

The Church's Beginning Matthew 16:13-20

v. 13-16

Each year in San Jose, California thousands of people visit the Winchester Mansion. The massive structure was built by Sarah Winchester, the widow of the gun company owner. For 38 years, from 1884 until her death in 1922, the house was under constant construction. Teams of carpenters, masons and other workers were employed around the clock. Various stories have been told about the reason for this unusual practice. One story claims that as long as building continued she would not die. Another story centers around her belief that she was either haunted by or would be haunted by the ghosts of those killed by the firearms her husband made unless she kept building her house.

Whatever the reason, she continued ordering more renovations and construction as long as she lived. There are more than 10,000 windows in the Winchester Mansion. Doorways and stairs lead to blank walls. It has some 160 rooms in total. It is estimated that she spent more than \$70,000,000 in today's money on largely pointless construction – all in a desperate search for peace that was ultimately doomed to fail.

There are many today who are searching for peace through equally futile means. Temporary peace may come through pleasure, drugs, intoxication, immorality, and wealth, but they are dead ends.

There is only one path and place that brings lasting and satisfying peace. It too is under constant construction. The cost was beyond calculation. There are no false walls or dead end stair cases. To find out more about this construction project turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 16:13-20**.

Jesus inquires about His person.

Jesus informs about His purpose.

I. JESUS INQUIRES ABOUT HIS PERSON –

With His disciples, Jesus traveled to the very northern most region of Israel. There was a town called Caesarea Philippi that was on the border of the territory. It was located about 120 miles north of Jerusalem and about 30 miles from the Sea of Galilee where He had just performed the miracle of feeding the 4,000.

This region had strong ties to pagan worship. In the days before the land was conquered by Joshua and Israel it was a center of Baal worship.

The Greeks referred to it as Paneas because of its caverns. It reminded them of similar places dedicated to the worship of the Greek god Pan.

In 20B.C. Herod the Great received the whole district from Caesar August. It was Augustus who ordered the census be taken and it was Herod the Great who ordered the execution of the children in Bethlehem in an attempt to eliminate the newborn king the Wiseman had come to pay honor to. Herod built a temple there to honor Caesar Augustus.

It was into this place of pagan idolatry that Jesus took His disciples and it was here that He gave them a test, a test about His person. In verse 13 the question is directed to them about popular opinion. He asks for a public response.

A. A Public Response – v. 13-14

“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

It is a very straightforward question. Jesus is not suffering from amnesia hoping to find out His identity. He wasn't confused at all about who He was. He had known that since He was 12 when He confessed to Mary and Joseph when they found Him in the Temple that He was to be doing His Father's Will. Later on when His ministry began at age 30 at the time of His baptism it was confirmed when the Father indicated that this was His Son in

whom He was well pleased. Jesus knew full well who He was and He knew full well who people thought Him to be. This was a test for the disciples.

I wonder if the disciples looked at each other with a puzzled expression trying to figure out why Jesus asked such a question or even cared what people thought. Notice the people that Jesus targeted. He didn't ask them what the religious leaders thought of Him. He knew that the Scribes and Pharisees had nothing but contempt for Him. With the exception of Nicodemus, as a group they despised Him. They didn't like that He confronted them in public. He often spoke against their motives. Jesus wasn't interested in their opinion of Him. He wanted to know what the disciples had heard about Him from the masses. What's the word on the street? What kind of reputation did He have among the people?

Notice one other thing about the question. Look at the title Jesus uses of Himself. The New Testament uses the term "**Son of Man**" some 80 times. It was a name the Jews understood to be in reference to the Messiah, the one they were looking for.

Notice how the disciples responded on behalf of the people to whom Jesus ministered.

Some said He was John the Baptist

Others said He was Elijah.

Others said He was Jeremiah.

Others thought He was one of the other prophets.

What do these individuals all have in common? First they are all flattering replies. I would be flattered if people said I preached or taught like Oswald Chambers or Martin Luther or Jonathan Edwards. Of those named by the disciples they were all great men of God from Israel's past even though their message was unpopular. It's interesting that the people didn't listen to them either even though they were held to be great prophets.

Something else they all had in common - they were all dead, but the Jews believed that Jesus was one of the great prophets who had come back to life to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Of course we know that John the Baptist was a contemporary of Jesus and Scripture tells us that he was the one crying in the wilderness beckoning people to repent and prepare the way for the coming Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world. John was beheaded by Herod. When Herod heard about Jesus he too, wondered if John had come back from the dead. **Malachi 3:1** is a prophetic word describing the coming of John the Baptist to announce the coming Messiah.

Others thought Jesus was the great prophet Elijah. Certainly at times the message of Jesus was just as sharp as that of Elijah who spoke against the sins of Israel and King Ahab. He stood against the indifference of Israel on Mt. Carmel when he challenged the false prophets of Baal. The Jews believed he was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Even today many modern Jews will set an empty chair at the Passover meal in hopes that Elijah will return to announce the Messiah's coming. **Malachi 4:5** prophesies that Elijah would return.

There are others who say that Jesus was Jeremiah. He was known as the weeping prophet, the one who yearned for Israel's return to God. In the apocryphal book of II Maccabees it is written that Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant and the altar of Incense on Mt. Nebo in order to preserve them from destruction when the Babylonians invaded and conquered the land. It is believed that Jeremiah will come back again to restore these articles to the Temple when the Messiah comes to establish His kingdom. Jesus was known as the man of sorrows who was acquainted with our grief. Another popular opinion was that He was one of the great prophets, but they didn't know which one.

Some thought that He was just another forerunner of the Messiah. They couldn't deny His power, but they wouldn't accept His person – they wouldn't claim Him to be the Messiah, the Savior. They were looking for a political not spiritual deliverer.

It is clear from these responses that the public was confused about who exactly Jesus was. Though they may have been honorable, even sincere responses their opinions of Him were still wrong.

If you asked people today, many would have a very similar opinion of who Jesus is. Few will object to Him being called a prophet or a teacher or a holy man or a spiritual leader. The masses do object though, if you call Him the Christ, the Son of the living God. The other titles are popular. That He is the Christ is an unpopular title that people today not only object to, they don't want to believe because then they have some decisions to make about Him.

Jesus now turned His question to the disciples. Jesus asked about a public response, now He was asking for a personal response.

B. A Personal Response – v. 15-16

Jesus said, **“Who do you say I am?”**

This question was addressed to the disciples collectively, yet it was a question to each of them individually. It is a question we too must answer. Up to this time their faith in Him had fluctuated. Sometimes they had great faith and at other times they doubted. When the storms were raging on the sea and it appeared that all hope was lost for surviving, He stood and calmed the waves and told the winds to be still. They wondered who this man was that even the weather should obey Him. On another occasion when many of Jesus' followers left because of the call to obedience He turned to the disciples and asked them if they would leave Him also. Again speaking for all of them Peter responded by stating that Jesus had the words of life **(John 6:68-79)**.

This question is asked of every living soul. The answer determines our eternal destiny. Who we believe Jesus to be is of utmost importance. It is a personal response and decision.

Peter spoke for the group. Whether or not Judas Iscariot held the same view is uncertain. He may have believed Jesus to be the Messiah, but blatantly and willfully betrayed Him later on none the less. **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

In this response Peter attests to both the humanity and the deity of Jesus. **“The Christ”** speaks in reference to the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah and Micah that God would come and be born of a virgin. He would have a human mother.

“The Son of the living God” speaks to His Deity that He would be God living among us. It expresses oneness in essence or nature with God. John wrote about this in His gospel in the very first chapter. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1, 14)**

Hoping to find some reason to accuse him, a man asked Gregory of Nazianzus in 381 A.D. this question: "Who do you say Jesus is?" Knowing the treachery behind the question, Gregory still gave his honest answer. He said, "Jesus fasted in the wilderness and so began his ministry by being hungry, yet he is the Bread of Life. Jesus was weary, yet he is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet he is our King. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet he is the owner of the world. Jesus was brought like a sheep to the slaughter, yet he is the Good Shepherd. As Jesus hung on the cross, he said, 'I thirst,' yet he is Living Water. Jesus died, yet he is Life Everlasting. You ask me who I say Jesus is? I say, 'Jesus is my Lord, my Savior, my all in all.' "...

Peter's response is the only right response when asked about who Jesus is. He is God who came in the flesh, the One who would die for us that we might live. Through Him all the promises of God are fulfilled.

The disciples needed to be clear about their view of Jesus and about what He was going to do. Jesus asked them who they believed Him to be because He wanted a clear confession from them. *This confession is basic to salvation and foundational to Christianity.* We need to be absolutely clear on His identity in the event someone may ask us who Jesus is. Can you be certain in your answer that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

He is the Messiah who died for our sin.
He is, was and always will be the living God.
The disciples had lived with Him and had been taught by Him and their conclusion of Him was completely different from the crowd. It wasn't just religious jargon to them. They didn't give the right answer because they heard it somewhere else. This isn't a confession of the head; this is a confession of the heart. **Romans 10:10 "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."**

The public thought He was a prophet, Peter believed He was the Christ.

The public thought He was just a man, Peter believed He was the living God.

Those who won't own Him as Christ will call Him anything else. Those who claim Him to be the Christ will confess Him openly.

What is your opinion of who Jesus is? Would it be like the masses or would it be like Peter? Who you think of Jesus will have a direct bearing on how you live your life. He doesn't care about what the public opinion is, He wants to know your personal view of Him.

Jesus inquires about His person. He sought both a public and personal response.

II. JESUS INFORMS ABOUT HIS PURPOSE – v. 17-20

What does Jesus think about such a confession?

Here is where Jesus lays the groundwork for the continuation of what He would start. This is the framework on which the church will be built. This is the work that we, not just as a local assembly, but as individuals of His great Kingdom, are to be busy doing. This is what He is calling us to.

Jesus speaks of three things in this section in relation to His purpose.

He speaks of its validity.

He speaks of its voice.

He speaks of its victory.

A. Jesus Informs About Its Validity – v. 17

The disciples were privileged to be witness to many of the miracles of Jesus.

They saw Him restore mobility to the lame.

They saw Him restore sight to the blind.

They saw Him restore hearing to the deaf.

They saw Him raise the dead.

They saw Him heal diseases and cast out demons.

They saw Him feed thousands with a kid's sack lunch of fish and bread.

The disciples were privileged to be witness to His teaching as He taught from a boat on the shore or to the masses on a hillside or in the synagogue or under a sycamore tree. They heard Him refute the religious leaders and answer those who tried to entrap Him with clever questions.

Could there be any greater evidence than these that Jesus was who He claimed to be and confessed by them that day? The answer is in Jesus's response: "this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven."

In essence He was saying that Peter didn't come up with this on His own. It wasn't by careful deduction or clever logic. It wasn't by intuition or investigation or by tradition. There was only one way that Peter could have come up with that answer – it was God who revealed it to him. God is the One who validates our response.

I Corinthians 12:3 “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

Only the heart that has been regenerated by God through His Spirit is able to make such a confession as Peter. And Jesus affirms that it was God who revealed it. Nonbelievers won't make such a confession. They will call Him anything but the Lord.

To become a part of the purpose of Christ one must confess Christ for who He is and only God reveals it to us through His Spirit. We are informed about its validity – **“He is the Christ, the Son of the living God”** revealed by God the Father.

B. Jesus Informs About Its Voice – v. 18a, 19

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church...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.”

Now there are a couple of things that we need to understand here about this verse. Contrary to what many teach, Jesus is not giving papal supremacy to Peter. This is not an indication that Peter was named as the first Pope.

This is the first occasion we see the word church in the New Testament. It's the Greek word ekklesia and means an assembly or called out ones. As used

in the New Testament it can refer to a local assembly of believers who gather for the purpose of worship. As such we speak of the local church as being an organization.

It can also speak of what is called the universal church. This is comprised of all the believers from the Day of Pentecost until Christ returns and is known as an organism.

Jesus is here speaking about a group of people who are called out because of what they confess about Him. They are the church. Peter was the first to make such a confession. Jesus is not speaking of a local church but of the universal church – all who have confessed Him to be the Christ, the only means of eternal life.

Peter introduced the work of Jesus building the Church on Himself. The existence of the church is only through Christ. Notice that Jesus states that it is **“MY CHURCH.”** Paul supports this.

I Corinthians 3:1-11

Ephesians 2:19-20

Acts 20:28 “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood.”

Notice as well that in our passage Jesus refers to the meaning of Peter's name as a rock and then refers to the church being built on a rock. Here's what you need to know. Jesus is using a play on words. The name Peter or rock is masculine in the Greek and it means a pebble or small stone. The word rock that describes what the church is built on is feminine and means a massive rock or a mountain peak.

Peter is not the founder or the foundation of the church – it is Christ and Christ alone. Peter will write in his epistle that Jesus is the cornerstone. The church is not built on fallible man, but on an infallible God. The church is built on Christ with those who confess Jesus as Lord.

Peter was the first voice professing Jesus as the Messiah, that salvation is through Him and since then each believer is to be a voice confessing Jesus as the Christ. We have the same responsibility that was given to Peter and the other disciples to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. The church are those who confess Jesus to be the Savior, that's the foundation the church is built.

The passage then says that Peter was given keys. A key is something that opens a door or gate. Looking in the book of Acts we see that Peter was used to open the door of heaven to both the Jews and Gentiles. He did that when he preached to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost in the Temple courtyard and thousands came to know Christ as Savior as their spiritually darkened hearts were opened by God to see that Christ was the way of eternal life.

For the Gentiles it happened in the home of Cornelius when Peter preached about Christ being the way of salvation and Cornelius and his house believed. Their confession made them a part of the Church Christ was building. The church then is built not on a person, such as Peter, but on the truth of Jesus in who He is and what He has done that provides eternal life.

The Heidelberg Catechism asks this question: "How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?"

The answer: "By proclaiming and openly witnessing, according to the command of Christ, to believers, one and all, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, by proclaiming and witnessing to all unbelievers and such as do not sincerely repent that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them so long as they are not converted. According to this witness of the gospel God will judge, both in this life and in that which is to come."

It's opened when someone hears and believes the gospel. It's closed when someone hears and rejects the gospel. The keys are the Word of God through which we have an understanding of who Jesus is and they unlock for us knowledge of how we can enter heaven. Every preacher, every person uses the keys when he proclaims the terms of salvation in Christ.

Jesus informs about its validity.

Jesus informs about its voice.

Jesus informs about its victory.

C. Jesus Informs About Its Victory – v. 18b

"I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

That Jesus is the source of power that will build His church underscores the victory it will achieve. That He states "**I will**" means to Him it was something yet future. It was something He had not yet done, but something He would do. It was a twofold process. The first piece was accomplished at His death, burial, and resurrection providing us with the only way to enter the gates. The second piece was on the Day of Pentecost when the building process of the church began. That it also speaks about the gates of Hades not overcoming it also meant that there would be nothing that would stand in the way of its progress. Nothing would impede it from reaching its goal. He is not speaking about the demonic forces at work against Christianity in the world, though they are a force that opposes the gospel's reach.

Hades speaks of the realm of the dead. Gates in Scripture represent power and authority. The Jews understood the gates of Hades as being physical death. Jesus was telling His disciples that not even His death would prevent His work of building the church – people who confess Him as the Christ.

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson provides some valuable insight on this point. “It is not the picture of Hades attacking Christ’s church, but of death’s possible victory over the church. The church is built on the Messiahship of her Master and death, the gates of Hades, will not prevail against her by keeping Him imprisoned...Christ’s church will prevail and survive because He will burst the gates of Hades and come forth as conqueror. He will ever live and be the guarantor of the perpetuity of His people or church.”

Because Christ was victorious over death and the grave, Hades has no power to hold God’s people captive either. It cannot imprison the church of Christ.

I Corinthians 15:55-57 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews 2:14-15 “Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

When John was given a glimpse of the new heaven and the new earth he testified that there was no more death, because Christ had the victory over it.

Jesus said that because He lives we too shall live. **(John 14:19)**

Paul encourages us with these words in **Romans 6:8-9** “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him.”

And then in **(Romans) 8:2** he says that Christ has freed us from death.

Sarah Winchester sought peace through the construction of a physical building. Jesus gives peace through the construction of a spiritual building. We have been given the remarkable privilege, just like Peter, to be a voice proclaiming the truth of Jesus as the Christ and that through Him we can have eternal life. As he hears and believes he is added to the church that Christ continues to build when a person confesses Him as the Christ. Nothing will stop His church from growing because He is its founder and foundation.

The church of Christ is the greatest ever built and we have the privilege to be a part of helping it grow by spreading the Word of His grace through faith. The church Christ is building is being added to everyday. Its construction won’t cease until He returns.

If you were asked today, who is Jesus, what would you say? Is your opinion that of the public or do you have a personal confession of Him?