

## The Church's One Foundation

Matthew 16:13-20

### Introduction

**How to Plant a Church:** What do you need to plant a successful church? What is success? Do you need a cool pastor (sorry)? Do you need catchy sermons, a cool vibe, and concert-level music?

- You have to keep them with what you catch them with (when the cultural aesthetic changes, you better change).

But it's more dangerous than that. When you start mixing Jesus with other "functional saviors," it corrupts the gospel message (e.g., crosses and banners at the Capitol march).

- KKK picture at a church with the Jesus Saves background (1920 Oregon).<sup>1</sup>

When we mix our preferences and opinions with God's, when we confuse our perspective with his, when we fail to trust his truth and, instead, seek it elsewhere we undermine the foundation of the gospel.

**Main Point:** The church must never move its foundation from Jesus Christ. We must see and proclaim Christ clearly as the focus of our worship and hope.

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. The Popular Identity of Jesus (vv. 13-14)

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.martyduren.com/2016/05/20/more-information-on-the-infamous-kkk-jesus-saves-photo/>

<sup>2</sup> <sup>13</sup> Ἐλθὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὰ μέρη Καισαρείας τῆς Φιλίππου ἠρώτα τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ λέγων, τίνα λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; <sup>14</sup> οἱ δὲ εἶπαν, Οἱ μὲν Ἰωάννην τὸν βαπτιστὴν, ἄλλοι δὲ Ἠλίαν, ἕτεροι δὲ Ἰερεμίαν ἢ ἓνα τῶν προφητῶν. <sup>15</sup> λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι; <sup>16</sup> ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ Σίμων Πέτρος εἶπεν, Σὺ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος. <sup>17</sup> ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Μακάριος εἶ, Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ ἀπεκάλυψέν σοι ἀλλ' ὁ πατὴρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. <sup>18</sup> ἀγὼ δὲ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ᾗδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς. <sup>19</sup> δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. <sup>20</sup> τότε διεστείλατο τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἵνα μηδενὶ εἴπωσιν ὅτι αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός.

**Penetrating Question:** <sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” He is talking to the disciples to discern who people say Jesus is. It is undeniable that he is **special** *but* how do they interpret that? The narrator of the Gospel has made it clear (Matt 1:1, 16) that Jesus is the Messiah, but Jesus avoids the term, letting people draw their own conclusions. What conclusions do they draw? <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

- Jesus was confused with John the Baptist (cf. Herod in 14:1-2), Elijah (also JtB adjacent), and Jeremiah (most unique; why not Isaiah?; prophet of doom?).

They seem to be stuck on Jesus as another in the line of great Hebrew prophets.

- He certainly *is* prophetic. He is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18 as the perfect prophet (*a la* Moses). But he is **more than a prophet**, he is the Messiah, God’s anointed Savior. He is the eternal Son of the living God.

Saying he is a prophet is *good* but still falls short. It places him on the same plane as John, Elijah, Jeremiah, and others and reveals that the people recognize something special about Jesus but are unable to fully grasp just how unique he is or how significant his mission is.<sup>3</sup>

- It is possible to have a high opinion of Jesus and still fall short of recognizing his true identity, power, and purpose.
- There is a serious difference between a prophet who speaks the words of God and a prophet who **is the very Word of God as God himself**.
  - A prophet relays the word of God and calls you to accept it; Jesus is the Word of God and calls you to follow him.
  - A prophet points out sin and points you to a Savior; Jesus points out sin and offers his own life to save you (“The gospel is the very treatment of what it diagnoses”).

**What Conclusions Do We Draw About Jesus?:** Who you say Jesus is will determine how you follow him.

- Is Jesus a good prophet (*a la* Islam) pointing the way to God? Telling us to be better and try harder?
  - He’s more than a prophet, he’s a Savior. You’ll never be good enough, that’s why Jesus not only points the way but *makes a way*.
- Is Jesus just a wise teacher? If so you’ll memorize information and take his life tips.
  - But a good teacher has no right to tell you to lay down your life for him (but God does).
- Is Jesus a Religious Mascot? Is he a stand-in for your way of life, a representative for your brand of culture? If so, you’ll slap some cultural Christianity on your life but your heart will never change. You will use Jesus rather than submit to him.
  - A mascot doesn’t call us to sacrifice yet Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him, to leave behind everything and submit to his perfect rule.
- Is Jesus your personal good-luck charm or Genie? You go to him when there is a problem or you need something but when things are going well you could care less?

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<sup>3</sup> “All this is highly honorific, but Jesus’ subsequent question reveals that it still falls short of the true estimate of his mission. It leaves him only on a level with John” (France).

- This makes it all about you when the opposite is true. You exist for him (not *vice versa*).

What happens when we elevate Jesus but fall short? Following Jesus is “all or nothing.” He is either Lord of all or he isn’t. There are no negotiations with the one who made all things and through whom all things exist. You can’t bargain or make a treaty with God. The only path to life and joy is complete and total surrender.

## 2. The Insightful Confession of Peter (vv. 15-17)

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

**Don’t Follow the Crowd:** <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” We know what the world thinks about Christ. What do *you* think about Christ?

- The crowds get some of it right, but the disciples *should* know more and know better (\*sidenote: it’s okay to expect “Christians” to do better than “non-Christians”).
- At the end of the day it won’t do you any good to follow *everyone else’s opinions* of Jesus, you have to answer for yourself who you believe Jesus to be.

**The Key Confession:** <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

- “Christ” is Greek for Messiah. So, Christ is a translation from Hebrew into Greek and we’ve just transliterated (e.g., apostle, baptize, deacon, etc.) into English.
  - “Christ” occurs 531x in NT (“Christianity”); Messiah occurs 45x in OT.
  - Greek word comes from word to mean “anointed” (both in Greek and Hebrew).
  - In the OT, when a king or priest was installed in a special position they were “anointed.”
- In the NT, “Christ” refers to Israel’s hope of a restored nation and monarchy along with the idea that the Messiah is the “Son of God.”
  - That’s why Peter says both “Christ” and “Son of the Living God.”

When we say, “Jesus is the Christ” we are saying that he is the anointed one, the promised one, the one chosen by God to fulfill every one of his purposes.<sup>4</sup> He is the perfect prophet, priest, and king of Israel. He is the son of God promised in Psalm 2 and the King of Israel promised in 2 Samuel 7. Our confession is that Jesus is God, our promised King.

**#Blessed:** <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. Jesus tells Simon (Peter), (Son of Jonah; cf. Bar/Bat Mitzvah), that he is blessed. Why is he blessed? Is he blessed because of his deep faith and righteous reaction? Not really. The fact that God has revealed Jesus’ true identity to him is the blessing.

- We imagine blessing to be tangible and materialistic. Am blessed because of my bank account, my significant other, etc.? Those are blessings but that is not the essence of blessing. Here, we see that Simon is Blessed because God has opened his eyes!

<sup>4</sup> “In Jesus, the purposes of God (declared in the OT) have now come to their fulfillment” (France).

- What is your blessing? The greatest blessing we can have is God opening our eyes to the truth of the gospel. That is the beginning of treasures in heaven, where neither “moths nor rust” can destroy.

Jesus says, “Good job, Peter” but it’s not even you that did a good job. Your “insight” is actually from God. Every good thing we do or have is from God.

- That’s the way the gospel works: we were dead, he makes us alive; we were blind, he gives us sight; we were lost, he finds us.

**This Isn’t to Elevate Peter:** Even Peter’s confession falls short. Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah doesn’t mean you understand what the Messiah really is, what he has come to do, or how he has come to do it. Most Jews of Jesus’ day understood the Messiah in purely nationalistic, militaristic, and political terms. What proves to be true in Jesus’ day is that the “Jewish expectations about [the] Messiah are not adequate” to encompass “Jesus’ messianic claims” (Hurtado).

- That’s why Peter and the rest of the disciples couldn’t understand Jesus’ predictions about his crucifixion.
- They envisioned a Messiah who would conquer, not die. They envisioned a Messiah who would dominate, not serve. They envisioned a Messiah who would overthrow, not sacrifice. They envisioned a military leader not a suffering servant.
- They think Jesus came to “make Israel great again” and he really came to give his life as a ransom for many.

**Calling:** Jesus is blessing Peter, the other disciples, and anyone who would place their faith in Jesus. He is blessing them by giving them insight into his identity and calling them to embrace his messianic mission.

### 3. The Unshakeable Foundation of the Church (vv. 18-20)

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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.”

<sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

**What’s In a Name:** <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, Name game: “You are Messiah” / “You are Peter”. We know Simon as his nickname Peter because, by the time the NT is written, he already has that name (cf. John as “the Baptist”). But Peter is a nickname given him by Jesus (cf. not unlike God changed Abram’s name to Abraham and Jacob’s name to Israel).

- The nickname that Jesus gives Simon is Peter (Πέτρος, Gk; Κηφᾶς, Ar). The word for rock here is “πέτρα” so there is a clear pun here. Almost like naming him “Rocky” then telling him on this “rock” I will build my church (he is hard-headed for sure).

What makes him a rock?

**Papal Misconceptions:** This verse has been used to justify the RCC view of the papacy. Regardless of your interpretation, this passage says nothing about papal succession or infallibility.

- Peter plays a central role as a representative of the apostles and a demonstration of a faithful disciple but...<sup>5</sup>
- The focus is not on a supreme pope but the sovereign savior. The context of the gospel has not been building to an apostolic figurehead but the clear confession of Jesus' identity as the Messiah. Our obedience is not to an elevated human but a divine mission.

**It's Not About Peter:** “[This] text is [ultimately] concerned with the person of Jesus rather than the person of Peter” (Chrys Caragounis).<sup>6</sup> The scriptures often talk about building our lives on a sure and stable foundation. In Matt 7 Jesus told us that a “wise man built his house on the rock” and could withstand the storms of life. We know that Jesus is the cornerstone of our building, the foundation of our lives, the unmoving anchor in ever storm of life. He must be our foundation because everything else is like shifting sand.

- “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).
- Peter himself tells us that Jesus is our cornerstone, and that he builds us as living stones into a spiritual house (1 Pet 2:4-8).

That's not to say Peter and the apostles are not central to our understanding of the gospel: Paul says we are “no longer strangers and aliens, but... fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” still with “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:19-22).

- “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21:14).
- Peter is even listed first among the apostles, being something of a leader of the group (e.g., Matt 10:2, “first, Simon, who is called Peter”).

But Peter himself and Paul both make it abundantly clear that the foundation of the church is not in Peter (1 Cor 15:5-10; 2 Cor 12:11).

- Peter is prominent but, like other disciples, he wavers (just wait until next week; my how the turntables). He's quick to step out of the boat or defend Jesus but he also denies him and runs away in shame later on. Peter is important but **successful leadership in the church is not a right inherited by an office but a gift to those who keep their eyes on Jesus.**

I am convinced that the “rock” on which Jesus is building his church is the confession that Jesus is the Christ, represented here by Peter's confession. Our foundation as the people of God is our proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

- Jesus is the foundation on which the foundation is built:

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<sup>5</sup> Platt

<sup>6</sup> Chrys Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990). Notice the pun on Πέτρος and πέτρα but not the exact correspondence (masculine πέτρος and feminine πέτρα). The confession (ὁμολογία) is would also take a feminine object.

- “The Church’s One Foundation” (Samuel John Stone): 1 The church's one Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; / she is His new creation, by water and the Word; / from heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride; / with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died

**People are the Mission:** (\*sidenote: when you hear “built” don’t think of a building, because the church is made up of living stones, i.e., people). People are the mission. That’s why we invest in people.

**God Builds the Church:** I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Even our great enemy of death cannot overcome the community that God has built. Jesus swallowed up death at the resurrection.

- The true church cannot be destroyed by persecution or martyrdom. Sometimes we feel like we need to defend the church, protect its reputation... we don’t, God is undefeated.
- False theologies and false “churches” will come and go, but the true church will persist.
- The church gets itself in trouble when it thinks it needs to cozy up to powerful systems and people to ensure it will survive. We depend only on Jesus!

What secures our salvation? Is it our good works? No, it is the grace and strength of God. He holds us in his hand (cf. Jn 10) so nothing can snatch us from him. Nothing can separate us from his love (Rom 8). “If you could lose your salvation, you would.” You’d have doubts and down moments. But the true believer can’t! The same is true of the church.

- But when we forget that God wins, that his victory is secure, we start looking for allies in this world. “The forest was shrinking but the trees kept voting for the axe because its handle was made of wood and they thought it was one of them” (Turkish Proverb). We compromise to ensure our survival when all we needed to do was steadfastly cling to Christ.

**Invitation to Participate:** <sup>19</sup> 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.” Peter is a representative of the apostles (in particular) and of Christians (in general). The church that God is given is invited to participate in the mission of God (“go and make disciples”). “Binding” and “loosing” is a familiar phrase of Judaism at the time and shows up in the gospels elsewhere. The church acts with the authority of Christ as agents of the Kingdom of God. We are privileged to be stewards of his new community. We should take that responsibility seriously.

- It should embolden us, sober us, and humble us.

John 20:23 puts it this way: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

- Such authority is directly connected with the mission of the disciples as agents of Jesus: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). As Jesus demonstrated authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:6), now his followers are given the same authority.

The authority we have is not our own, it is merely derived from the one we represent.

- An ambassador is not strong on his or her own, but as a representative of their country they carry the strength, reputation, and power of their home.

Do you take your role as a Christ-follower seriously? (This is why we take membership seriously). Do you see yourself as a representative of Christ everywhere you go? Do you take the church of God this seriously?

**Messianic Secret:**<sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. One of the more puzzling things in the gospels are the moments Jesus tells disciples and others not to explicitly tell others about his messianic identity. I can't say for sure why he does that but I have a few ideas:

- First, Jesus wants everyone to follow him of their own accord. It is not enough to "follow the crowd" to the popular teacher, they must count the cost for themselves.
- Second, he's given plenty of signs already. He's taught clearly. The crowd doesn't need a new sign, they need to believe what they've already been told.
- Lastly, Jesus' plan was to go to the cross. The crowds would never let him go with their misunderstanding of what they thought the Messiah was supposed to do. They thought he was supposed to conquer through military might, but he came to die a sacrificial death.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

**So What?:** What does it mean to make Christ the foundation of the church?

- It means trusting him completely: "The great thing about Jesus being the source, sustainer and end of all authority? He rules from the right place. He rules in the right way. He rules for the right purpose. You can trust Jesus, the Righteous Lord, totally. You cannot trust anyone else this way. Trust the Lord" (Yarnell).
- Too often we've put our trust in false gods, in idols. We've pursued influence through all sorts of avenues other than the gospel. We must repent of idolatry and refocus our hope on Jesus. For the gospel to impact the culture of our church, the truth of God's love and the sufficiency of Christ's death has to really be satisfying to our hearts. We can't take our anxiety, loneliness, or needs to other places seeking comfort. We can't place our hopes on anyone other than Christ.
- And if we want people to see Christ as eternally glorious, satisfying, and beautiful then we must make him our foundation, we must "live as though the truth were true." It can't be something we merely say, it must be the foundation of every choice we make.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "The messianic secret expresses in Mark the irrevocable and free decision of Jesus to embrace his passion, because this is the divine will. It is this fact which is expressed by δεῖ, 'must.' If Jesus had allowed his glory as Son of God to shine everywhere, if he had permitted to the crowds their delirious enthusiasm, if he had allowed the demons to howl their servile confession, if he had permitted the apostles to divulge everywhere their sensational discovery, the passion would have been rendered impossible and the destiny of Jesus would have issued in triumph, but a triumph which would have been wholly human (cf. Mk. 8:33) and which would not have accomplished the divine plan of salvation" (Tillesse, qtd in Lane NICNT ftnt 78).

<sup>8</sup> Concerning Dorothy Day: "She lived as though the truth were true" (Father Daniel Berrigan).