

The Declaration at Caesarea 2

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[0:00] Matthew chapter 16. We can read from verse 15. And we're going to be looking at verses 17 and 18.

Matthew 16 at verse 15. Jesus 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 that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Now let's just remind ourselves, as we saw last time, how we come to this particular verse.

Remember Jesus here, as he came into this district of Caesarea Philippi, turned and asked the disciples who people were actually identifying him with or making of him.

What was his identity? Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And of course they then said, some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah. And then he said, But who do you say that I am?

[1:17] And we saw that Jesus was addressing not only them at that time, but addressing ourselves as well, as to what we make of Jesus, what his identity is, as far as we are concerned, and where he fits into our life as well.

And Peter's great declaration then, or confession, he answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And we did a little bit of looking into the terms that Peter used, and the importance of these terms.

The Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, and the Son of the living God, which brings about a reference to our Lord's deity.

The Lord as the Son of God, in terms of his Godhead, and how that fits in with him being the Messiah, the Sent One, the Anointed One of God, as our Savior as well.

And his response then to this declaration of Peter is what we want to look at for a little time this evening. As Jesus responds, he says, Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah.

[2:24] Simon, son of Jonah, that means, For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And then verse 18, he speaks about building his church.

So two things. Christ's commentary on Peter's confession, and then Christ's construction of his church, as that's set out for us in verse 18 especially.

There's Christ's commentary briefly on the confession that Peter had just made. Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Now when he says, Blessed are you, Peter, you are blessed. He's not just using that in any kind of loose way. Of course, you wouldn't associate the Lord in using language loosely anyway. But sometimes we use the word blessed or say, Bless you.

Maybe after somebody sneezed, you say, Bless you. And it doesn't carry much weight or meaning in that context. But when Jesus says, Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, he means, You're in a good place, Simon.

[3:31] You are really blessed. You're in a state of blessedness. You're in a right relationship with me and with God the Father. You are blessed.

And indeed we understand that there's something about this that was of consolation or comfort or of help even to the Lord himself. Remember, as the Lord is going through his ministry and the experiences of his ministry, as you find them outlined in the Gospels, that there are times when his disciples were not very helpful, when they were other than helpful or unhelpful, and when they couldn't even support him and give him the support.

But here is Peter with his great confession. And it's obviously a means of support to the Lord himself in his time of going through with the rigor of his journey as the Savior. Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah. Why is he blessed? Why is Peter? What is it that makes him blessed? Why is he in a good place? What has brought him to that good place? Well, that's what he says here.

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. In other words, Jesus is saying, Peter, the confession you've just made has not been made up by yourself. [4 : 46] You have not come to it by your own understanding merely of who I am. It's something that God the Father has given you. It's something that my Father, and we could go into that difference where Jesus speaks about my Father in terms of his relationship to him as the Son of God from the previous verse.

We'll leave that aside. But what he's saying is, You are blessed, Peter, son of Jonah, because my Father has revealed this to you. You have not come to it by your own understanding merely. You've come to it because it's been revealed to you. It's something that God has opened your heart to. In other words, when you come to confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, when you make that confession sincerely from your heart, when you come to set that before God and say, This is who you are to me, Lord.

That's not something you've created yourself. And it's not something that you're merely repeating from reading it in this passage of the Word of God. When you come before God, before your Lord, and you make this confession truly from your own heart, that this is who he is, that this is his identity, that this is what he means to you.

Where does that come from? Have you created it yourself? Has it always been there? No, it hasn't. You're in a blessed place, he's saying to Simon, For flesh and blood is not revealed to you.

[6 : 20] It's not of human origin. It's not of human creation. Any more than any other aspect of the life that's within us spiritually, it's a creation of God.

It comes about through his regenerating work. And here it's an emphasis on God the Father revealing this to you. It's not been flesh and blood.

It's not been yourself, Peter. It's my Father. We can only come to appreciate who Christ is and have a meaningful relationship with him through the work of God in our hearts.

We can't produce that ourselves. That doesn't mean we go away into despondency. The Bible tells us our limitations, our sinfulness, our lack of power to save ourselves, not so that we can actually come and despair at the fact that we cannot do that, but so that we place ourselves before God and say, Lord, please do for me what I cannot do and what you alone can do.

That's why David, for example, though already a believer in Psalm 51, when he comes back to make this great confession of his sin against God in one of the great verses of that prayer of repentance, he says, Create in me a clean heart.

[7 : 48] David doesn't say, Lord, I'm now going to set about cleaning out my heart. I'm going to get rid of all this sin by my own efforts. No, he's saying, Lord, create it.

Create that clean heart in me. Because if he doesn't do it, Peter himself and David himself cannot do it by themselves. So the question tonight is, what are we relying on in terms of our own individual lives in relation to God?

Are we relying on our own understanding, on our own ability? Doesn't mean we don't apply our minds to the truth, that we don't think things through. Doesn't mean anything like that at all.

But are we relying on something more than our own ability? Are we relying on something above that when we ask, what is it that makes me a Christian? We have to come and realize that this is how we come to be Christians, that this is really what makes us believers, that this is what gives us this confession in sincerity, that God himself has been working in our souls, that he has released us from the darkness of our sin, brought us to know Christ, and to confess his identity, that he is to us the Christ, the Son of the living God.

So there is, firstly, Christ's commentary on Peter's confession. I want to deal a bit more, in a bit more detail, with the second point, which is Christ's construction of his church, because Jesus doesn't leave it there.

[9 : 28] He says, Blessed are you, Simon Bariona, 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.

There are three points there that we need to look at in turn. First of all, where he says, I will build my church. Secondly, where Jesus says, You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church. And thirdly, where Jesus assures Peter and assures ourselves that the gates of hell shall not prevail against Christ's construction and building work of his church.

Let's look at these in turn. I will build my church. There are two things in that itself that we need to notice, where Jesus is saying, I will build my church. Whose church is this?

We are the church of God in this world, along with all others who, like ourselves, gather to worship Jesus, to follow Jesus, to pay our confession to Jesus, all over the world.

[10:38] But who does the church belong to? Is it our church? Is it the free church's church? No, it's Christ's church.

It doesn't belong to Peter. It doesn't belong to any bishop or archbishop. It doesn't belong to the pope. It doesn't belong to the free church. It doesn't belong to the church of Scotland.

It doesn't belong to any denomination. The church is Christ. I will build my church. Let's never forget whose church that is, because that really lays some very important matters upon our own souls.

When we belong to the church of Christ, we belong to something that he possesses, that he has a right to possess. Our membership of the church is so important, not just in terms of making our confession as we come to take communion.

Our membership is as baptized members of the church who bear the mark of baptism as belonging to Jesus. That's what it really signifies. That's what it means, that we are actually his possession, his property, his church.

[11:56] I will build my church. Whenever we think of the church and our responsibilities in regard to it, let's always try to think of it as his church, his property.

That means that as that truth bears upon my life and your life, it obviously has importance as to how we live that life. And as we live that life and realize that it is his church we belong to, then obviously that places upon us great responsibilities and privileges that this is what we are.

We confess his identity, but he is now speaking of the identity of his church and he's saying, I will build my church. And he has a right to it because he has purchased it.

There's a great passage in Acts chapter 20 and at verse 28, words which remind us of how this church came into being and how it is the property of Christ and what gives him the right to say it's my church.

This is a passage, as you know, that's really very emotional where Paul is saying farewell to the elders of Ephesus. They realize they're not going to see him again and so he's giving them counsel as to how to look after the church of God, how to oversee it, how to be elders in it.

[13:29] It's one of these very important passages in regard to leadership in the church of Christ in terms of the eldership particularly. And he says, this is how it came about.

Now he says, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained or purchased with his own blood.

And he's putting together these words, God and his own blood. Where does God have blood? How has God purchased the church with his own blood?

What has it taken to actually procure this church for himself, to purchase this church, to bring it back out from the clutches of Satan? It's the blood of Christ, the death of Christ.

That's how valuable the church is to God. That's why Psalm 87 is such an important psalm in realizing just what the church meant to the psalmist. Where great things are said of Zion, the city of God, where it shall be said of this one and that one there.

[14:40] They were born in her. They have her for their mother. They're looked after by the church. He has bought it. It's his.

He has a right to it. That's why it's a huge privilege tonight for you and I to be here. Not only in regard to this building and this congregation, privilege though that is, but the privilege especially is belonging to the church of Christ, being Christ's property, being Christ's purchased possession, being part of what he has given his life blood to procure and to make his own.

What does the church mean to us? Is the church important to us? Well, it's not as important as Jesus himself, of course. But it's of importance hugely in all the privileges that belong to us as the people of Christ's church.

We belong to him. I will build my church. And then he says, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. But then you see, you can see that it's Jesus who's building this church.

It is his church, but what he's saying is, I am building or I will build my church. This is a spiritual construction, of course. This is something that the Lord is still doing and will do to the end of time.

[16:08] Christ is still building his church. He's going on building his church. We're not building his church. It's not the preachers of the gospel who build the church. It's not the eldership who build the church. It's not you people yourselves who are building the church, though we have all these responsibilities and privileges and such a lot of work to do that Jesus has given us in his service.

But he is the builder of the church. And I must never forget that. Nor must you. I will build my church.

You know, sometimes it may seem to us that the church is not making much progress. It may seem to us at times that the church is actually receding backwards.

That is losing the fight with all that seeks to destroy the gospel. But look at all the setbacks the church had in various passages in the Bible.

You go back to Nehemiah's day, for example. In the very difficult work he was engaged in along with the people there back in Jerusalem, trying to rebuild a community for God and faced with setback after setback and enmity after enmity.

[17:25] And yet what was happening? God was building that community. And Nehemiah was relying upon God's ability to rebuild. Although he had given him the skills to be a servant in that context.

Nehemiah was absolutely sure that it was God really ultimately who was doing the building work. He was putting together these living stones, if you like, and forming that spiritual edifice that Nehemiah was part of and that God was building.

every convert is a new stone, a new spiritual stone laid into the fabric of this church of Christ.

I will build my church and that's not going to go away. It's not a truth that's going to disappear. It's always going to be relevant in every age, in every context, against every discouragement.

I will build my church. When you go home and you feel, well, the preacher didn't get on very well tonight. Not many people surely could have been affected by that sermon.

[18:41] When the preacher himself goes home and before God laments on what a poor job he made of that passage. The church's building is not dependent on that.

God uses such weak beings as we are, but it is he who is building and he will use his truth to build his church. I will build my church, said Jesus.

It is my church and I will build it. I will construct it. I will put it together. I will finish it. Christ's building his church.

Secondly, he says, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. What does he say? What does he mean? You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church.

The church is Christ. It is Christ who is building it. But then he says, you are Peter and on this rock I will build it. Now, as you know, I am sure there are two divergent opinions about that, about what he meant, what Jesus meant by the rock.

[19:52] On this rock I will build my church. Roman Catholicism undergirds their doctrine of the papacy with Peter being the first pope and therefore from that there is, we are told, a line of popes that have succeeded Peter down to this very day and they use this as one of the biblical passages that confirm in their view of it at least the truth of that or the reality of that.

You are Peter and on this rock you are the first of the line of the popes is what Roman Catholicism in undergirding the papacy says. Well, there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that Peter was a pope and indeed the first popes in history are obscured really and just their names are there but the rest of them is just obscurity.

Nobody knows who they were many of them. But then you've got the other type of interpretation which says going to the opposite extreme from that which is the rock has nothing to do with Peter.

This is actually Jesus speaking about himself. That's what some Protestant views of the passage will say. You, Peter, on this rock by which Jesus means himself I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

We don't think that that actually accurately portrays what Jesus meant either because the word Peter itself is literally a stone or a rock in its meaning.

[21 : 19] That's what the word means. So why would Jesus say to Peter you are the rock or you are a stone you are a rock and on this rock I will build my church. If it's nothing at all to do with Peter what is the significance of his name?

There has to be something in the naming of Peter as Peter as the rock that fits in with what Jesus is saying on this rock I will build my church. The rock is Peter but not as a foundation of the church. Jesus is the foundation but the rock is Peter as he stands there in that passage before us as the confessing disciple who confesses that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God and in terms of being the disciple who is making that confession that's the rock on which Jesus is building his church.

Where have you ever seen a church where confessing Jesus as the Christ the Son of the living God is absent? If that is absent then it's not a church.

That's very obvious from what we read in John's first epistle in chapter 4 where it quite categorically states those who deny Jesus Christ come in the flesh from God that's the confession that's from God but every spirit that does not confess Jesus in that sense is not from God but it's the spirit of the Antichrist.

[22 : 47] In other words Jesus builds his church through his confessing people and through this confession that his people have of who he is as the Christ the Son of the living God and as more and more people come to have that confession and to make that confession so the church is being built so Jesus is building his church.

I will build my church you are Peter you are the rock and on this rock I will build my church.

You see that's why he's saying blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona in other words the fact that that's Simon's human name that's his human identity and very often you'll find that Jesus speaks like this in terms of bringing out the humanness the weakness if you like of Peter himself it's not Peter as Peter it's not Peter as a mere human being that proves to be the rock it is Peter as the confessing disciple of Christ's identity and his messiahship and his deity on this rock I will build my church and that's how Jesus is building his church now the fact that Jesus is building his church involving this confession on the part of his people doesn't absolve us from the responsibility of looking to ourselves and asking ourselves do I have that confession and do I make that confession more than just in my heart am I yet in the position of making that confession openly am I denying my Lord tonight when that confession isn't obvious in my life do I expect the Lord to build his church without that confession on my part am I prepared tonight to be a stone in the fabric of Christ's building with that confession you are the Christ the son of the living God am I part of this great building work am I still outside of that confession and I come to know Jesus for myself as he come to work in my heart to bring to me this confession to place me as a living stone in his church to be part of his building program that is going on as we speak where people have come and are coming to Jesus and coming to confess him and it doesn't matter how long you've let that be it's not too late yet for you to step out and make your confession maybe many years have elapsed and maybe it's been in your heart for many many days it's still not too late for you to join the confessing church of Christ maybe you think tonight it's not really for young people well it's for young people too it's not about age or years of experience it's really all about what

Jesus means to you it's all about who he is to you that he is the Christ the son of the living God in your heart and he was there in your heart then he must be there on your lips as well and I will build my church and you are Peter you are the rock you are the stone and on this rock I will build my church and the final thing the third thing Christ is building his church and Peter is an example of the rock on which he built and of course you could say as far as Peter is concerned that he was very much in the leadership of the apostles themselves and suffered much for it and thirdly the gates of hell shall not prevail against it what does it mean the gates of hell what are the gates of hell in regard to the building work of

[27 : 22] Jesus of his church well some people would say the gates of hell is just a reference very often to death the gates of death the gates of hell the gates of the grave pretty much come to the same thing but there is surely more than that to it in this context especially because when you go back to the old testament and you'll often find the word gates used in terms of a city and it doesn't just mean the literal gates that would swing open and shut day and night to the gates of the city if you find somebody sitting in the gate in the old testament that meant somebody sitting in that place where the if you like the councillors of the city it's a place where the city council met it's a meeting place where things are planned where strategies are set out where things are discussed where the

city policies are actually worked through on the part of those who are councillors or people in these positions in the city life the gates of the city is where the policy is made where decisions are taken just like you find today in the corolla where councillors take decisions where they discuss where things affecting us all in our communities are brought under their review and their discussion and their decisions these are the gates of the town or of the society we belong to and that is also true of the forces of darkness the powers of sin of

Satan of darkness because these are the powers that confront the church that confront the gospel that stand against the progress of the gospel and of the church the gates of hell the gates in which Satan himself is the chief antagonist the council of darkness where he is the great leader because let's remind ourselves of what Paul writes to the Ephesian church we do not wrestle against flesh and blood we need the whole armor of God he is saying for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood not merely he says against flesh and blood is what he means it's not just human beings and human ingenuity but against principalities and powers which is Paul's way of referring to the spiritual powers that exist in the unseen world the rulers of the darkness of this world Satan and his particular kingdom and he has a strategy and they have their plans and they have ingenuity and as that passage in Ephesians says the wiles of the devil the stratagems the policies the ways in which they work out their policies as they stand against the gospel and stand against the church we're facing more than just human minds friends when we actually think of what the gospel is confronting as we take the gospel into the world as you witness for Christ in the world you're not just up against human powers secularism atheism they're not just human powers it's not just human ingenuity it's not just human strategy or human devices it's part of the policy of the gates of hell anything that's against the gospel out and out against the gospel committed against the gospel that's where the policy of it comes from that's where it's worked out that's whose strategy it is but you see what

Jesus is saying the gates of hell shall not prevail against it now there are two ways of taking that it could mean that what Jesus is saying is the powers of darkness as they assault the church they shall not be successful against it that's one way of looking at it but the better way I think is to look at it in the other way as the gospel is taken out to confront the powers of darkness as the gospel goes into the world and confronts those powers of darkness in people's lives the power of the gospel is greater than the power of darkness and we have to be absolutely convinced about that otherwise there's no point in evangelizing unless you're confident in the authority of scripture the supremacy of scripture and especially confident that the building work of

Jesus though it will be resisted the resistance will not be successful the gates of hell shall not be able to thwart the building work of Christ as Jesus goes on building his church as people are still converted even in a day like our own thankfully there are that's itself evidence that against the power of Jesus and against the power of the gospel the gates of hell shall not prevail their well defended gates their policies well worked out there's ingenuity there's cleverness there's lots of human ability harnessed in order to oppose and to frustrate and to stand against the gospel but tonight I would not stand in this pulpit for one moment longer unless

[33 : 19] I was absolutely persuaded that Jesus and his building work of the church is not going to be successfully undone by the works of darkness there'll be setbacks there'll be disappointments there'll be discouragements there'll be battles some of which we'll lose but the overall building work of Jesus cannot actually be thwarted or undone he will build his church and every stone that he has designed to go into it will go into it now that's for our encouragement tonight that's for our support and for our strengthening tonight when we're facing discouragement when we're facing days when the church has a bad press when the church has a bad name and when all of that gets so much publicity more than the gospel whose work is going on in building it and what is it that's supreme is it the gospel is it the word of

Christ or is it the world just in conclusion really let me just remind you of a great chapter in the book of Acts where much of this of course is out worked in the life of the early church and in Acts chapter 12 as you go on reading that chapter it seems really that you're reading about the annihilation of the church because that's really what Herod and those who were under his control were actually setting about doing at that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church he killed James the brother of John with the sword and when he saw that it pleased the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also and you think well how can the church survive how can the church make progress in that sort of context look at all the powers that are against it and

Herod the king himself is taking charge of those powers that are against the church the gates of hell are busy and this is what they're doing but as you go on reading the chapter and as you read about Herod coming out and going to Tyre and Sidon and having a tour of Tyre and Sidon and all the grandeur and pomp of his kingship the people were shouting it's the voice of a god and not of a man that's the kind of status he had immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last there's the great Herod there are the gates of hell in all their apparent success where is

Herod he's dead something's happened in his inner gut and killed him but then the next verse says something very very important he was eaten by worms and breathed his last but the word of the Lord increased and multiplied you see the contrast you can see the point that's made in that passage here is Herod here is all that he achieved here is all the opposition against the church in his time here is all that he actually brought about even to the killing of James and imprisoning the likes of Peter and all of a sudden he's gone because he's not in charge of the church the one who's building the church is and if a Herod gets in the way and has to be removed then the builder of the church will remove him but the word of the

Lord went on and increased Herod decreased Herod died and the contrast the word of the Lord increased and went on increasing isn't that wonderful doesn't that give you encouragement against all the forces that you meet with against the things that arranged in opposition to the gospel tonight in Stornoway here is Jesus saying I'm telling you I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it we can have every confidence tonight in the builder of the church however much we can say of ourselves that we are weak and insufficient creatures liable to all kinds of mistakes and faults and errors but our confidence is in the builder of the church and that's where we leave [38 : 49] Peter's confession in Christ's commentary on it and his construction of the church church now for me and for you tonight it should be obvious to us all that the church is always in need of confessing disciples are you one of those will you not become one of those after all this is his word to you who do you say that I am surely you're going to come and say with your confession you to me are the Christ the son of the living God let's pray Lord our gracious God help us we pray to appreciate what it means to belong to your church and to appreciate it increasingly as we seek to reach out in your name and as we seek in the gospel and for your name sake to invite others to come and come to know you and confess you

Lord make our confession one which will ring through we pray that you would grant us as we go on in our life of confessing you in this church Lord we pray that you would maintain us and grant to us your own protective care so that at all times we may be confident in your strength and in your wisdom against the gates of hell we pray that you would accept our worship again and be with us again as we meet in fellowship later and grant these mercies to us now we pray for Jesus sake amen our final psalm of praise this evening is psalm 124 that's on page 170 psalm 124 the tune is old 124th if god the lord had not been on our side let is real say had not the lord been near when foes attacked us filling us with fear and when their wrath against us reached its height alive we had been swallowed in their spite we'll sing the whole psalm 124 let's stand to sing it is god the lord and not being on our side let is still safe and not the lord be near when foes attacked us filling us with fear and when their wrath against us reached its height alive we have been swallowed in their spite we could not be enveloped by the flood over our heads the torrent would have gone the waters would have carried us alone but praise the lord for he has set us free and has not left us to their cruelty love and he has been saved just as a captured bird out of the fowler net has been set free the spirit is cut we are at liberty our help is in the name of god the lord who made the earth and heavens by his word if you allow me please to get to the main door after the benediction lord our god we pray that you'd bless to us what we will receive for our bodily needs and the fellowship we thank you for the hands who have prepared it and we pray that you would make us continually thankful for the many blessings we receive from you we pray that your grace and mercy and peace from god the father the son and the holy spirit will be our portion now and evermore amen