

The Confessing Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 June 2025

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] In the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Please be seated. June 29th is the feast day of St. Peter, apostle and martyr.

His story is familiar to many of us. He's one of the most engaging characters in the Bible, shall we say. He's also one of our Lord's closest disciples and friends.

And as I said in my weekly parish letter, it's important to take advantage of these wonderful punctuations in the church here.

These feast days are more than mere sentimentalism. Rather, they're wonderful reminders of the Spirit's work. The Holy Spirit's work in the church.

[1:17] It reminds us of the Spirit's gifts to the saints. The Spirit's gifts that allow them to persevere as they proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we are invited as the church of Christ to see and to be encouraged by their example, by the advancement of Christ's church.

We are reminded and invited to remember that the church is not a man-made institution. And therefore, it is not bound by earthly limitations.

So what makes up the church of Jesus Christ? What makes up the church of Jesus Christ? Who belongs to it? How does one join it?

These verses in Matthew 16 that we're about to look into, which is our gospel reading this morning, answered some of these questions for us. So I invite you to open your Bibles if you're able to.

[2:13] If you bring your Bible open to Matthew 16, if you can grab a pew Bible, it's on page 977, 977 of your pew Bible. And we'll be in verses 13 to 19 this morning.

Matthew tells us in verse 13, When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, That's an interesting fact. The setting of this story is notable.

Because Matthew tells us it's in this particular place called Caesarea Philippi. The place, the city, is a Greco-Roman city. It's about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

And you know that the Sea of Galilee is the pivotal point in Jesus' early ministry, where a lot of the actions were taking place. Either on the sea or around the bordering shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Capernaum was a neighboring city that's a shore, a Bethsaida. All of these cities are around the Sea of Galilee. It says in Rhea Philippi is about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

[3:26] This is likely the farthest region outside of Jewish territory that Jesus traveled in his earthly ministry. The city was the center of pagan worship because it was largely a pagan city.

And there was a cave in that city, there in which they worshiped the idol Pan. In fact, the name of the city was first called Paneus after this idol. Until Philip the Tetrarch, one of Herod the Great's sons, renamed it after he had done a lot of renovation to the city.

He renamed the city Caesarea Philippi in honor of Caesar Augustus and himself. And during Jesus' time, there would have been an impressive temple in this city dedicated to the worship of Caesar.

Because you know that what they believed in Jesus' time was that Caesar is a god. And there's a cult of Caesar all around the Roman Empire. So there would have been a notable temple in this city dedicated particularly to the worship of Caesar Augustus as king.

The divine Augustus, they would call him. Now we should not let the fact that it was a city that Christ's true identity. We should not let the fact that this city was the city that Christ's true identity as Christ and God was first confessed.

[4:50] A place where the powers of the earthly kingdoms held sway. And the forces of the evil one had enslaved people in darkness and death.

This is where the confession about Jesus was first proclaimed. And where Jesus then told us, his disciples, of the future realities which this confession about himself will bring about.

Jesus asked his disciples, whilst they were in the city, who do people say the Son of Man is? And they replied, some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah.

And still others, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. Who is Jesus? One can easily ask that question today on any college campuses or city center.

If we were to go, for instance, to Andagar Community College, just across this road there, and we ask them that question. What sort of answer will we get? Who is Jesus?

[5:59] In fact, I looked into it and I watched a short video online this week asking that very question in New York City. And they asked, who is Jesus? And these are some of the answers that people came up with.

They said, he is a really enlightened figure. Another said, he's God's son. You should have stopped there.

But he said, he's God's son, like Gandhi or Mohammed. Because we are all God's children.

Someone else said, someone who made the world a better place.

That's true. Another said, I like this one. Jesus is a marketing genius. Because he got people to believe in him. Another said, Jesus was a David Copperfield of his day.

Because he was a great magician. These are people's answers in a city, in our country. But who is Jesus? The video was about eight years old, so it's not that long ago.

[7:07] These responses all have one thing in common. They seek to sideline the truth about Jesus.

Notice that none of them are really negative. They're positive. They said nice things about Jesus. But at the end of the day, they seek to sideline Jesus' true identity.

And in doing so, they sideline the gospel. Who is Jesus? You might ponder that question this morning in your own heart.

And although the answers the disciples gave in Matthew were much better than the ones I just read, their answer also ultimately did the same thing.

It served to ultimately sideline Jesus as well. What the people in Jesus' day were saying about Jesus was nice. They knew he was a special figure. But ultimately, it sideline Jesus because it didn't rightly speak of who Jesus is.

[8:12] The people in Jesus' day seemed to know that he was an important figure in God's unfolding plans. They knew that he's on par with the great prophets of Israel's past. They said he's John the Baptist.

He's Elijah or Jeremiah. But even they were off the mark until Peter's confession. Peter spoke up. And his confession revealed that Jesus is a singular figure in all of God's plans. Jesus is a singular figure in all of human history.

He is incomparable to anyone. And to compare him to anyone else. It's to sideline him and to sideline his gospel.

And hide the key of salvation from view. And so Jesus asked his disciples, Okay, that's what the people say. That's what the people say I am.

[9:14] Who do you say I am? What about you? Who do you say I am? And that's the unavoidable question, isn't it? It's not enough to say, Who do people think Jesus is?

Ultimately, You have to answer the question for yourself. That question that Jesus puts to his disciples is a question he puts to all of us.

Who do you say Jesus is? And the answer you give to that question Will shape your eternal destiny. Simon, He spoke up.

Ever the spokesman for the twelve. He replied to Jesus, You are the Christ. Christ means Messiah. You are the Christ. The son of the living God.

Now, Peter hits the ball out of the park with that answer. He hits it in the bullseye. He hits the bullseye. Is that the phrase? Yeah, he hits the bullseye. He makes right there and then The only confession that matters.

[10:21] It's as if he said, You are Christ, The Messiah we've longed for. You are God's chosen high priest Who makes atonement of us for our sins.

You are God's anointed king Who defeats the enemy And establishes his everlasting kingdom. You are the son of the living God. Even now, As we stand in this city Amidst the powers And pretend gods Of this world God's who are deaf And cannot hear God's who are blind And cannot see We see you We see you That you are the God Who hears You are the God Who sees You are the God Who's come down to us From high above And long before To save us From the relentless enemy Of sin and death That binds us That's what Peter is confessing When he says You are the Christ The son of the living God And this is the confession Upon which the church stands Or falls I want to repeat that again This confession of St. Peter Is the same confession

Upon which the church stands Or falls You are the Christ The son of the living God How then are we To make this confession Well Jesus tells us In his response to Peter In verse 17 He first says to Peter Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah For flesh and blood Has not revealed this to you But my Father who is in heaven Jesus is essentially saying to Peter What you've just said Simon son of Jonah Is not by your human intellect It is a revelation It is a spiritual reality Jesus didn't just say to Peter Yes you're right Peter That's good You can see the excitement of the Lord At Peter's response And Jesus' response to Peter

Is loaded with great significance Jesus shows That what Peter has just confessed Is not something That he came up with It was not a deduction Of reason Of human intellect By Peter If you've read the gospels You know that Peter is often Not just him Let's not pick on Peter All of the twelve They're usually three steps behind So it's not It's not a moment of Of just intellect and genius That's going on here Jesus makes it apparent Peter Peter what you've just confessed Was a revelation From God the Father About God the Son Made known to you So that you can proclaim it It is through the work of God The Holy Spirit Opening our ears To hear the gospel And our eyes To see Christ Who is the subject Of the gospel proclamation By which we can then Make this same confession And that's what's happened

With Peter God has opened his ears And opened his eyes To see That the man Standing in front of him Is the God man It is altogether A spiritual reality That only God can bring about In a person's heart That's why Jesus was excited At Peter's confession Because he knew By this confession The Father is giving Those who belong to him To the Son And Jesus says to Simon Blessed are you Simon Son of Jonah That's what bar Jonah means Son of Jonah To be blessed Is to be welcomed Into Christ's kingdom Peter's just made This confession And Jesus says to him Welcome Welcome into my kingdom Blessed are you This blessedness Is now reserved For Peter alone

[14 : 36] It is for all who Like him Make this right confession About Jesus For all who Like Peter Believe in his name That is in Jesus' name And confess him To be Christ and God This same blessedness Is for all Who make that same confession If you're here today And have made this confession Then blessed are you Blessed are you For the Father Has revealed the Son to you And you are united to him As a member of his body Adopted into his family Granted citizenship In his eternal kingdom This is your Lord And if you've not made That confession this morning Let me say to you The time is now While it is still today Do not harden your heart Against God's anointed Hear the words of the gospel Jesus the Christ Has come from the Father

And he is mighty And able to save all Who will turn to him in faith Acknowledge your sins Seek his forgiveness Submit to him Confess him As your Savior And Lord And receive his salvation So that he may say of you As he says of Peter Blessed are you Welcome into my kingdom Because what Peter has just said Is a confessional reality It is a spiritual reality It's also a confessional reality Let's now look More closely At Jesus' words Concerning this confession Of St. Peter Jesus says to Peter Verse 18 I tell you That you Simon Are now Peter And on this rock I will build my church And the gates of hell Shall not prevail against it Now There's a lot of contention About this verse 18 But my aim this morning Is not to invite you To look My aim this morning Is to invite you Rather to look At God's word I want you to look At God's word Rather than listen To man-made inventions Okay So let's look At God's word Let's look in verse 18 Firstly I want you to know That this is the first time In the New Testament That the word church Is used Church of course Does not really mean This building I think we all know that Right For example The deep reality Is that we didn't come To church This morning We didn't come to church 4876 On Andaga Road Instead It is more appropriate To say The church Gathered In 4876 On Andaga Road This morning The church is in the building We Are the church We are the temple Of the living God We Are the assembly Of the gathering

Of God's people God's chosen ones This building Is merely A shell That houses The assembly Of God's people And so Jesus says I will build My church He doesn't mean I will build Four walls With air conditioning And heat In the winter That's not what Jesus Is talking about I will build My church You're who He's talking about Secondly Jesus gives Simon A new name Upon this confession That he made He called him Peter Meaning Stone A rock And Jesus promises That upon This rock He will build His Unconquerable church Now You know The Roman church Claims That the rock Spoken of by our Lord Here Is the man Peter himself That Peter Simon Peter The apostle And martyr He is the foundation Upon which The church is built But here's what A church father From the 4th century St. Augustine Explains This is what he says He says That the declaration Of Peter This confession Of faith In Jesus As the son of God Will As un-a-rock Builds the church In fact What St. Augustine Is saying Is that It's the confession Of Peter That is the rock Upon which Christ builds his church Not the man It's the confession The rock On which the church Is built Is not the Person of Peter But rather Peter's confession About the person Of Jesus Christ That is the rock Upon which the church Is built In fact What Jesus is doing here And Peter himself St. Peter himself Says as much If you go to 1 Peter chapter 2 In his own writing [19 : 38] In his epistle He says to the church He says As you come to him Who are you coming to? It's okay I love the call And response Let him be What is Jesus saying?

And what is Peter Saying in his epistle? He says As you come to him A living stone Who is he talking about? Is he talking about himself? Who are you coming to? Jesus He is the living stone As you come to him A living stone Rejected by men But in the sight of God Chosen and precious As you come to Jesus The living stone You yourselves Like living stones Are doing what? Are being built up As a spiritual house This is Peter's own confession Testimony The rock to whom we come Is Christ The living stone And we come through We come through To Jesus Through what?

Through this same confession Of St. Peter This is why the confession Is important It is an important thing That is going on here That is what Peter himself Invites us to come to He says Come to Jesus Through the same confession That I made Confessing As Christ And God The argument That Peter Is the infallible rock And the church's authority Is passed down Through From Pope to Pope Is a vain invention That has no Scriptural warrant So I want us to look At verse 18 again Who is doing the building?

Is it Peter or Jesus? It's Jesus Right Jesus promises to build His church And whose church is it? [21 : 28] Jesus's Yeah Is it Peter's? No It is Christ's church Jesus's eye I I Jesus I will build My church But I suggest then That If it's not Peter's church But Christ's church Then it is not your church either That's an important thing to note First We've said That the true church Is not a building Is it?

But rather This building Is just a mere physical structure The true church Is the assembly Or gathering Of God's chosen people You As you assemble Here this morning You are the church So you see It doesn't work To say My church It's even blasphemy To lay ownership And ownership claim Of the church It doesn't belong to you It belongs to Christ Of course we say Yes This is my church This is the church I go to I don't mean that You should just Change your vocabulary But the real truth Is that It doesn't belong To any of us Does it?

It is Christ This church As it is constituted Holy Trinity As it is constituted It's constituted Upon the confession About Jesus's identity And it belongs to him And that's a wonderful Truth Brothers and sisters It's a comforting truth I don't know for you It is a comforting Truth for me It means that We don't belong To anybody We belong to Him Who alone Can preserve And save us And bring us To the travels Of this world Into his glorious kingdom He alone Can keep us And hold us fast Amen But Christ Has ordained That the building Of his church Will be through The gospel Proclamation I want you to See that as well As we gather Around This apostolic word The church Is established And God promises To build it Not only that

But God also Promises to sustain This church So that no powers Earthly or spiritual Will be able To overcome it What does that mean It means that The most powerful Thing on this Earth Is the church Of Christ Want me to say That again The most powerful Sin on this Earth Is the church Of Jesus Christ Kings and empires Rise and fall They eventually Prevailed upon In Jesus' time It was the Roman Empire They lasted Hundreds of years And they were Prevailed upon But not so This Kingdom That Christ Is established It's Unconquerable It is the most Powerful institution The world

Has ever seen This kingdom Of our Lord And of his Christ Shall reign Forever and ever We see that In Revelation 11 15 And Jesus says Regarding this Kingdom 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 Lose on earth Shall be loosed In heaven So as we Proclaim this Gospel Brothers and Sisters The Lord promises To give his church The authority That's what the Keys is The key is an Authority What does the Key do?

[25 : 14] It opens And give access To And so Jesus Says I will Give you My church The keys The keys The authority To admit people Into my kingdom Upon the same Confession Of Saint Peter About Christ Do you see the Correlation here now?

Peter has made The confession Jesus promises That he will Build this church Upon that same Confession And then he Promises that Upon that Confession That will be The key By which people Not just Peter And the 12 And the other 12 But all Will come After them Will be admitted Into his kingdom As we proclaim The gospel The authority Of admittance And the authority Of discipline Christ himself Has given To his church And this is The authority By which the Church is governed Through appointed Elders Through priests And bishop Who were appointed And ordained To feed and Ten Christ's church In closing Let me say this I want to invite you To look again At the life Of Saint Peter Look at this man What can we learn What can we learn From his confession What can we learn

From his life It was this rock That God first called This rock This Peter That God first called To proclaim the gospel In Acts This same Peter Who before Was cowering Hiding Who denied Jesus Christ This same Peter Stood up And proclaimed The gospel Of Jesus Christ And offered The keys Of the kingdom To thousands Whom the Lord Has drawn unto himself In Acts The first proclamation Of the gospel Peter The thrice Denier of Jesus The one who tried In his flesh To please God And failed Numerous times This same Peter Now imbued And given The many excellent Gifts From the Holy Spirit Spoke boldly In the face of Human authorities Of hostile Human powers

And kingdoms He spoke Of the greater Kingdom of God The man whose faith In Jesus Once faltered As the Lord Beckoned him To walk to him On the seas Remember that Story Picture This same man Now endures All hardships Bearing his cross With faithfulness And devotion Delighting to share In his Lord's Suffering So as we look At the Spectrum of the Confession of Jesus About Jesus Let's look at the Life of the man Himself Who first made This confession And I must Say to us We must follow In Peter's Steps As he follows In Christ Our Lord Has promised That his church Will not be overcome But the path Of victory Is not to be Found in chasing After worldly Glory And respect Or worldly Dominion Our Lord Has promised His church

Cannot be overcome For the call Is to wield Swords And conquer Like the Mohammedans Do Or like Peter Wanted to do When Jesus Was arrested How What is the means By which this Kingdom Expounds And And fills The earth And draws Many to the Lord Our Savior Jesus Christ What is the means It is the Proclamation That we Worship The Savior Of the world Who is both Christ And God It is In lowliness In suffering And even In rejection By the world That the church Expounds That the church Goes forward Even in death If God Should allow it Death Itself That's what The gates Of hell Means Death Itself Cannot

[29 : 36] Overcome The church Of Christ And here Is the truth For us Brothers and Sisters As the nations Rage Against the Lord And against His anointed As wars Rage all Around us As cultures Seek to Terminate the Confessing church As governments And powers Persecute the People of God We are to Have this Promise From our Lord The gates Of hell That is Death Itself Cannot Overcome The church Which stands On the Faithful Confession Of St.

Peter The world Cannot Overcome The church Which proclaims Jesus as the Messiah The savior And hope Of mankind The son Of the Living God So let us March on Proclaiming And confessing Let us Pray Almighty God Who by your Son Jesus Christ Did give to Your apostle St.

Peter Many excellent Gifts And commanded Him to Feed your Flock We ask That you Will make All bishops And pastors Diligently To preach Your holy Word And you Make your People Obudently To follow The same To believe This same Confession And to Proclaim it To the World around Us Boldly In the Face of All opposition And at The end That we May receive The crown Of everlasting Glory Which is Ours Through Jesus Christ Our Lord Amen Thank you Thank you