

Joshua Willadsen  
10th Sunday after Pentecost  
Sermons  
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## MATTHEW 16:13-20 - "THIS ROCK"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

In the Second Article of the Creeds (the Apostles' Creed & Nicene Creed), the One, Holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church confesses that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God and bears the office and work of the Christ, the Anointed One of Israel. **And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered, and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.** The Church through the centuries confesses the same saving truth that the Apostle Peter was first given to confess by the Father and that all the Twelve Apostles boldly proclaimed after the Day of Pentecost. Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

No other confession of Jesus other than the confession first given and confessed by St. Peter and given and confessed to us in Baptism saves. To confess Jesus as one of God's prophets as Muslims do, does not save. To confess Jesus as a Rabbi or Teacher as some Jews do, does not save. To confess Jesus as some sort of spiritual guide to enlightenment as some Buddhists or Hindus might, does not save. To confess Jesus as a great philosopher and ethicist as Thomas Jefferson and some of America's founding fathers did, does not save. Only the Apostolic and Scriptural confession, which confesses Jesus as God's unique Son and God's promised Christ saves.

Some two thousand plus years ago, in area some twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee, amongst pagan surroundings, God the Father first revealed to Peter and to all the Twelve that Jesus was both the Son of God and the promised Christ. The Father had already revealed to the Twelve that Jesus was the Son of God; they all confessed Him as such after Jesus came to them walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33). But now Jesus was also revealed to them as the Christ, the Anointed One, in whom all the hopes of Israel and the promises of God were being fulfilled. "Christ" is not a personal or last name, but a title that designates an office of service, like Pastor or President.

Peter and the rest of the Twelve had been with Jesus a while. They had been chosen by Jesus from the midst of His disciples as apostles, those sent with Jesus'

authority to participate in His ministry of preaching the reign of heaven and working miracles in Israel. Peter was even the first disciple called by Jesus along with his brother Andrew. All of them not only had heard Jesus' Word and witnessed the many miraculous things that Jesus did, but they were insiders to whom the mysteries of God's reign come in Jesus were given. They didn't understand or comprehend everything they heard and saw, but they did know more than the crowds and the religious leaders of the Jews.

**Matthew records:** 13 And when Jesus went into the parts of Caesarea Philippi He began to ask His disciples saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

King Herod, himself thought that Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life; he had ordered John's execution, but the reports of Jesus' preaching and miracles had convinced him that Jesus was John. Other people were convinced that Jesus was the prophet Elijah, whom the prophet Malachi prophesied would come again before the Day of the LORD. Some thought that Jesus' preaching and signs were more similar to the prophet Jeremiah who called the people of Judah to repent and warned of Jerusalem's doom. Despite the varied specific ideas on who Jesus was the general consensus of the day was that Jesus was a prophet, one sent to proclaim God's Word.

Apart from God's revelation the best confession a flesh and blood person can give concerning Jesus is that He is a prophet, but this confession does not save. In our own day many people are willing to say that Jesus speaks for God in some way; people always seem to want Jesus on their side supporting their agendas, but less are able and willing to confess Jesus as St. Peter confessed. 15 He did say to them, "But you, who do you say that I am?" 16 And Simon Peter replied and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus replied and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you rather My Father who is in heaven (revealed it). 18 But also I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church and the Gates of Hades will not win the victory over her. 19 I will give to you the keys of the reign of heaven, and whatever you bind upon the earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose upon the earth will have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He commanded the disciples that no one speak that He is the Christ.

Simon Peter confessed Jesus in truth; He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But Simon did not make this confession of Jesus by his own reason, will, strength, or understanding, nor that of another human being. The Father revealed this saving truth to Simon through the work of the Spirit in the person, word, and work of Jesus. Jesus proclaimed that Simon was blessed, not because he had such great wisdom, insight, and faith, but because in deed the Father graciously had blessed Simon by revealing to Him and the others that Jesus was both God's unique Son and Christ. Jesus then gave Simon the name Peter and a set of three promises that have caused just a bit of disagreement and consternation amongst Jesus' disciples over the ages: 1. upon this rock I will build My Church; 2. the Gates of Hades shall not win the victory over her; 3. I will give to you the keys of the reign of heaven.

The Roman Catholic position is that these promises of Christ are for Peter only and uniquely. Peter is thought to be the unshakable rock upon whom Jesus built His Church, because Peter confessed Jesus rightly. They here surmise that God gave Peter and his spiritual heirs (what we call Popes today) a unique ministry as pastor over the whole flock of God in the world as the Vicar of Christ. The Roman Catholic Catechism reads:

**881** *The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock.<sup>400</sup> "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head."<sup>401</sup> This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.*

**882** *The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful."<sup>402</sup> "For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."<sup>403</sup>*

The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church, and Protestant churches in general all dispute the papal supremacy of Peter and his spiritual successors; they are one in witness against Rome that "this rock" which Jesus promises to build His Church upon is not the man Simon Peter, but that "this rock" refers to the true Gospel confession that Peter made, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." These non Roman churches further agree that Peter is standing in for the Twelve Apostles whom Jesus called before His crucifixion and sent after his resurrection from the dead to make disciples of all the nations by baptizing and teaching.

The words of Jesus that Matthew records here, the immediate context of this text, and the rest of Matthew's Gospel rule out any possibility that Jesus was creating a new office over and above the apostles and the Church throughout the world. In Greek "Peter" (Πετρος) does mean rock and is masculine in gender, while "this rock" (ταυτη τη πετρα) is feminine in gender. The two words are similar, but not identical. If Jesus wanted to refer to Peter as the one upon whom He was building the Church then Jesus could have simply used the masculine form of "rock" (πετρος) or simply said...You are Peter and upon you I will build My Church." Further, the immediate context makes it clear that Simon Peter's confession of Jesus is not only his, but the confession of all the Twelve Apostles. Remember Jesus had asked the Twelve as a group, "Who do you (plural) say that I am?" and it was then Peter who made the good confession for all of them. And finally the only times in the Gospel of Matthew that Peter is not representing the rest of the Twelve Apostles or speaking for them are those unflattering and rash instances when Peter tries to be more or better than the rest of the Twelve, but ends up proving he is a horrible sinner. The two best examples of this are: when Jesus walked on the water and Peter didn't believe Jesus' Word to His disciples, but wanted to get out

the boat and walk on the water; and when Jesus warned His disciples that they would all fall away on the night that He was betrayed, Peter boasted that he alone would even die with Jesus, yet that very night he denied Jesus three times.

A Church built upon sinful Peter is bound not to endure, but to fail! But the Church of Christ built upon the confession of Jesus as revealed by the Father to Peter the Confessor of Christ and the Apostles is sure to endure! By the grace and mercy of God Peter was restored to Jesus after His death and resurrection and served often as the leader and speaker of the Twelve Apostles; in Acts Peter was the first to preach the confession that he was the first to make here in Matthew; Peter confessed Jesus of Nazareth crucified and risen as God's Son and the Christ and proclaimed the Good News of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. But Peter never did this by his own reason, strength, or power; nor did Peter do this alone, but always by the gracious revelation of the Father and always with the Twelve.

So Jesus' three promises to Peter, were not only for Peter, but all the Twelve Apostles, the new Twelve Patriarchs for the new Israel that Jesus was creating. Jesus' Church would be built upon the apostolic confession that He was the Christ, the Son of God and this Church would endure and be victorious over all the forces of evil; this is the second promise that "the Gates of Hades shall not win the victory over her." Jesus was not here promising an easy life free from trial and tribulation for His disciples, rather He promised that our great enemies sin, death, and the devil though they violently assault His Church and cause much pain and suffering shall not win the victory. Jesus won the victory for the Church through His death and resurrection!

The third promise Jesus made to Peter and thereby to all the Twelve concerned the keys to the reign of heaven and the binding and loosing of sins. Jesus was here referring to the apostolic ministry of proclaiming Christ Jesus' death and resurrection to sinners for forgiveness. After Jesus fulfilled all the Father sent Him to do, Jesus gathered the Eleven disciples and sent them to bind and loose sins through baptizing and teaching. *"All authority in heaven and upon the earth has been given to Me. Therefore as you go, make disciples of all the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; by teaching them to hold fast to all the things which I have commanded you. And I will be with you always until the completion of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20). Acts records how the Twelve (the Eleven plus Matthias as replacement for Judas) did just as the Lord Jesus commanded; they preached the Word that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God; they baptized and they taught; and according to Jesus' promise sinners had their sins loosed, removed, forgiven.

Speaking of the One, Holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church that Jesus founded St. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19-22: *19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,** 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

The Church of Christ is founded upon the Apostles, founded upon the apostolic confession that Peter was the first to make, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" and thereby founded upon Christ Jesus the cornerstone. Jesus' promises to Peter, to all the Twelve did come true and remain true even today. What the Father first revealed to Peter by the Spirit in the Word and he confessed, so too the Father has revealed to you and me by the Spirit in the Word and we confess, "Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God." As Jesus called and sent the Twelve to baptize and teach, to bind and loose sins, so Jesus has called and sent pastors even in our day to do the same.

In our day, many are tempted to build the Church upon the reason, strength, and ways of man; business principles, leadership principles, large and enduring institutions, and accommodation to the culture, but these all lack Christ's Word and promise. The rock upon which Christ's Church is built is upon the apostolic confession that Peter first made; mysteriously through the Word of Christ God brings sinners to repentance and faith in Christ. In our day the evil one continues to violently assault the Church of Christ, sin remains in us as an enduring plague, and death relentlessly hunts us; yet Jesus has won the victory for His Church over these enemies through His death and resurrection. Even now we share in Christ's victory in the midst of our weakness, but in the resurrection to come we shall rejoice in Christ's glory. In our day you, the people in our community, and all around the earth have sins that bind us and separate us from God and each other, yet in your midst Jesus has called and sent you a pastor to loose your sins with the Word of forgiveness and to lead you in confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God to your families, friends, and neighbors, amen.