

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

March 30, 2025

I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 16:13-20**, Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” [14] And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” [15] He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” [16] Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” [17] And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. [18] I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” [20] Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.
- B. These eight verses present us with some wonderful truths and some challenging statements that have fueled controversy and division among Christians.
 - 1. This portion begin by giving us an idea of who the people thought Jesus was. Then it gives us Peter’s correct answer, and how he came to the truth.
 - 2. This portion concludes with several statements that have led to disagreement, controversy, and even division within the Body of Christ as Christians have discussed and debated: (1) Who is the rock upon whom the church is built? (2) What are the keys of the kingdom? And, (3) what is binding and loosing, and how are they to be used?
 - 3. Though our study today will not be exhaustive, I hope to provide some answers that make sense and fit the context. Whether you agree with my answers is up to you.
- C. Pray

II. Who do people say Jesus is?

- A. **Matthew 16:13-17**, Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” [14] And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

1. As you may recall, Herod thought Jesus was John the Baptist having come back from the dead.
 2. Obviously, he was not alone, because it is clear that some held the same belief while others thought Jesus might be Jeremiah or one of the other prophets who had come back from the dead.
- B. [15] [Jesus] said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” [16] Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ (*Messiah*), the Son of the living God.” [17] And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona (*son of Jonah, or son of John (John 1:42)*), because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.
1. We are not told if Peter was speaking for the group or just himself, but we do know he gave the right answer.
 2. And though it is my opinion that Peter would not have come to the right answer without spending some time in serious thought about who Jesus was, it is clear that he was able to come to the right conclusion because God was directly involved in aiding and directing his thinking so that he could come to the right answer.
 3. What is true for Peter is true for us – without God’s direct involvement, or as some would say it today, without the Holy Spirit’s direct involvement, our best efforts at thinking and pondering in relation to God, God’s word, and how to live the Christian life, are not enough.
 4. Without question, we need to think! We need to think deeply, sensibly, and carefully. And we need to spend time pondering – about God, about what God is like, what He wants from us, why He wants what He wants, what the Bible says about God, and what the Bible says about how we are to live. We also need to think and rethink about how to take what we know and apply it in practical ways to everyday life.
 5. And yet, serious, sensible, careful thinking and pondering will only take us so far.
 - a. If we are to discover the fullest possible measure of truth, if we are to continue discovering more and more of the truth, if we are to make sense of the truth that we come to know, and if we are to apply the truth as God intends it to be applied, **God must** be present and active in aiding and directing our thinking so that we can come to the right conclusions.
 - b. This also applies to being taught by those who know more than we. How we think about and come to understand what we hear must be aided and directed by God in order to make sense of it and properly apply it to everyday life.

6. Jesus affirmed this in **John 14:26**, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”
 - a. This is why there is great wisdom in asking God to speak to you when reading the Bible, listening in church, attending a Bible Study, reading Christian literature, or talking with older and wiser believers.
 - b. This is why there is great wisdom in coming to our Sunday and Wednesday gatherings having asked God to speak to us as a group.
 - c. The reality is, the revealing, enlightening, aiding, and directing work of God is required for discovering, understanding, and applying God’s truth in realistic and sensible ways to who we are inside and how we are to live on the outside.
7. Therefore, I am urging you to make it your aim to intentionally affirm your dependence on God by repeatedly asking Him to speak to you through whatever means you are investing in – so that by His gracious involvement you may grow in the knowledge and application of truth.

III. God, the Rock on whom the church is built

- A. **Matthew 16:18**, I also say to you that you are Peter (*Gk: **petros***), and upon this rock (*Gk: **petra***) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower (*defeat, conquer*) it.
 1. I’ve included the Greek word for Peter and the Greek word for rock so you can see how the Greek NT translated Jesus’ words.
 - a. The Greek word for Peter (*petros*) and can be translated as “**stone**” that can be picked up, or a “**fragment of rock**.” The Greek word for rock (*petra*) can be translated as “**rock**” or “**large mass of rock**” that is most often large enough to be immovable.
 - b. The challenge for us is discerning to whom or to what the word “rock” refers.
 - c. The Catholic church believes it refers to Peter, and as such they see Peter as God’s designated first leader or Pope of the church, with subsequent Popes filling Peter’s God-ordained position.
 - d. Most Protestants believe it refers to God – the One who revealed to Peter who Jesus was. And as stated earlier, many refer to God’s revealing work as the work of the Holy Spirit – a work that is vital for church leaders to fulfill their responsibility of leading God’s people to a proper understanding of God and godly living.
 - e. A few Protestants say we can’t know who the rock is, because they believe Aramaic – which is the language Jesus spoke – had no word

- that differentiated a large rock from a stone. Therefore, they conclude the differentiation was put there by the Greek translators.
2. For me, prayer for insight and consideration of the immediate context are important for deciding what Jesus meant.
 - a. For example, Jesus precedes this statement by making it clear that Peter came to the right conclusion about who Jesus is by means of God's super-natural, revealing work.
 - b. Then Jesus follows this statement by saying that the gates of Hades (*Hell*) will not overpower it, that is, the church.
 - (1) Consider: If you believe in demons and demon possession, then you believe that the powers of hell possess enough super-natural power to overpower the human mind, and heart, and will.
 - (2) Yet because their power doesn't come close to rivaling the power of God, it is the common conclusion of believers everywhere that as individuals and as the church universal we need the presence and aid of God's super-natural power to not only withstand the powers of hell, but to gain victory over them and remain victorious – as they do their best to defeat us and destroy the church.
 - (3) In other words, our victories are not due to who we are, but to who is in us and empowering us.
 - c. I want to be clear that this need for God's empowerment takes nothing away from Peter and his role as the main leader of the first church. Remember, it was to Peter that Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." It was to Peter that Jesus said, "tend my lambs and shepherd My sheep." It was Peter who is seen as the main speaker on the day of Pentecost. It was Peter who led the way in dealing with Ananias and Sapphira. And it was Peter who had the vision and call from God to take the gospel to the gentile, Cornelius.
 - d. The point is, it appears that Peter was the most prominent leader in the early church, and God used him to get the church launched and on its way. Yet as I see it, it was not Peter, the man, but the Spirit-empowered, Spirit-led Peter.
 3. Therefore, it is my opinion that when Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church," He was speaking about the God who was in Peter – and all the power, revelation, wisdom, insight, understanding, leadership ability, and speaking ability that God, through His Holy Spirit, brought to life in Peter – and Who today brings these things

- to life in church leaders and teachers and preachers and Bible Study leaders and any other believer who serves the church on behalf of God.
4. As Jesus said, “**I** will build **My** church.” And Paul affirms this in **1 Corinthians 3:6-7**, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. [7] So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God [is everything, because He’s the One] who causes the growth.”

IV. The keys of the kingdom, binding and loosing

A. **Matthew 16:19-20**, I will give you (*Peter*) the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” [20] Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

1. There are two distinct challenges in understanding these two verses. **First**, are the keys of the kingdom what enables Peter to bind and loose, or do the keys represent one aspect of leadership, and binding and loosing another? **Second**, what can we bind and loose?
2. It seems to me that the most reasonable understanding of the **keys** is that they empower the ones who have them to decide what is godly and ungodly, righteous and unrighteous, and/or what the group under their authority can and cannot do on issues and practices that are not decided **in** and **by** the word of God.
 - a. For example, **Acts 15** records a dispute within the church concerning the need for circumcision in order to be saved.
 - (1) After the apostles and elders in Jerusalem listened to both sides of the debate, Peter stated that all (*Jew and Gentile*) are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus (**vs 11**), and James expressed his view that though there should be a few requirements placed on Gentile believers, circumcision should not be one of them.
 - (2) So the apostles and elders wrote a letter which included these words, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well” (**vs 28-29**).
 - b. A second example: In the early 1900's, many Churches decided they would not attend Hollywood movies because they did not want to support the decadent lifestyles of those in the movie industry.

3. It also seems reasonable to me **to unite** the authority of the **keys with binding and loosing**. The challenge here is that binding and loosing is only spoken of in **Matthew 16:19 & 18:18**, which doesn't give us much to go on.
 - a. In **Matthew 16**, binding and loosing appears to be tied to building the church and remaining victorious over the powers of Hell.
 - b. In **Matthew 18**, binding and loosing appears to be tied to church discipline and deciding that it is time to treat an unrepentant Christian as an unbeliever.
4. In my opinion, both uses (*building the church, church discipline*) seem reasonable and within the confines of the word of God. Paul provides two examples of this:
 - a. He handed Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme (**1 Timothy 1:20**).
 - b. And he delivered to Satan the immoral and unrepentant Christian in Corinth for the destruction of his flesh (*sickness or injury or death*) so that his spirit would be saved in the day of judgment (**1 Corinthians 5:4-5**).
5. Early church literature informs us that they saw the keys united to binding and loosing for the purpose of establishing church leadership, the structure of that leadership, and the spiritual requirements for church leaders. They also saw the keys united with binding and loosing for setting guidelines for maintaining doctrinal purity, for godly living, for preserving the unity or oneness of believers, for baptism (*children or adult only, at the time of salvation or at Easter*), and for confession of sins as practiced by the Catholic church.
6. There are some groups within the church who apply binding and loosing to binding the devil and his demons and loosing fear-based or emotionally driven hindrances that hold believers back from fully living in the freedom they have in Christ. Though I don't question the sincerity of those who sincerely use binding and loosing this way, I do not see the reasonableness or find clear Biblical support for using binding and loosing in these ways.

V. Conclusion

- A. As long as there are humans in the church, there will be varied opinions, understanding, and applications of the more difficult to understand portions of God's word. Therefore, I urge you to seek God's wisdom and direction, for if God revealed truth to Peter, He can and will reveal truth to you.