

Proposition: As a church, our hope rests on two unchanging realities, according to Matthew 16:16-20.

- I. Our hope 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. Our hope rests on the Promise of Jesus (18-20).

"I will build My church."

 - 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 hope of the church is Christ.

When I was a small child, I used to visit my grandparents who lived near a decent-sized lake. One of the things that fascinated me was their red rowboat. We had a lot of fun with that boat. It was at that time that I began to learn the importance of an anchor.

From time to time we would take the boat out in the lake to fish. It didn't take me long even as a 5-year-old to make an important observation. Without an anchor, a boat goes wherever the waves take it. For instance, we would find a good fishing spot, stop rowing, and start fishing. But if it was a windy day, you know what happened? The boat drifted from the spot we chose. It happened slowly, even unnoticeably, but it happened. But there was something we had right in the boat that could help. An anchor. An anchor gives a boat stability and security.

What is it that gives a church stability and security as it faces the winds and turmoil of life? Jesus tells us in Matthew 16. As a church, our hope rests on two bedrock anchors.

Today is a significant day in the life of this church. Today we pause to thank God for the 120 year demonstration of His faithfulness to this congregation.

The Church of Jesus Christ has a bright hope. How do I know? Because of an announcement Jesus made before He left the earth. What Jesus said is absolutely astounding as well as perspective-changing. 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. I can think of no more fitting church-anniversary text. It's here that we discover the two anchors of the church's hope.

I. Our hope rests on the Person of Jesus (16-17).

*** 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.

Matthew was one of Jesus' 12 apostles. Matthew recorded the gospel that bears his name to provide us with a portrait of Jesus the Messiah, the One who came 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. He's already performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000. 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.

Then, here's what happened. Jesus took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi (13). The location is significant. That's Gentile territory. That's 120 miles from Jerusalem in the northern part of Israel. The area was 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 (Wiersbe).

It was there, in this pagan environment that Jesus taught His disciples about the entity by which He would transform this pagan world, the Church.

Here's the first anchor. The hope of the church rests on the Person of Jesus. In our text, we see three things that verify this.

A. Many people exhibit confusion. About Jesus, that is. 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 disciples' answers indicate that people were as confused then as they are now. 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 so confused about the person of Jesus. The very people who saw and heard Jesus came to wrong conclusions about His identity. Many people were confused.

Then Jesus turned the question (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). "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" That's amazing. Jesus' first question, again, was, "Who do *people* say I am?" And the answers were so diverse: Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others say Jeremiah or another of the prophets. But then Jesus placed His second question on the table, "Who do *you* ['you' is plural; Jesus is talking to the twelve] say that I am? 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 speaks as self-appointed spokesman for the others, and the confession he makes is absolutely critical. He confessed two things about Jesus.

1. *Jesus is the Answer.* "Thou art the Christ." Ponder that. We're so familiar with the word "Christ" we're prone to miss its importance. We hear it as a swear-word. Some have the idea it's Jesus last name. 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 account. 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--*Meshiach*.. *Christos* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term Messiah.

Even the term "Messiah" is probably familiar to us, but we probably don't grasp the importance it held for a Jew like Peter. Messiah means "the anointed one." The Messiah is 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 (570), "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.'"

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!:" There's a second aspect to Peter's confession. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

2. *Jesus is the Son of the living God.* Jesus is God's own Son, but not just any god's. 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." "Jesus, You are the Answer, the One that the Living God has sent to rule as King over this world."

My friend, there's much confusion in our world about Jesus, but here before us is the right confession. To be right with God, you must make Peter's confession about Jesus your own. How do I know? Because of Jesus' response 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.

But wait. Did you ever wonder how Peter "get it" when so many others didn't "get it"? 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 tells us two insights about Peter's confession.

1. *Peter didn't come up with this on his own.* Notice carefully Jesus' words in verse 17, "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 Peter's religious sensitivity, sincerity, or insight that enabled him to make this confession.

Indeed, a correct understanding of God's truth is not something I can 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 explains a second insight to Peter (and to 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 of Jesus.

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."

The offer is universal. 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 sought God on his own apart from the gracious, effective, revealing work of God. Jesus said to Peter, "It's the Father who enabled you to make this confession."

I'm intrigued by 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 the same truth? It's because this truth eliminates pride. The reason we know the truth about Jesus is *God*. There's no room for pride. We would not have "found" Him if He had not made Himself known to us. And because of that truth, guess who gets all the glory? God does!

Beloved, here is the first anchor upon which the hope of this church rests. Our hope rests upon the correct confession of the Person of Jesus.

Don't miss an obvious lesson from the story. You will never get an accurate picture of Jesus by taking a poll of the people. When it came to Jesus' identity, the majority of people were wrong. That's true today. Frankly, the important thing is not what *others* say about Jesus, but what do *you* and *I* say? What the crowd says can never be my excuse. "Well, there are so many denominations out there. When they get their act together, I'll think more about Jesus." My friend, don't let the confusion of others keep you from making the proper confession of Jesus. And if you're confused about Jesus, ask the Father to help you see the truth. Now we come to a second anchor.

II. Our hope rests on the Promise of Jesus (18-20).

Listen to Jesus' 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 an amazing promise, one that's familiar to most of us. I invite you to plumb its depths and notice three characteristics of Jesus' promise.

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." 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. A whole religious tradition uses this text to support the conviction that Jesus said He'd build the church on Peter. Is that what Jesus meant? We could easily get lost looking at the details of what's *not* clear in the verse, and miss what *is* clear, namely two things.

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"? Jesus is (4). He is the foundation rock on which the Church is built. What does Peter call us in verse 5? "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 believe in the Living Stone. He must be precious to us. In short, we must do what Peter did, make the right confession about Jesus.

That's the issue in Matthew 16. The focus is on Peter's confession. The Church is built on Christ, not Peter. The Rock upon which Jesus said He would build His Church was the right confession that the Father enabled Peter to make of Jesus. 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 Himself would do? "I will build My church." This is the first occurrence of the word "church" in the NT. From Jesus' promise, we learn three beautiful lessons about 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 guess who's the General Contractor? He is! What's more, His words indicate this building task is a process.

Suppose you were building a house, and suppose I came to look at your house before it was finished. And suppose I saw the half-completed project--the plywood floors with no carpeting, the light switches with no covers, the unpainted walls, the unlandscaped lawn--and I said, "Oh, I'm not very impressed with your house. It's not very beautiful. I wouldn't want to live there." How would you feel? Hurt, probably, if not angry.

How do you think the Lord feels when people criticize His Church? It's not uncommon in our age for people to naively assert, "Oh, I love Jesus, but I don't like the Church." Beloved, it is a dangerous thing to criticize something that's not done yet. Jesus loves His Church. He 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. He bought it at a great price, didn't He? He gave us an owner's manual so we would now know 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 that sink in. The Church is the Lord's. It wasn't Peter's. It's not yours, nor mine. We belong to Him. What a privilege this is for us, to be *His* people.

3. *Jesus is the protector of the church.* "I will build My church, and the gates of hades shall not 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 "gates of Hades" is merely 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. Our greatest foe nor any lesser foe can stop the plan of Christ for His Church. He is the contractor, the owner, *and* the protector of His Church.

Samuel Wesley, the author of *The Church's One Foundation*, understood this. He penned these words in verse 3, "Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war, She waits the consummation of peace forevermore. Till with the visions glorious he longing eyes are blest, and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest." A third characteristic.

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 is to miss Jesus' intent.

2. *It authorizes the preaching of the gospel.* 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 the kingdom. How's that? The same way Peter did, through the right confession of Jesus. The "keys" refers to the preaching of the gospel.

How do we know? 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, by which Peter and the apostles could reconcile alienated sinners to the Living God. My friend, we have those keys, too.

I'm struck by the irony of verse 20. There Jesus warned His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ, for the obvious reason that it wasn't time. He told them, "Don't tell!" yet they were inclined to tell. But to us He says, "Tell! Let the world know about Me!" And we're inclined to be silent.

Beloved, here's the hope of the Church. It rests in the Person and Promise of Christ. The bottom line, simply put, is this. The hope of the church is 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. I surrender my life to You." And I invite you to claim Jesus' amazing promise, for He said, "I will build My church..."