

## Sunday Service Sermons

29 August 2021

The Church and its Beginning

Read *Matthew 16:13-19*.

And upon what was the church of Jesus Christ built ?

Was it Peter or the confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Loving God and the salvation of The Lord God Almighty?

Of course we say the confession.

And it is that confession that is the beginning of a relationship with the Son of God.

What do you think about when you hear the word church?

Do you think of a building, a physical structure?

It might be a modern steel building in the suburbs with an open ceiling, acoustical panels on the walls, interlocking chairs, a large stage, and a Plexiglas pulpit.

That would be a more modern version of a church building.

Or do you think about a more majestic and imposing edifice with stained-glass windows, cushioned pews and beautiful furnishings.

Or how about a meeting house like we Brethren used to have.

Most likely those of us here think of this building.

Built in 1940 and it has been a part of our lives since we can remember.

Only a few of us can remember when this building was not here.

Or when you hear the word church do you think of a service, a ceremony or liturgy that takes place on Sunday mornings, in which there are hymns, prayers and a sermon.

All of these images are connotations of the word church, and they all are right if we have firmly planted in our minds the original and basic meaning of the word.

The purpose of this morning's message is to establish in our minds the basic meaning of church that Jesus has given to us.

This was not Peter's idea of the church or Paul's concept or Matthew's or John's.

It came directly from Christ who "loved the church, and gave himself for it." *Eph. 5:25*

The verses of today's text are divided into three parts.

First is the prologue.

A prologue is like a preface or introduction in which the author sets the stage or prepares the reader for what he is about to say.

Second is the presentation.

Here it is a single verse in which Jesus revealed the foundation, mission, and security of the church.

Finally, there is an epilogue, or concluding section or statement in which the author attempts to round out or sum up the design and purpose of what has been said.

The prologue.

What happened in the area of Caesarea Philippi has been called the "watershed" of the gospel.

All that went before and all that comes afterward flows from this event.

At this point Jesus was only six months away from his death on the cross.

Did His disciples understand him and his mission on earth?

They had been fascinated by his teaching, thrilled by his miracles, and awed by his divine personality,

But did they understand him and what he came to do?

Certainly Jesus knew their hearts, but they had never articulated their thoughts about him: they had never verbalized their faith.

Paul said in Romans, "With the mouth, confession is made unto salvation." *Romans 10:10*

There is something about speaking one's faith that validates it.

The setting is a relaxed one.

Jesus has taken the disciples apart from the milling crowds.

On every hand in this historical area of Palestine are monuments of ancient kings and conquerors; there are also relics of the ancient Canaanite religions as well as the current pantheistic cult.

In the midst of all this Jesus asks a question he has never asked his disciples before.

"Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"

No doubt this is a jolt to the disciples.

It is a probing question.

One by one they begin to answer.

Of course Jesus isn't asking the question to receive information from his disciples, for he knows what others are saying about him.

He is simply preparing the disciples for the question of all questions: "Who do you say that I am?"

It does not matter what the others are saying.

I am not interested in your reciting a creed to me.

Rather, tell me who you believe I am!

Perhaps the disciples begin to glance at one another as Jesus' words fall like heavy stones on their hearts.

They may begin to smile.

Doubtless there is a throbbing excitement in Peter's voice as he speaks for all of them: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!"

Peter speaks what his heart has already accepted as truth.

Immediately Jesus recognizes the reality of Peter's confession.

The stage is set, the prologue complete.

The presentation.

After Peter's confession Jesus reveals to his disciples the most fantastic concept the world has ever known.

He begins by saying, "You are Peter".

The name means little stone or rock.

When Jesus first met this man, he said to him, "You are Simon the son of Jona: you shall be called Cephas"

Cephas, the Aramaic form of the Greek name Peter, is by interpretation "a stone".

Now Jesus is saying, "Peter, you have become a stone!"

And what is the evidence?

His confession of Christ.

Peter is still unstable, but at long last the "rock" is beginning to harden.

Through the sorrow of the crucifixion, the victory of the resurrection, and the glory of Pentecost, Peter will keep on becoming the rock that Jesus has predicted he will become.

But Jesus is not through.

After he commends Peter, Jesus changes his emphasis completely.

"And on this rock I will build my church."

The word Jesus used for "rock" is *petra*, in the neuter gender.

It means a great ledge of rock, such as would be the foundation for a huge building or large city.

Peter was "a little rock" broken off the great ledge, the *petra*.

Undoubtedly the *petra* refers to Christ himself, and when individuals make a confession of faith in Jesus Christ, they partake of his nature.

And upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, he would build his church.

The church belongs to Christ, who "loved the church, and gave himself for it."

The epilogue.

Now Jesus is about to summarize this electrifying revelation he has given his disciples.

"And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

What does Jesus mean by "the keys of the kingdom"?

He is not telling Peter that he will be the first pope of the church and, as such, have the authority to retain or forgive sin.

Instead, in Jesus' day the keys to a house were entrusted to the slave who was the "steward" of the owner.

Keys are used to lock and unlock doors.

Each time Christians take the Word of God and proclaim it, they are unlocking the portals of heaven for a lost person.

But if they fail to share it, teach it, and preach it, they are keeping those doors locked to someone who needs entrance!

Jesus is saying that the preaching of the cross, as Paul would later attest, may sound like foolishness to the world, but it is Jesus' way to introduce lost souls to eternal salvation.

It is a glorious privilege to have "the keys of the kingdom" committed to us.

But it is also an awesome responsibility.

We hold in our hands that which contains the power to transform the world!

And if people go away from us because of our silence, it will not be the fault of the gospel or of the Christ whom it preaches, but of his church, his people who have played truant to the task he has placed before us.

Jesus' words here are a monumental part of the New Testament.

All the way through this passage there is a ringing note of victory, of conquest.

Yet at the same time this is the most serious challenge God's people have ever received.

As believers we are members of his church, his body, And we are founded on the Rock, Jesus Christ.

We are charged with the keys that will unlock the doors of heaven, and that is the gospel of redemption.

What are we doing about it?

Are we taking our commission and going forth to speak the gospel, or are we standing back hoping someone else will step up and complete the task before us?

When we wonder why God is not doing anything about the plight of the world, He is saying I did do something, I made you!

And I saved you and commissioned you to take my message to the world.

We might be reluctant ambassadors but we are ambassadors of the greatest Good News the world has ever been given.

If we don't spread the good news, who will?