

ESF Lord's day service message
4/30/2017

The Foundation and Authority of the Church

Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Christians gather together every Sunday to worship regardless of weather, circumstances, persecutions, and other difficulties. And they call the gathering "the church." Why do they gather as the church? What do they mean by "the church?" When they gather as the church what difference does it make? What is the difference between the Christian church and other institutions or from other gatherings of people- schools, communities, governments, organizations, and political parties?

Today, Jesus is asking you a question that will in turn give you the answer to these questions. The question is: "Who do you say Jesus is?"

A college sophomore tried to prove how smart he was one day by asking his professor the following question, "Is the bird I'm holding in my hand dead or alive?" If the professor said the bird was dead, the boy was obviously going to free the bird and let it fly away.

If the professor said it was alive, the boy was going to crush the bird.

The professor looked at the young man and said, “My boy, the answer is in your hands.”

When Jesus asks the question, “Who do you say I am?” the answer is in your hands. And by how you answer the question, your life will be eternally different.

Who do you say Jesus is?

Jesus asked this question to His disciples 2000 years ago. Since that time, He has been asking this question to all men: “Who do you say Jesus is?”

All eternity is hinged on an answer to this question. Acts 4:12 tells us: *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* Romans 10:9 says, *“If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Before you answer the question, “Who do you say Jesus is,” take a moment to think about “Who do people say Jesus is.”

Jesus asked the question “Who the people say Jesus is” to His disciples before He asked them who they say Jesus is.

In those days, people said that Jesus was a servant of God like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or a prophet. They thought that Jesus was a mere man, a prophet or a spiritual leader.

Today people have many different opinions of who Jesus is. People may say that Jesus is

- . a prophet but not God
- . the founder of one of the major religions in the world-Christianity
- . a religious leader who might have lived a long time ago, but still is remembered and worshiped by many Christians

But when Jesus asked the disciples, who they say Jesus is, Peter answered: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Peter’s answer was not only his

answer but the answer of all Jesus' disciples who had the same belief of Jesus as Peter's.

How did Peter and all the disciples come to know that Jesus was the Son of God? First of all, by God's grace they came to know that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. If you understand and acknowledge that Jesus is your Savior and the Son of God, it is not you but God who enables you to do this.*

Secondly, they knew that Jesus was the Son of God by following Him and sharing their lives with Him. They shared their lives together with Jesus and learned the truth and received spiritual blessings through His teaching and training.

The reason some people do not know who Jesus really is, is because they have never had a close and personal relationship with Jesus. They have not experienced His power and grace which has impacted billions of people. They misunderstand who Jesus is because they judge Him only by what they learn in their school textbooks, or by common knowledge or by watching Jesus and His people through their outward appearances.

If you let Jesus come into your life and let Him share His teaching and life with you, you will find out who He really is. If you listen to the teachings of Jesus and live by the teachings, you will surely find out that He is not a mere man, or religious leader who lived a long time ago, but the Son of God, the Savior for your life. Try to have a personal relationship with Jesus first, and continue living your life by His teaching and life. And eventually you will discover that He is your Savior and He is the Son of God.

Upon this rock I will build my church

When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ and the Son of God, Jesus said: *"I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."*

What did Jesus mean by “this rock?” Some people think that by the rock Jesus meant Peter. But there is a big problem if it is Peter himself. He was a human being. He made many mistakes. If the church was to be built upon him, whenever he made a mistake, the whole church’s foundation would stumble with him. So Jesus could not have meant that Peter was the rock. Then what? Jesus meant the content of the Peter’s confession - the confession that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. Jesus promised that upon this confession He would build His church. The Church should not and cannot be built upon any person or persons. The Church should be built upon the right confession of faith in Jesus.

As long as we gather with the confession- “Jesus is the Christ, the Son Of God”- we *are* the church. In the original Greek text of the Bible, the church is “ecclesia.” It means people who are called out from. The church is not just a religious organization. It is not a gathering for religious activities. It is the people who are called out from the unsaved world, from the world where dark Satan rules over. It is the people who confess that Jesus is their Savior and the Son of God. It is the people who put Jesus as their Lord and make themselves the body of Christ. It is the people who are actually living with the teachings of Jesus and put Jesus at the center of their lives.

Jesus gives the most blessed promise to this church: *and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.* Hades is the place of punishment for the spirits of dead unbelievers. Gates means entries. So Gates of Hades means the power of hell, the power of death. Therefore, the promise is that even the power of death, which is the ultimate weapon of Satan (cf. Heb. 2:14, 15), has no power to stop the church. Satan uses the weapon of death to scare you, to paralyze you, to let you feel and think that your life is meaningless. With the power of death, Satan leads you to live only for short pleasure, to feed the desire of your flesh at all cost.

But death, the weapon of Satan, has no impact against the church. Jesus has overcome the power of death through His resurrection. With the power of the resurrection, Jesus protects the church from the power of death. So death can’t

overpower, or overtake the church. Romans 8: 38-39 *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, ...nor any powers, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

If the power of death cannot stop the church, there is no power in this world to stop the church. The church has power which prevails over all powers in this world. Since Jesus gave that promise, some 2000 years ago, there have been countless empires, kingdoms, and nations which have tried to destroy the church. But the church has never been destroyed. Against all persecutions and attacks of this world, the church has been victorious and has been constantly growing worldwide.

Here we have to remember that the promise is given not to an individual believer but to the church. The church is not an individual. The church is people. The power that can prevail over death is in the church. If we want to share that power we have to belong to the church.

If you are experiencing death to your spiritual life, death to your relationships, death to your finances, death to your marriage, death to your family, come to confess that Jesus is the Son of God and be a part of the church. When you come to church as a follower of Jesus, Jesus gives you that same power in your life.

We may have heard some people saying: "I really do not need the church. I grew up in a church and I was not too impressed. See these people in the church, many of them are hypocrites. They sounded so sincere when they were in church, but if I saw them during the week, they were not. I don't want to belong to a church with such hypocrites. My faith is a personal thing - its between me and Jesus. The church only gets in the way. So I believe, but you'll never see me in your church again."

But they misunderstand what Jesus means by the church. Jesus never promised that the church on earth would be perfect or sinless. Jesus only promised that

upon the right confession of Him from believers, He would build His church, and He would give them the power. The church is a place where sinners gather, repent of their sins and, if needed, continue to repent.

This is why it is important to come and have fellowship with other believers, and share lives together with other believers although they may be still sinful. That is why you have to come and make yourself a part of the church, even if the church is not perfect and may have some stains of sins.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven

After giving the promise of the power to overcome the gates of Hades, Jesus adds one more promise to the church. It is the promise to give the Keys of God's Kingdom to the church.

When you give your key to someone, who do you give it to? Do you give your key to a thief? Do you give your key to a stranger? Do you give your key to someone you cannot trust fully? No!

You give the key only to someone you can fully trust.

And when you give someone the key, you give the person the right to open your house or room and enter. It means that you give the person the authority to take care of your personal belongings.

This is exactly what Jesus means here by giving the keys of the kingdom to those who are the church. It means that Jesus gives His authority to the believers to take care of His kingdom's business.

By giving the keys to the believers, Jesus gives them authority to bind and loose spiritual blessings. *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.*

What does Jesus mean by the words "bind and loose?" "Binding and loosing" was a familiar phrase to the Jews. Jewish rabbis often used the phrase "binding

and loosing,” to mean “forbidding or permitting.” So the words can be paraphrased this way: “And whatever you forbid to be done on earth, will be forbidden in heaven; and whatever you permit to be done on earth, will be permitted in heaven.”

With this word, Jesus did not say that God would obey what the believers do on earth, but that they should do on earth whatever God has already willed. The church does not get its will done in heaven; it obeys God’s will on earth. While they are obeying the will of God on earth, God dispenses the power and grace of heaven through them.

Then how does the church exercise the authority to forbid and permit in God’s kingdom? Through witnessing, teaching and preaching the gospel of Christ, believers can use the authority of the keys to God’s kingdom. Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus says, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”

Peter first used the keys to bind and loose on the Day of Pentecost. Through his preaching, Jesus poured out His authority to Peter to lead many people to Him and be saved. Such authority was not given to Peter exclusively, but as a representative of all the disciples (Matthew 18:18).

If you confess that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God and belong to the church of Christ, you also have authority to use the keys. Believe that you have the authority of the keys. Claim the authority. Use the authority whenever you witness, teach and preach Jesus’ gospel.