

The Rock and the Keys

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Date: 15 August 2010

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[0 : 0 0] 4 and I want us to read together from verse 13 once again page 991 Matthew 16 and verse 13. Now when Jesus came to the district of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples who do people say that the Son of Man is or who do people say that I am the title the Son of Man was Jesus' favorite description of himself he's talking about himself who do people say that the Son of Man is verse 14 and they said some say John the Baptist others say Elijah and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets he said to them but who do you say that I am Simon Peter replied you are the Christ the Son of the living God and Jesus answered him blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven and I tell you you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it 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 loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven at this time of year young people get their exam results either standard grades or hires or advanced hires or whatever they've been sitting in school and it's a very anxious time for those who have just come through fourth fifth and sixth year and I'm sure that by now you will probably not thank me for reminding you perhaps if you haven't done that well you've perhaps come here if nothing else to forget about the realities of life or else perhaps you're ecstatic and you you're quite happy with what you have received I'm not going to go into that in any great detail today because church is not about exams apart from perhaps in one respect and the respect that we have in this passage because exams are a way of stopping and finding out where you are in relation to the subject that you're supposed to know now what's happening here is that

Jesus and his disciples they've been traveling around the cities and the towns and the villages and the disciples have been watching Jesus and listening to him and at the same time they've been absorbing the information that he's been giving them all the time and here now it's this accessory of philippi Jesus is saying I want to ask you a question about me and here is a good no I want to ask you two questions about me the first question is general what's the word on the street about who I am what are people saying and I guess in the kind of community in which they lived the people knew each other just like they do in part in the community in which we live and people talk to each other and they discuss the latest items and news and this would have been happening there and Jesus would have been top priority people would have been talking about him all the time but the fact that they were talking about wasn't good enough for Jesus Jesus wanted to know who do the people say that I am what is their conclusion to who I am what have they decided about me having watched me and having listened to me what do they think that or who do they think that I am so that was the general question and in answer to that general question people said the disciples said this well some of them are saying that you are Elijah Elijah had left the scene of time thousands of years ago or some of them were saying that you're John the Baptist or some or others are saying you're Jeremiah or one of the prophets so there were all these strange notions going about as to whether Jesus was Jeremiah coming back to life or Elijah having coming back to earth or or one or so on but you know it's easy to talk about other people isn't it and what they are saying Jesus then turned to another much more personal question and directed it at them the disciples all right said Jesus who do you say that I am now it's much more difficult to answer that kind of question because it goes right into the heart of what you're thinking and where you are in relation to the fact is that when it comes to examinations the Lord is not interested in whether we are geniuses whether we are professor material or whether we're not the Lord is interested in this same question when it comes to you and I this morning who do you say that Jesus is when the Lord wants to ask us a question this is the question what about the question always surrounds Jesus Christ now it would be much easier if he was to ask you this morning what do you think of the political situation in the far east or

what do you think of the political situation between left-wing and right-wing politics or British foreign policy or all of these things that are so topical in the news and the newspapers are full of it would be very easy to discuss the same way as you would discuss after dinner one night but that's not what the Lord is concerned about at all I'm not saying he's not concerned about it of course he's concerned about every all world affairs but primarily when it comes to you and I he is concerned about one thing and it relates to the same question Jesus Christ who do you say that I am now some if that question were put to us today some of you would say exactly the same as Peter I believe that you are the Christ the son of the living

God and that's because you like Peter have come to know him personally as your savior and as your Lord but not everybody would say that some would ignore the question you might feel it's so uncomfortable it's a question you've wrestled with many times in the past and you tend perhaps to come back to it someday but for the moment you have more pressing matters let me ask you how many times you've said that to yourself and let me ask you if that's just an excuse for you to avoid the painful question that you know you're going to have to face up to one day it's not me that's asking the question it's God himself who's asking the question and surely your relationship to God is not such a low priority that you put it on the back burner until it's more convenient perhaps there are some of you who will say I flatly completely disbelieve that Jesus is the son of God I don't want anything to do with it I've looked at it

I've studied it don't want anything my conclusion is that I do not believe the opposite to what Peter said perhaps perhaps there are some of you who have who have who have come to that conclusion and all I can ask is that you think again all I can ask is that you come to the Bible again and look at the evidence of that Jesus has clearly demonstrated to his disciples and to the people that were there look at the devil there's absolutely no question but that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person there's more information about this Jesus of Nazareth than there is about any other person at that time historically the question is whether you prepare to believe the accounts that are given by Matthew and Mark and Luke and John in the Bible about his extraordinary power and then having looked at them come to the conclusion who else could this be who is capable of such extraordinary amazing impossibilities and that's the challenge that lies in front of every one of us as we read the Bible and I would ask you to look again and to think again and to ask well who if he isn't the son of God then who could he possibly be and what other answer is there for the world in all its dilemma and in all its pain and its darkness but in a way I can understand and I say this with very great care I can almost understand the person who's looked at it and who said at least that person has given us what I can't understand is the person who says well I actually have always believed that Jesus is the Messiah I've always believed that he's the son of God but it's made no difference to my life at all I've got no time for it don't want to think of it too many other pressing matters too many other priorities it has no effect on my life at all I believe that he is actually the son of God never had a problem believing that but it's made no difference to my life well I can't understand that at all I really seriously genuinely don't understand how you can come to such an illogical how can your relationship to God not mean anything to you how can it not be your first priority what you give yourself to in the very first instance I can't understand that at all and I'm asking you today to think again and if you have come to the conclusion that Jesus is who he says he was and everything in this book I believe then give yourself to the Lord come to him as he says and open your heart to him and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and he tells us that you will be saved but Peter, Peter there was no question at all he had watched him, he had been amazed at the kind of miracles that Jesus would do day by day and when it was put to him who do you say that I am there was absolutely no question at all but yet this may have been interestingly enough the very first time that Peter put into words what was in his heart all along and he needed that occasion he needed to hear that question in order to find out himself where he was in relation to God through Jesus Christ and the fact is we all need that occasion we all need to come to that point where we articulate finally once and for all [10:45] I am a believer I love this Jesus I follow this Jesus I know I don't do it perfectly I know that there are many areas of fault within my life but if you're asking me what do you think of Jesus and this is what I do think of that he is the son of God and I believe in him and I want to follow him I want to follow him with my whole heart we all need to that occasion when we put into words what Jesus means to us and I want to remind you as communion comes up in two weeks time that this is such an occasion when we're able to put into words what perhaps has been lying in our heart for some time now and this is the expression that God asks to make of our love for Jesus Christ and the fact that we are following him publicly Peter said you are the Christ the son of God I wonder how many

people there are amongst us this morning you want to say that because you believe it with all your heart you are he is your Christ he is your Messiah and he is your Lord well I'm going to leave that with you

I'm going to leave that in your own heart well now I want us to look at the the response I want us to look at this passage very very briefly it's actually quite a controversial passage I'll explain that just very briefly later on but there are basically three questions that arise out of this passage and I hope you were reading it with me as we read it previously there are three questions and the question let me just raise the questions as we read them verse 17 Jesus answered Peter blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah for flesh and blood has not this revealed to you but my father who is in heaven God has shown you this Peter now verse 18 here's the first question I tell you you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church that's the first question what or who is the rock that's the first question let's read on the gates of hell shall not prevail against it that's the second question what are the gates of hell what does that mean the gates of hell or rather if I'm going to be absolutely precise if you'll know if you're reading the ESV it's a wee footnote here number two it says the gates of Hades the gates of Hades but we won't go into that in too much detail the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it that's the second question what are the gates of hell the third question is if you read on

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 loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven third question you've guessed it what are the keys of the kingdom of heaven and what does it mean that whatever they bound on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever they loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven let's get to the the first question very quickly then because we don't have that much time.

What was the rock? The rock. Peter said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus said, I tell you, you are Peter. And on this rock, I will build my church.

Now, here's where you come to the controversial part. And I'm not going to spend any time on this or any one thing in particular. But the controversy surrounds whether Peter, whether Jesus, was appointing Peter to be the head of his church that was going to follow him after his death and his resurrection and his ascension.

[14 : 20] Now, I say this because the Roman Catholic Church went on to believe that this is precisely what it meant. And, of course, they meant that what they believed was that Peter was the first pope, the first head of the church.

And then thereafter, there was a succession of popes all throughout the centuries. And they were, in themselves, the successors to Peter, the head of the church. Now, that's where the controversy lies.

And, of course, the Protestant church says, no, we don't believe that. And, of course, that is what I'm going to teach this morning. However, even if you don't believe it was Peter, there's still a question as to what is the rock.

Now, let me just give you three suggestions as to what the rock is. First of all, that Jesus himself is the rock. Now, why do I say that?

Because, remember the question, who do you say that I am? And Peter said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And then Jesus went on to say, upon this rock.

[15 : 20] He could have meant, and it's very likely that he did mean, that the rock is what you've said, Peter. That I am the Christ, the Son of the living God, and I am the rock upon which I will build my church.

That's what many people believe. The rock is Jesus. And, of course, you go through the Bible, and you find many, many times in the Bible when the word rock is used as a description of God.

So it's not surprising, then, if Jesus meant himself when he said, I am the rock upon which I'm going to build my church. Second, that other people believe that it is Peter's confession.

Peter's confession. What does he say? He says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And so, that confession, that statement, is the basis of the message of the gospel, the foundation of the church.

What's the church all about? It's about a message. The church is about proclaiming good news. What's the good news? The good news is precisely this. Peter proclaimed, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

[16 : 35] Other people believe that Peter is the rock. However, only in so far as he actually spoke as a representative of the other disciples.

Now, you know that he did this on many occasions. Peter was always the disciple that would speak up first. And that was his nature. We thank God for his nature. Because on many occasions, Peter says things that have become really precious to us.

But on this occasion, it's once again, that he said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, you are Peter. And on this rock, I will build my church.

But notice this. Peter wasn't just speaking on his own behalf. He was speaking on behalf of the rest of the disciples as well. Now, the Bible tells us that the church, Ephesians chapter 5, it tells us that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

The apostles being the 12 apostles, the followers of Jesus Christ. So these are all the various ideas that people have as to the question, who is the rock? But there's a sense in which all of these three ideas are right.

[17 : 41] The church was built on the disciples. The disciples were the first church. So that could be the rock. But also, the church is also built on Christ himself. But the church is also built on the truth, the gospel, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

So much then for the question, who is the rock? Jesus is the rock, the disciples and the message. The whole thing, I believe, is the rock upon which the church was founded.

Now look at what he says then, as a follow-on from that. I will build my church, and the gates of hell or Hades will not prevail against it.

Look at the two things that that tells us. I will build my church. Let's stop for a wee moment and just take that in. I will build my church.

Now to many people, the church is a negative. To many people, the church is all about the institution or the over-institutionalization of the church.

[18 : 56] The organization, the tradition, the building. And that's true for all kinds of denominations throughout the centuries. And some people have a very negative view of the church because they link certain ideas with the church.

More likely, perhaps how they were brought up themselves or whatever. But I would like us to stop this morning. Whatever perception you have of the church, whatever negative you have in your head about the church, please, please, wrestle with it.

Because whatever the church means to you today, it means everything to Jesus Christ. Now the church is not a building.

It's not a denomination. It's the collection of God's people who believe in him and who follow him and who come to worship him and who want to witness for him and to come together, to pray together.

It's the collection of God's people, the fellowship, of the redeemed people of Jesus Christ. That's what the church is. And Jesus passionately, eternally and unbreakably loves the church.

[20 : 17] Look at what it says in Ephesians chapter 5, that great passage often read about weddings. Husbands, love your wives. We're going to come on to this, by the way, once we get back on to Ephesians.

A very interesting teaching. They're practicing teaching. We'll come on to that in the evenings. But look at this. Ephesians chapter 5, Husbands, love your wives. Now he doesn't just stop there. He could have, but he goes on.

Here's the standard by which husbands have to love their wives. As Christ loved the church. Who can match that standard?

Any husband. Nobody can. But that's the standard that's set before us. And that's what Paul had in mind when he talked about love. As far as the apostle Paul is concerned, when he wants to find out about love, he doesn't read some Mills and Boone novel.

He doesn't watch some sappy movie. He looks at Jesus. He goes right back to God himself and the extent to which God loved his people.

[21 : 19] And that's love. He says, that's what you aim at. Husbands and wives also. Wives, husbands, love your wives. as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to sanctify her.

The church means everything to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I want to ask, I had a French teacher once. I remember my first year in school and there was somebody that we feared greatly.

and we all sat there for our very first lesson. It's the first word she said to me. Now she says, the first word she said to the class. Now she says, I know that some of you have come in here and you've got some French.

Your words, you all think you know some French. I want you to forget it. Anything you think you know, forget it. You know, sometimes we have to do that with all the kind of ideas that we have. And one of the most, one of the areas where people form a completely distorted picture of something is in the area of the church.

[22 : 32] And they react and they start criticizing and they're all negative. And that's the reason why many people have abandoned the church and they've gone to what's known as the emerging church or the emergent church, which is the idea, and I hope I'm not misrepresenting it, the idea that well, let's get rid of all the organization.

Let's get rid of all the, get rid of the authority and the elders and minister and all that kind of thing. And let's just meet together and let's just see how the spirit leads. Now that's all very well in theory. The only instance I've ever come across with that, there was a split within six weeks where that happened. And I know that we can be overly organized and the church in every single generation has made its mistakes.

The church is a fumbling, stumbling organization that's full of sinful men and women like us today. And yet, the Lord has loved that church and he has told us how to organize ourselves and he wants a tidy, prayerful, committed organization of which you must be part.

The church is not a place of your Christian today for you to sit and observe and to spectate and to go home again. If when that happens there's something wrong. We all have to be part.

[24 : 02] It might be a small part, but it's part of that organization that God has set up and gathered and that he loves. Now what's our responsibility? Our responsibility is to be involved within that.

It's to get her hands dirty, to roll up her sleeve and to get stuck in. Not just to sit on the sidelines and to criticize the way that it's so easy to do.

Jesus said, I will build my church. And in a day of course when there's so much stacked up against the gospel, where all the odds are stacked up against it, we're in a minority in the part of the world where we live in.

It's so easy to just abandon what is not popular for the sake of our own comforts. Well that's what the children of Israel did when they came back from Babylon. They kind of abandoned what God wanted them to do in favor of their own comforts.

They just tried to make life easy for themselves rather than get stuck into what God was doing. And that's why the prophets had to say to them, you're wrong. Let's rediscover what God has done.

[25 : 06] And you know, it's quite strange, isn't it? How what is a minority in one era can turn into a majority. And I was reading this week in my Bible reading about how David, you know how he was being pursued by Saul, and there was a group of people around him, and they must have felt, well, what is this going to lead to?

We're being pursued all the time, and if this goes on, then chances are that David's going to get caught up with Saul, and Saul's going to kill him, and we're all going to come to nothing, because we're all going to get killed. That's what it appeared like.

But within a matter of weeks, the whole nation of Israel had gathered around David, because Saul was dead. That's what God can do in a very short period of time.

And if we give up on the gospel, simply because it's not popular, A, we're not living in faith, and B, we're going to miss out on what God is going to do one day.

I will build my church, said Jesus. So, let's then move on to the gates of hell, or the gates of Hades.

[26 : 17] The Greek says the gates of Hades. That's a fact. That is just a fact that you have to accept if you know what the original says. It says Hades, and the word Hades means the realm of the dead.

That doesn't mean hell doesn't exist. I'm not saying that hell doesn't exist, but that's just a fact. But that doesn't really have any bearing on what we're doing. Now, what were the gates of hell?

This is the second question. Well, gates, if you think about gates, and particularly gates as they were used in a city in the old days, they were either used to keep people in or keep people out.

They were used for both, keep people in, protect them, or to keep people out. Now, if you think about gates, the gates of Hades, or the gates of hell, that could mean that there are gates keeping people in a place of death.

The Bible tells us that a person who hasn't come to faith in Jesus is dead. and he or she is kept that way by the gates.

[27 : 31] It's as if there's this big gate, and you're being kept, like it or not, this is what the Bible says about you, if you're not a Christian, that there's a gate, there are gates keeping you in where you are, and these gates have to be open, that's the only way.

And here's the promise of Jesus, that as the gospel is preached by his people, and as people come to hear the gospel, these gates are opened, they're battered down by the gospel, to release those who hear, those who come to discover God's forgiveness and his newness of life.

That's what the gates of hell are, and it's our prayer, even today, that as we reflect on Jesus and his person, and what he came to do, and the forgiveness that he came to purchase for us today, that even as we're talking about these things, that the gates will be falling and being battered down so that you can be released and delivered and saved.

That's what you need, and it's only through the power of the gospel, battering down the gates, that that can possibly happen. Well, I was going to go into a wee bit more detail on that, but the time has gone.

I want to come just very, very briefly onto the keys of the kingdom of heaven. That's what Jesus says. He says, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

[28 : 56] And he goes on to say something that's even more intriguing, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and so on. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Well, a few moments ago he spoke about the gates of hell.

Now I want to talk about another city altogether, and that's the city of God, the kingdom of heaven. And there's a door to the city. I believe that's what Jesus is saying.

There's a door to the city, and there are keys to the door to the city. And Jesus says, I have the keys to the door, and I'm now giving them to you.

What do you mean that he was giving them to them? Well, let me just give you an example. You have a house, and you're going away for a while, and somebody else wants to use the house.

You give them the keys. you'd only give the keys to your house if that person was a responsible person who's going to use the house as you want it to be used.

[29 : 58] The same way with your car. Somebody comes to you and says, can I borrow your car? For some of you, it'd be a flat no. But say you were to be gracious and give them your car.

You would only give your car to somebody who you knew was going to use it responsibly. You wouldn't give it to anybody. You'd give it to only somebody who was going to use it responsibly and use it the way you want it to be used for the purpose that you want it to be used.

So you entrust the key of your car or the key of your house. Now here's Jesus and he's holding the key to the kingdom of heaven and he's saying it's mine but I'm going to give it to you.

Not to be used responsibly but to be used for the purpose for which I want it to be used. Now what are these keys? What's the key? Well the key is this. There is only one door into heaven.

There is nothing mysterious about it. It is simple. There are not six doors or twenty doors. There's one door. And the door is the gospel.

[31 : 03] The message that Jesus came into the world to seek and to save those who were lost. That he died on the cross as our substitute. As our lamb of God.

So that through his death we can be forgiven and we can step into his kingdom. And the moment you do that it's like the door opens and you step into his kingdom.

The key has been turned to the door opens and you enter into his kingdom. Once and for all the door is the gospel. There's nobody you can't be saved except through the gospel. You can read the gospel in the Bible.

You can gossip the gospel by speaking to one another. But however the gospel is shared whether it's in the pulpit or whether it's on the street or in the kitchen. The door is like opening a door to someone.

If that person accepts and comes in. The key is turned and the door is opened.

[32 : 03] And you come in freely. Without money. Without pass. There's no entrance fee. You come in as you are. We talked about this last Sunday night.

Come in as you are. You don't take baggage with you. Just come in. You come in once and for all and forever more. That's the key. The key to the door of God's kingdom were given to the apostles. people. They had to then go out into all the world and they had to preach the gospel to make sure that door was open to as many people as possible as they possibly could open the door for.

That was the whole point. It's an incredible responsibility. You imagine you were given somebody's car and they gave you the use of their car. That's an amazing responsibility isn't it? It's the same with somebody's house.

The moment you take the key to someone's house, you better be very careful how you use it. The disciples were the same. They had to go then, thereafter, and they had to make sure that they were diligent in what they did.

[33 : 08] It's the same with the church today. What use are we making of the keys that Jesus has given to us? The keys that have been passed from the apostles to the first century and the second century, all the way down through the centuries, all over the world, we have the key to the kingdom of heaven.

are we using it? Do we have any idea of the responsibility that we have? And the great privilege which is ours. Now what he says is this, and just bear with me for one more minute.

Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. What does that mean? And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Well, some people have believed that from that we have the power to forgive people's sins.

We don't. We never did. only God has the power to forgive anyone from their sins. So what does it mean? It means that when the church goes out in Jesus' name and proclaims the gospel, they have every authority to say to that person, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today, you will be, not you might be saved, not there is a slight possibility of you being saved, not just that you have taken the first step in the right, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are loosed from your sins. And when the church says that, it's not because the church has the authority, it's not because the church creates the authority, it's because they're telling the truth, they're declaring something, they're making known to you something which is a heavenly truth.

[34 : 51] And as you listen to the gospel, and as you believe in the gospel, then your sins are forgiven. By trusting in Jesus, they are forgiven on earth, and they are forgiven in heaven.

That's the marvelous truth that we proclaim today, and I hope that we have been thinking about today, that whatever you bind on earth, by the message of the gospel, but the opposite is true as well, because the gospel can also be a stench to you.

The fact is this morning that as you listen to the message of salvation, perhaps there are some hopefully, hopefully, who are listening, accepting it, and coming to Jesus in faith yourself.

For you, Jesus, is loosing you from your sins. but it can have the opposite effect as well, in that the more you hear, the more hatred you have to the gospel.

The more bound you are, the more trapped you become in your own sin and your own deadness. Well, I hope that there's nobody here in that condition today. I really hope not, that it could happen.

[36 : 12] The fact is that Jesus came to save, and he will save, and he will continue to save. And the work of salvation will go on until the end of time, until Jesus comes again, until the very last person will come into his kingdom, and then he will come again the second time.

Meanwhile, we continue tirelessly to share the gospel, to make it known, to pray for others, to work away at bringing the gospel to our friends, to our neighbors, to the people that we know, to our families, and to those we don't know.

May God continue to give the power, so that we, even in our lifetime, will see great things happening.

Let's pray. Father, this is our prayer, that you will continue to work and to do great things in building your church.

We thank you that the future of the church is absolutely secure, and we can pray this knowing that you are continuing to add to your kingdom those who are being saved.

[37 : 24] We pray that that kingdom will extend even to ourselves today. We pray that you will bring people into your kingdom in great numbers. We don't want to put any restriction, we don't want to suffer from a lack of faith in any way, but we want to ask that you will do the impossible amongst us.

We do not deserve it, but we ask for it nonetheless, because therein is your name glorified. In Jesus' name, Amen.