disciples in verse 13, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" "Son of Man" was a title Jesus often used to refer to Himself. "Who do people say I am?" was the question. The truth is, then as now...

A. Many people exhibit confusion. About Jesus, that is. The disciples' answers indicate that people were as confused then as so many are now. In verse 14, "They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" For our purposes, it's not necessary to discuss *why* the people were drawing these conclusions about Jesus. What is critical to see is that the people were indeed confused about the person of Jesus. The very people who saw Jesus' miracles and heard His powerful teaching came to wrong conclusions about His identity. Simply put, they were confused.

So Jesus turned the question in verse 15, "But what about you? Who do *you* say I am?" It's easy to get sidetracked and worry about what others think of Jesus, but the real issue is what do *you* think of Him?

Peter, a man seldom at a loss for words, couldn't stand the silence, so he spoke up. In contrast with the confusion of the people...

B. Peter exhibited the right confession (16). In verse 16, "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" That's remarkable. Jesus' first question, again, was, "Who do *people* say I am?" And the answers were so diverse, with some saying John the Baptist, others saying Elijah, others saying Jeremiah or another of the prophets. But then Jesus placed this second question on the table, "Who do *you* say that I am?"

⁵ Observations by Warren Wiersbe

The "you" is actually plural. Jesus is talking, not just to Peter, but to the twelve, to James and John, to Philip and Thomas, to Andrew and Matthew and the rest. "You men have spent much time with me. I've opened my life up to you. You've heard my teaching. You've seen my works. Now it's exam time. Who do *you* say that I am?"

In a sense, I think Peter spoke as the self-appointed representative of the others, and the confession he made is absolutely critical. He announced two conclusions he had made about Jesus.

1. *Jesus is the answer.* "Thou art the Christ," said Peter in the KJV. Ponder that. We're so familiar with the word "Christ" that we're prone to miss its significance. We hear it all the time today, in sermons and songs and unfortunately, as a swear-word. Some have the idea it's Jesus' last name.

But what did Peter mean when he said, "You are the Christ"? *Christ* comes from the Greek *Christos*. It's the Greek term that Matthew used to record this conversation. But remember something. Peter wasn't speaking in Greek when he answered Jesus. Peter was a Jew, and in his conversation with Jesus he would have used a Hebrew word--*Mesiah*. *Christos* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term Messiah.

Even though the term Messiah is probably familiar to us, we may not grasp the significance it held for a Jew like Peter. Messiah means "the anointed one." The term Messiah refers to the person the Old Testament prophets predicted would come from God to rule as King over men. In the OT, kings and priests and prophets were "anointed ones" (with a small "a"), but the hope of the OT was that one day God would send THE Anointed One (with a capital "A"). He would be the *ultimate* one.

Frederick Bruner tells about a church in downtown Manila. In front of this large church was a prominent sign from which the church got its name: "Christ is the Answer" church. Bruner adds, "That church's unusual name was, in fact, one of the best gentile ways to translate the difficult Jewish expression 'Messiah' or 'Christ': Christ means 'the Answer.'"⁶

When Peter said, "You are the Christ," what he was saying was, "Jesus, You are the Answer to life. You are the Point, the Last Word, the Meaning. You are It!"

But that's not all. There's a second aspect to Peter's confession. He acknowledged...

2. *Jesus is the Son of the living God.* "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus is God's own Son, but not just any god's son. There were many pagan gods in Peter's day as in ours [remember where Peter was when he said this, near Ceasarea Philippi, in the shadow of a pagan temple]. "Jesus, You are the Son of the God who is alive," literally, "the Son of God, the Living One." Or, "Jesus, You are the Answer, the One that the Living God has sent to rule as King over this world."

So there's Peter's confession, and it's the right one. In fact, if you want to be right with God, you must make Peter's confession about Jesus your own. How do I know that? Because in verse 17...

C. Jesus responded with a commendation (17). "Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'" Way to go, Peter! You've got it! You are blessed for what you've said. You have God's smile. You have His favor.

And that raises a question. Did you ever wonder how Peter "got it" when so many others didn't "get it"? I mean, a lot of people saw Jesus' miracles and heard His teaching.

⁶ Bruner, p. 570.

How'd Peter put it all together? Was Peter smarter, better educated, and more intuitive than others? Is that how he came up with this right confession about Jesus?

No, in fact Jesus revealed a couple of things about Peter's confession.

1. *Peter didn't come up with this on his own.* Listen carefully to Jesus' words in verse 17 [in the KJV], "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee." "Flesh and blood" is a common Jewish expression referring to man as a mortal human being. It's what we are. Jesus says it wasn't any human being that's responsible for Peter's correct answer, whether a teacher or Peter himself. No, it wasn't Peter's religious sensitivity or insight that enabled him to make this confession.

The truth is, a correct understanding of Jesus' identity is something I cannot give you, nor can you come up with on your own. Peter didn't come up with this on his own. How'd he get it then? Jesus tells us...

2. *The Father revealed it to him.* "This was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven." It's the Father who enables a person to make the right confession regarding Jesus. Unless God the Father opens the mind, we don't get it.

That's exactly what Jesus had already taught His disciples. Back in 11:27 Jesus said, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

How is it that two people can listen to the same Jesus and hear the same truth, yet one gets it and the other doesn't? In 13:11, Jesus explained, "To you [the disciples] it has been *given* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." In John 15:16, Jesus summed it up, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."

So it's God that opens up a person's understanding so that he or she responds rightly to Jesus and His offer of salvation. Granted, this offer is universal, for Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matt 11:28)." There will not be one person in hell wanted to be saved but was not allowed. But neither will there be one person in heaven who is there because he figured it out on his own. When a sinner says yes to Jesus, it's because of the gracious, effective, revealing work of God. As Jesus said to Peter, "It's the Father who enabled you to make this confession."

What intrigues me is the question *why*. Why did Jesus tell Peter that he didn't come up with this confession on his own? Why does God's Word tell us this same truth again and again? The answer is, it eliminates pride. The reason anyone knows and affirms the truth about Jesus is *God*. So there's no room for pride in us. We would not have found Him if He had not made Himself known to us. And because of that bottom line truth, all the glory goes to God.

I'm thankful to say this truth is something our forefathers affirmed. If you open up the official records of WBC, and go back to 1878, you'll find a handwritten *Declaration of Faith*. The founders of this church wanted to make it very clear what they believed about several key topics. Listen to what they said about salvation:

"We believe that in order to be saved sinners must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with Divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the Gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance and faith, and newness of life."

That fits what Jesus told Peter, doesn't it? *This was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father.*

Beloved, here is the first anchor upon which the hope of this church rests. God is working in people's lives, and when He opens their eyes, they do what Peter did and make the correction confession regarding the Person of Jesus.

Let's talk about an important implication. Our society loves polls. It's how we choose politicians. It's how we choose the American Idol. We make decisions by finding out what other people are saying, and then jumping on the bandwagon with them. But you can't do that with Jesus. You'll never come to the right conclusion regarding Jesus by taking a poll of the people. When it came to Jesus' identity, the majority of people in Peter's day were wrong (it's why they crucified Him). That's true in our day, too.

Quite frankly, the important issue is not what *others* are saying about Jesus. It's what *you* are saying.

I want to talk to the person who says, "Well, there are so many denominations out there. When they get their act together, I'll think more about Jesus." Dear friend, what the crowd says can never be my excuse. What Jesus asked Peter, He's also asking you and me. *Who do you say the Son of Man is?*

Every person's eternal destiny rests upon the answer they give to that question. So, I urge you, don't let the confusion of others keep you from making the proper confession of Jesus. And if you're confused about Jesus, then admit it. Jesus made it clear you won't figure this out on your own. So start asking the Father to help you see the truth, and then start studying the Book the Father gave us so we could know His Son.

The hope of WBC rests upon the person of Jesus. That's our first anchor. You don't have to be wealthy to join this church, nor poor, for that matter. You don't have to have a family connection, or a college degree, or a good reputation in man's eyes. But you must know Jesus, not know about Him, but truly know and put your total trust in the *person* of Jesus the Christ.

II. The hope of WBC rests on the promise of Jesus (18-20).

And here's His promise in verse 18, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church., and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." This is a world-changing promise, and as we ponder it three things stand out.

A. His promise was to a person (18a). "And I tell you that you are Peter." Though the other disciples are there, Jesus is talking directly to Peter. In verse 17, He called him "Simon," but in verse 18 Jesus tells Simon, "Now you are Peter."

Why would Jesus change a grown man's name? Why did Jesus call Simon "Peter?" This wasn't the first time. John 1:42 tells us that when Jesus first called Peter to be a disciple He told him, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas (which when translated is Peter)." But at the time Jesus didn't explain the significance of the name change. Now (in Matthew 16) He does.

"Peter" comes from the Aramaic *Kephas* and the Greek *Petros*. The name means "a rock." It's sort of like Jesus is saying, "Simon, I tell you that you are Rocky."

There's a play on words in verse 18 that we miss in our English Bibles. In the Greek text Jesus says, "You are *Petros* [a rock], and on this *Petra* [a different word for "rock"] I will build My church."

For centuries, scholars have debated what Jesus meant by this. The Roman Catholic Church uses this text to support the authority of the pope, insisting that Jesus said He'd

build the church on Peter, the first pope. But if we look carefully at this text and compare it with other Bible texts, we'll see that's *not* what Jesus taught.

There are a couple of things that are clear from our text.

1. *The focus really isn't on Peter.* By that I mean, Peter wasn't a spiritual giant. Remember Jesus just said he could not have made this right confession apart from the Father's revelation. Indeed, in the very next story Jesus has to rebuke Peter because he tried to stand in the way of God's plan (23). Peter was a sinner who knew that Jesus was his only hope which is why He would say, "You are the Answer!" So the focus isn't really on Peter per se. Rather...

2 *The focus is on Peter's confession.* Let's explore that play on words a little further. Jesus didn't say He would build His Church on Peter [*Petros*], but on "this rock" [*Petra*]. The name Jesus gave Peter, *Petros*, means "a stone." Jesus didn't say He'd build His church on "a stone" [*Petros*], but on a "rock" [*Petra*, a word that signifies a large rock].

What is that "large rock"? I think the best person qualified to answer that question is Peter himself. Did Peter think Jesus wanted to build the church on him? Let's turn to Peter's commentary on the subject in 1 Peter 2:4-8, "As you come to Him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him--you also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house...through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay in Zion a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' Now to you who believe, this stone is precious..."

Who did Peter say is the "Living Stone"? He said *Jesus* is (4). Jesus is the foundation rock on which the Church is built. What does Peter call us in verse 5? We are "living stones" that THE Living Stone is using to build a spiritual house called the church. How do you become a living stone in this spiritual house? Verse 7 tells us—we must come to believe in the Living Stone, not just intellectually, but with a belief that results in Him becoming precious to us. In short, we must do what Peter did, make the right confession about Jesus. *You are the Christ, the answer to life!*

That's the issue in Matthew 16. The focus isn't on Peter the man. It's on Peter's confession. The Church is built on Christ, not Peter. The Rock upon which Jesus said He would build His Church is the right confession that the Father enabled Peter to make of Jesus. *Upon this rock, this confession you've just made Peter, I will build my church.*

With that understanding let's consider a second characteristic of Jesus' promise.

B. His promise involves a plan (18b). To Peter Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." What did Jesus say He would do? "I will build My church." This is the first time the word "church" appears in the NT. From Jesus' promise, we gain three important insights regarding the Church.

1. *Jesus is the contractor of the church.* "I will build My church." Jesus uses a construction metaphor. He said He was going to build something, and He makes it clear that *He* is the General Contractor. And His verb choice indicates that this building project is a process.

Now suppose you were building a house. And suppose I came to look at your house before the project was finished. And suppose I saw the half-completed house—the plywood floors with no carpeting, the light switches with no covers, the unpainted walls, the unlandscaped lawn—and I said, "Ummm, not much of a house. Pretty drab looking. I sure wouldn't want to live there." What would you think of my assessment? You'd be hurt, probably, if not angry.

How do you think the Lord feels when people say things about His Church, like... “I don’t need the Church in my life. I mean, it’s full of problems. Oh, I love Jesus, but I’m not too impressed with the Church.” Beloved, it’s sort of foolish to criticize something that’s not finished yet. Sure the church isn’t what it ought to be, not entirely, but it’s not done yet. And the truth is, Jesus loves His Church and commands His people to love His Church. Not because it’s perfect, but because it’s *His*. He is the General Contractor of the Church.

2. *Jesus is the owner of the church.* He said, “I will build *my* Church.” The church belongs to Jesus. How did it become His? He bought it at a great price, didn’t He? He paid His own blood for it. And He gave us an owner’s manual so we would now how to take care of His Church. We have no right to deviate from the Owner’s Manual, and take matters into our own hands when it comes to the care of His Church.

Let this sink in. The Church is the Lord’s. It’s not Peter’s. It’s not yours, nor mine. If He is our Savior, then we belong to Him. What a privilege this is for us, to be *His* people, to be His Church.

3. *Jesus is the protector of the church.* “I will build My church, and the gates of hades shall not overcome [KJV, prevail against] it.” Answer this. Can anyone stop the building project of the Church? Jesus said “the gates of Hades” cannot. The term “Hades” refers to the realm of the dead.” A “gate” is what you pass through to enter something. So “the gates of Hades” is a euphemism for *death*.

Death is our greatest foe, isn’t it? Human beings spend millions of dollars for health care and physical fitness. Why? To try to postpone the inevitable foe that entered the world when Adam sinned. Death.

But listen. Not our greatest foe, nor any lesser foe, can stop the plan of Christ for His Church. But they’re try. The fact that Jesus says the gates of hell won’t prevail against His church is an indication that they’ll try.

When you read the history of WBC’s 134 years, you quickly discover that our story is not without its challenges. For example, meetings scheduled for November 16-18, 1918 were cancelled, as the record states, “on account of the influenza epidemic.” In 1958 John Adkins, having served as the pastor of WBC for 22 years, went home after church one Sunday afternoon and died of a heart attack in the parsonage. Ten years later his wife, Mary, died in the tornado that ripped through our community.

It’s worth noting that there are no church records from July 31, 1896 to September 10, 1910. The pages are blank. Maybe they just didn’t keep records. Maybe they couldn’t pay their bills and closed the doors.⁷

Then on September 10, 1910 the *Church Minutes* state that our forefathers met “to reorganize,” and that “a motion was made and seconded to transfer the Wheelersburg Regular Baptist Church Property to the Ohio Baptist State Convention.”

It seemed like a good idea at the time. Turn the controls over to the convention. Let the denomination pay the bills. It made good economic sense. In reality, however, we almost lost everything do to that decision. That’s because in the 1910s and 1920s, liberal theology infiltrated the Baptist Convention. That means that the denomination stopped

⁷ According to *A History of Scioto County & Pioneer Record* (published 1903; p. 390), in a section on the history of Porter Township, “For the past ten years there have been no regular services.” [that is, from 1893 to 1903; this “gap” is in agreement with the record of the *WBC Minutes*]

believing that the Bible is God's inerrant Word and that Jesus is the only way to heaven and started promoting a social gospel.

Consequently, in 1920 our church did what many churches committed to the fundamentals did throughout the state (and country). We severed ties with the liberal convention. In 1925 we become a member of the Baptist Bible Union of the State of Ohio, and eventually, in 1945 we joined fellowship with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches.

The problem, however, wasn't settled. Though we pulled out, the liberal Convention still owned our property. In 1923 Pastor Harry Ketcham traveled to Columbus to ask the Convention for the church deed, and the Convention agreed to give it. But for reasons I can't explain, the legal battles for our deed continued until around 1970 when the church still didn't have the deed, was forced to hire an attorney, and the rights to the property were finally secured. That opened the door for building our educational facility in 1975 and our auditorium and offices in 1990.

So again I say, though they will try, the gates of hell will not prevail, for our Lord is the contractor, the owner, *and* the protector of His Church.

There's something else to see about this promise. One, Jesus' promise was to a person—to Peter, who shows us the right response to Jesus. Two, His promise involves a plan—*I will build my church*, says Jesus. That's the plan. If you want to be in tune with Jesus, you need to be in His church. Three...

C. His promise involves a prospect (19). Jesus continued, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." This verse, too, is the subject of much debate. That's unfortunate. For the sake of clarity, I will lay before you two conclusions to which I believe Jesus' declaration points us.

1. *It doesn't authorize confession and penance.* To use this text to support the practice of going to a priest to obtain forgiveness, as some insist, is to misread Jesus' intent. The Bible teaches that every believer in Christ is a priest (Heb 4:16). We don't need to go through a human priest to reach God, only through Christ. So what's the point of verse 19?

2. *It authorizes the preaching of the gospel.* "I will give you the keys," said Jesus. What's a key? It's what you use to open a lock and get into something. What are the keys of the kingdom? It's the way you get into God's kingdom. And how's that? The same way Peter did, by making the right, heartfelt confession about Jesus.

So the "keys of the kingdom" here are referring to the way to get to heaven. *I'm giving that to you*, says Jesus. As you help people get to heaven? By giving them the gospel.

How do we know that? By tracing the steps of Peter and the apostles in the book of Acts, we discover by their actions what they understood these "keys" to be. What did the apostles do in Acts? They used the keys. How? They preached the gospel.

In Acts 2, Peter used the keys to unlock the door of the church to the Jews. In Acts 8, the keys were used to open up the door for the Samaritans to be right with God. Then in Acts 10, Peter took the keys of the gospel to Cornelius, and the door swung wide open for Gentiles.

Here's the prospect of the church. The Lord gave Peter a set of keys, namely the gospel, the good news about Jesus' perfect life, death for sinners, and triumphant

resurrection. By preaching that gospel, Peter and the other apostles had the power to reconcile alienated sinners back to the God who created them.

My friend, we have those keys, too. We have been entrusted with the only key that will rescue condemned sinners from hell and take them to heaven. Friends, our forefathers believed that. That's why you read a statement like this in the church minutes of August 2, 1923: "Under new business the question of missions was brought up. The church voted unanimously to divide the mission funds 25% to go to Africa, 25% to Central America, and 50% to be retained to be used at home as the church deems best."

And by the way, at the same meeting the church voted to build a parsonage for its pastor, H. E. Ketcham.⁸ Ministries at home and ministries abroad. It's all a part of faithfully using the keys the Lord has placed in our hands.

I'm thankful for those who made sacrifices so I could hear the gospel. Aren't you? And I'm thankful for those who made sacrifices in the past 134 years so others could hear the gospel, both here in this community and around the world. Now it's our turn.

What are we going to do with the keys? I'm struck by the irony of verse 20. There Jesus warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. Why'd He say that? Because it wasn't time yet. He had to go to the cross first, and die, and rise again. They wanted to talk but He told them, "Don't tell, not yet," for the telling would come later.

But to us He says, "Go, tell! Let the world know about Me! Be my witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Make disciples in every people group on the planet."

And what are we doing? Let's be honest. We're so prone *not* to tell. It's not that we don't appreciate Jesus. It's just that we get distracted and preoccupied with other things.

Today's a great day to be reminded of why we're here. We've been given keys, beloved. Let's use them.

I hope you love the church. No, the church can't take you to heaven, only Christ can. But He said the church is His number one agenda for rescuing sinners in this age. *I will build my church.*

And know this. *The future of the church is certain because of Christ.* The future of the Church rests upon the person and promise of Christ.

I challenge you today to make the confession Peter made: "Lord, You are the Answer, the One the Living God sent to this world to save me. I put my trust in You. I surrender my life to You. And I will take seriously what You take seriously, Your precious Church."

⁸ On October 7 the trustees recommended that the church build the parsonage and place a mortgage on the same for \$5,000.