

April 4, 2004 by Steve Brandon



You Are the Christ

Matthew 16:13-20

1. The Good Question (verses 13-14)
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Our passage this morning is one of the most debated passages in all of Scripture. In fact, I discovered this week that a book has been written about these verses that has recorded the various interpretations of this passage down through the ages. It is entitled, "A History of the Exegesis of Matthew 16:17-19 from 1781 to 1965" (written by Joseph A. Burgess, published in 1976). One of the contributing factors to this debate is that these verses are the climax of Matthew's Gospel. These are the verses that resolve the tension, once for all, of who exactly Jesus is. In verse 16, Simon Peter answered Jesus and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." This is the culmination of everything that Matthew has been writing about.

Matthew began his gospel with Jesus' genealogy, which traces his lineage back through David, from whom the Christ (the Messiah) would come. Matthew has demonstrated how Jesus was the fulfillment of many Messianic prophecies. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught with authority, unlike any of the religious teachers of the day (Matt. 7:28-29), as He raised the standard of righteousness that those in His kingdom would be expected to live. He also presented Himself as the gate-keeper of the kingdom of heaven. He would receive some and He would reject others. In His ministry, Jesus went about doing miraculous miracles of compassion. He described His kingdom in parables (Matt. 13). He sent out His disciples to preach, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7).

And yet, the disciples didn't fully understand who Jesus was. In hindsight, we can look back at the life of Jesus and say that it should have been obvious. But, to the disciples who walked with Jesus for two and a half years, it wasn't obvious at all. In some ways, Jesus met their criteria for what the Messiah would be like, as He taught and healed and had compassion for Israel. But, in other ways, Jesus didn't seem to be quite what they were looking for, as He didn't seem to come in triumph and power. So, they were slow to recognize Him as the Christ. But, in this passage, it all comes to light. Jesus reveals Himself and His plan to build His church.

Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

In verse 13 we find Jesus and His disciples in "the district of Caesarea Philippi." This was a city about 25 miles north of Galilee at the base of Mount Hermon, about 1000 feet above sea level. It is right there that much of the snow Mount Hermon melts and forms the head of a river that feeds the Sea of Galilee. I remember being there after travelling around in the hot desert climate of Israel and was struck with how luscious and green everything was because of the abundance of water. Because it is a nice place, some have suggested that Jesus and His disciples were on a retreat, away from the conflicts in Galilee.

And as they were there, Jesus began to take a public opinion poll. This was long before the Gallup polls. Barna wasn't yet around. Neither were there any Nielsen ratings to which Jesus could appeal. So, He did the next best thing. He asked His disciples this question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13) This brings us to my first point.

1. The Good Question (verses 13-14).

He told His disciples, "You all have been with me now for two and a half years. We have been around the block a few times. We have been to Jerusalem together. We have been ministering in Galilee. We have been to Nazareth and Tyre and Sidon and a bunch of other places. We have been with the multitudes and with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Tell me now, as you have been around the crowds, apart from me, what are they saying about Me?"

Jesus shows His wisdom here in that He asks His disciples what others are really thinking. I know that as a pastor, there are things that you simply don't tell me, like what you really think about my preaching, or what you really think about me and my family. You can talk about it

freely with others, but you won't talk about it freely with me. Let me say this. One of the things that I have tried hard to do at Rock Valley Bible Church is to be entirely open and honest with you. I don't want to be aloof from you as a guy who is high and lofty, up on a pedestal. I want you to see me and my weaknesses. I want you to see my lack of giftedness. And rather than being frustrated with me because I'm not meeting up to all of your expectations, I ask you to be patient with me as I grow in grace. I want you to realize that I can't be everything, but I do want to be approachable.

Anyway, the disciples answered with a lot of different things. Verse 14, "Some say, John the Baptist" This was the view of Herod. Perhaps you remember back in Matthew 14, when Jesus was performing His miracles and Herod heard about it. He said, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead" (Matt. 14:2). "Others [say] Elijah." There were those who were certainly saying this because they observed what was taking place. They sensed that the dawning of the Messianic Age was coming, especially as Jesus walked around and was performing these tremendous miracles. The prophets had prophesied that Elijah would come first and prepare the way for the Messiah. Some thought that Jesus was simply preparing the way, and that one greater than Jesus would be coming in the future. "Others [say] Jeremiah." In the book of 2 Maccabees, (which is one of the apocryphal books) the story is told of Jeremiah took the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle hid them in a cave on Mount Nebo, to protect them from being destroyed by the Babylonians, who were coming upon Judah (2 Maccabees 2:1-12). The expectation of some of the Jews was that Jeremiah would return again. "Others [say] ... one of the prophets." This was just a guess. They recognized Jesus as a holy man, but were unsure of who exactly He was. When Jesus entered Jerusalem upon a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, the city was stirred, saying "Who is this?" The multitudes were calling Jesus a prophet, saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee" (Matt. 21:10-11). The point of all of these answers is that **the people didn't really know** who Jesus was. Certainly, there was an acknowledgement that He was a great man of God. But, He still wasn't identified by any of the people as the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah.

Still, the question was a good one to ask. It caused the disciples of Jesus to think a bit about Jesus. Perhaps they had never really contemplated who Jesus was. Sure, He was a great teacher and leader. His teaching was amazing. But they never really came to any conclusions about anything.

At this point, I want to encourage you all to ask good questions of those around you. There are many people in the world, who are simply going through life without being confronted with the bigger questions of life. They never think much about God, eternity, their own souls, or their sin before a holy God. They life revolves around themselves and their job. They focus their attention upon the kids or upon the championship basketball game tomorrow night or on the latest movie or their hobbies. Perhaps God might use you and your questions to begin to stir their hearts to think about things. I thought about some practical questions that you might ask those around you to initiate spiritual conversation in a non threatening way.

"Are you interested in spiritual things?"
"Do you attend church?"
"What about next Sunday. It's Easter, you know? Are you going then?"
"Are you going to church next Sunday for Easter?"
"What did your pastor speak about this past Sunday?"
"Do you believe in an afterlife?"
"Have you seen 'The Passion of the Christ'? What did you think?"
"Do you believe the Bible? Do you ever read the Bible?"
"Are you religious?"

These are all good questions. These types of questions are all good questions to ask to begin to stir someone's interest. I encourage you to be asking these types of questions to others, because **the good questions lead to the great questions**.

In verse 13, Jesus asked The Good Question. In verse 15, Jesus will ask ...
2. The Great Question (verse 15)

He said, "But who do you say that I am?" By this question, Jesus cuts through all of the smoke. He cuts through the small talk and gets down to the fundamental question of life. "Who do you say that I am?" Indeed, this is the fundamental question of life, "Who do you believe that Jesus is?" It's not enough to trust current public opinion about Jesus, it's not enough to rest upon what your parents believe, and it's not enough to let your pastor decide these things. The issue is more direct than that. "Who do you believe that Jesus is?"

The Bible declares that Jesus is the Creator of the world (Col. 1:16, "all things have been created by Him and for Him."); the Sustainer of the world (Col. 1:17, "in Him all things hold together."); the Lord of the world (Eph. 1:22, God has "put all things in subjection under His feet."); the Judge of the world (In Matt. 25:32, Jesus described the day coming when He is sitting on His throne, judging the world, separating the sheep from the goats); and the Savior of the world (John 3:16, "whoever believes in Jesus will not perish, but will have eternal life."). Jesus is the sovereign and supreme one.

This is who Jesus is. The Bible says that Jesus is all of these things, "that He Himself might come to have first place in everything" (Col. 1:18). Do you believe that Jesus has the supremacy in all things? Your eternal destiny depends upon your belief in Jesus. If you believe Jesus to be anything less than the sovereign, supreme ruler, judge, and savior of the universe, you are defaming His name. If you believe that you will stand before God in His holiness, apart from faith in the shed blood of Jesus, you will perish in your sins. If you believe that you can make it through life without the day-by-day, ongoing strength and support of Jesus, your life will crumble.

Do you believe that Jesus has supremacy in all things? Have you trusted in His all-sufficient sacrifice for your sins? Are you resting and trusting today in Jesus? If you aren't, I say to you that your soul is in danger.

In this world of ours, there are many differing beliefs about Jesus. Some people would deny that Jesus even existed, believing the Bible to be

a made-up book of fairy tales. However, most people in our society would at least admit that they believed that a man, named Jesus, lived in the land of Palestine some 2,000 years ago. Many believe that Jesus was a good man, but that is all. Many believe that Jesus was a great teacher, on the order of Plato or Socrates. The Muslims would elevate Jesus to the be one of the prophets, sent from God with a message from the Lord. In one sense, many of these answers are true. Jesus was a good man. Jesus was a great teacher. Jesus was a prophet, sent from God. In another sense, these answers all fall short and are wrong. Jesus wasn't merely a good man. He was a *perfect* man. Jesus wasn't merely a great teacher. He was the *greatest* teacher. Jesus wasn't merely a prophet. He was *the* prophet.

"Who do you believe that Jesus is?" (verse 15). It matters greatly whether you answer this question correctly or incorrectly. In verse 16, we see Peter answering the question correctly. This brings us to my third point:

3. The Right Answer (verse 16).

Verse 16 reads, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The New American Standard is good here, where it gives the footnote, "You are the Messiah!" This is what the word, "Christ" means. It means "Messiah." You might also translate it, "Anointed."

Everything that I said before about Jesus is wrapped up in this term, "Messiah." You simply need to read Isaiah 61 and you will discover that the Anointed One will come and preach the good news of "liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" (verse 1), as the *Savior*. If you read Psalm 2, you will discover that the Anointed One is the one who rules the earth and sits as *King* upon the earth. There will be a day in which he comes to earth and wipe out all rebellion against Him, as the *Lord* and *Judge* of the earth. Those who worship Him and take refuge in Him will be "blessed" in their deliverance (Psalm 2:12). Those who continue to resist Him will be "shattered like earthenware" (Ps. 2:9). It is also interesting to note that the Anointed One is called "the Son" in Psalm 2, which corresponds exactly to Peter's confession, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (verse 16).

As I said in my introduction this morning, this is the climax of the book of Matthew. This is where it is all pointing: to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He is the Christ. He is the Messiah. He is the Anointed One, who has come to rescue His people. For two and a half years of ministry, Jesus has kept His true identity somewhat a mystery. In John 10:24, the Jews gathered around Jesus and said to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." His identity had been veiled. But, now the veil is lifted. The truth is out. Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah.

In the last six months of His ministry with His disciples, He will be more and more open with His disciples, informing them of what will take place in months and years to come. Look at verse 21, "*From that time* Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." The sense here is clearly that this revelation is the hinge around which Jesus began to focus His disciples upon the purpose of His coming to earth in the first place. Sure, the miracles were good and the teaching was great and His incredible compassion was wonderful, but now we begin to see why Jesus came to earth.

So why did Jesus come to earth? Matthew 20:28 says, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as ransom for many." He came to "render Himself as a guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10). He came to take our iniquity of our sins upon His body on the cross (Isaiah 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:24).

So who is Jesus? Peter gave the right answer. He is the Messiah. But, how did Peter come to know this? Was he the smartest of all of the disciples? Was he always searching through the Old Testament passages to figure this Jesus thing out? Did he discover on his own through His study that Jesus fulfilled an unbelievable number of prophecies, that led him to realize the truth about Jesus? No, of course not. Peter gave the right answer because it was ...

4. The Revealed Answer (verse 17).

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven' (verse 17).

Do you know why Peter gave the right answer? Because God, the Father who is in heaven, revealed it to him. Peter wasn't smarter than the other disciples Peter didn't have the insight that the others didn't have. Peter didn't grow up in the right home with the right surroundings. Peter saw everything that all of the other disciples ever saw. Peter had the right answer because it was the revealed answer.

Jesus said that it wasn't through "flesh and blood" that he knew this. When the phrase, "Flesh and blood" is used in the Bible, it simply describes an earthly, bodily experience. For instance, when Paul received revelation from heaven, Paul said, "I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). In other words, Paul said, "I didn't talk with other people about it right away." The writer to the Hebrews describes the incarnation of Jesus as a partaking of "flesh and blood" (Heb. 2:14). In other words, "the divine took on the human." Paul wrote, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness" (Eph. 6:12). He is saying that "our struggle isn't so much on the earthly, mortal, realm. It is being fought in the spiritual realm."

So, when Jesus told Peter, "Barjona," (which simply means, "son of Jonah") that "flesh and blood did not reveal this to you," He was saying that you didn't come to understand this because of earthly things. You weren't persuaded by the miracles. You weren't convinced by the prophecies. You weren't enlightened by My authority. It was God who revealed it to you.

This is a great picture of our salvation. For those of us who have come to believe and know and trust and love Jesus, it isn't because we are so smart that we have figured it all out. It isn't because we have read enough books that prove Jesus to us. It isn't because we have heard some great, persuasive speaker. It isn't because we have witnessed the great, godly lives of others that have convinced us. It isn't because we are more righteous or holy than other people. It is because God has revealed the truth to us, opened our eyes to see Jesus and (2 Cor. 4:6), and made us alive (Eph. 2:5).

It's God's work to illumine the mind to understand. Apart from God's intervention, none of us would seek for God, nor would any of us discern the glories of the work of Jesus on the cross. Consider 1 Cor. 1:30, "by His doing you are in Christ Jesus." In other words, God initiates salvation and God brings it to pass. He grants repentance. He grants faith. He gives discernment. Why are you in Christ? Because of what you did? No. It is because of what God has done, "by His doing you are in Christ Jesus." Why has God done it this way? 1 Corinthians 1:29 says, "that no man should boast before God."

Could you imagine Peter walking around and talking with the disciples after this event? Could he be boastful, saying, "Hey guys, do you know what? I figured it out! Jesus is the Messiah. I've been thinking about it for a long time. I've been puzzled about it. But, finally, I put two and two together and I discovered that Jesus was the Messiah. Do you remember when John the Baptist asked about Jesus? Jesus responded with Messianic works in fulfillment of Isaiah 35. For instance, the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the lepers being cleansed, and the deaf hearing. And we saw Jesus do these things. It must be that Jesus is the Messiah! I solved the riddle!"

Jesus said the exact opposite took place in Peter. He said, "flesh and blood did not reveal this to you." Peter could never boast of anything before God or others. The only way that Peter could ever talk about these things is by saying to his fellow disciples, "Hey guys, I may have been the first one of us to come out and say that Jesus was the Messiah. But, don't give the credit to me. I hardly even knew what I was saying. I had never even thought much about it before. But then, it was as if everything became clear for me. Jesus said that God revealed it to me. And I spoke and said, 'You are the Christ.' Don't give me credit for being the first to clearly confess this. Rather, give God the glory for revealing it to me. I was simply His mouthpiece."

You ought to think of your own salvation in similar terms. Perhaps your testimony runs something like this: "I came to a crisis in my life, where I had nowhere else to turn, so, I turned to God. I began attending church, where I heard the gospel clearly preached for the first time: that by faith in Christ, I can be reconciled to God. As I attended the church and met the people, I came to see more and more clearly that trusting in Jesus was the only way to have happiness in this life or in the life to come. And as I look back, it was God who brought the crisis in my life. As I look back upon it, God stirred my heart to seek Him. God used the people of the church and the message of salvation to draw me to Himself. The words of Jesus ring clear in my ears, 'No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him' (John 6:44)." This is God's grace. This is our salvation. You will never believe the truth about Jesus until God reveals it to you!

Consider how Peter spoke about the salvation of others in the scattered churches to whom he wrote. He said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Literally, Peter said that God "borned us again." It was God's work that regenerated us. God has done it. God has caused it to happen. May you glory in these things!

We come now to our fifth point, ...

5. The Promised Church (verse 18a).

Jesus promises a remarkable thing: Jesus promises to build His church. Look at verse 18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church."

Over the years, this verse has been the topic of much discussion. The Roman Catholic Church has staunchly defended the interpretation that Jesus was making Peter the first Pope, upon whom the entire church would be built. The Protestant church, on the other hand, has reacted strongly to this interpretation by claiming that it was upon Peter's confession of Christ, not upon Peter, Himself, that the church would be built.

The debate centers around the meaning of two similar Greek words. Let me read this text by inserting the appropriate Greek words, so that you might hear the nuance. Jesus said, "And I also say to you that you are Petros, and upon this Petra I will build My church." Jesus called Simon Peter, "Petros," which means "rock." (You might call him "Rocky") And then, Jesus said that upon this "Petra" I will build My church. "Petra" is the normal form for the word, "Rock."

The Protestants argue that these two words are different. They say that "Petros" describes a stone, or boulder. They say that "Petra" describes a giant slab of bed-rock. They say that Jesus was founding His church upon the "bed-rock," of the confession that Peter made. The Roman Catholics, on the other hand, are quick to divert the attention away from the Greek words which are written to the Aramaic words, which Jesus actually spoke. They point out that in Aramaic, there are no differing forms for the word, "Rock," which is "Kepha" (from which we get the word, "Cephas" as found in 1 Cor. 15:5, referring to Peter). The Roman Catholics argue that Jesus must have said, "I also say to you that you are Kepha and upon this Kepha, I will build My church." And so the debate rages. It goes on and on and on and on.

Rather than muddying the waters, I will say just this. If Jesus had wanted to establish His church upon Peter, He could have said so in terms that weren't so cryptic. He could have said, "You are Peter, and I'm going to build my church upon you." Jesus did this in verse 19, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

If Peter thought that Jesus was going to build the church upon Him alone, as the Roman Catholics like to say, I believe that he would have written something about it in His epistles. In 1 Peter 2, Peter speaks about the church, using the imagery of stones and rocks, but he is silent about himself. He said that all of us are "living stones [which] are being built up as a spiritual house" (1 Pet. 2:5). At the foundation of all of it, is the precious corner stone that God laid in Zion, which is Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:6). Peter considered himself as a "living stone" not much different than others in the church. And so, I resist and reject the Roman Catholic understanding of this passage.

However, I can't sway as far as those who would like to take Peter entirely out of the picture and identify the "Rock" here as only referring to Peter's confession. There is a connection between Petros and Petra. There is a play on words. Jesus is not taking Peter out of the picture. Jesus is placing Peter, in the context of God's revelation coming to him, as foundational to the church. In Ephesians 2:20, the church is described as "having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," though Christ Jesus Himself is "the corner stone." Peter and the other apostles played a crucial role in establishing the church of Jesus Christ on this earth.

When interpreting the Bible, you need to realize that symbols and metaphors can be used in different ways and in different contexts. To take one symbol and push it to an absolute may cause you at times to contradict other scripture. For instance, In this text, Jesus said, "I will build My church." Yet, Paul called himself, "a master builder" (1 Cor. 3:11). Peter was given the keys in our passage, but Jesus said that He has the keys (Rev. 1:18). Jesus claimed to be the light of the world (John 9:5). Yet, He also told His disciples that they are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). None of these are contradictory. The metaphors simply can't be pushed to the extreme, which the Roman Catholic Church has done when Jesus gave a measure of prominence to Peter.

Peter was foundational in the building of the early church. Just as the apostles were all foundational (Eph. 2:20), Peter was the leader of the apostles, which sets him as prominent among the apostles. We will see in a bit that it was Peter that preached at Pentecost and brought the gospel initially to the Jewish community. Under his preaching, thousands of Jews were saved. Furthermore, Peter was the one who brought the gospel to the Gentiles. God used Peter to open the doors of the kingdom wide open. Peter would be foundational. But, it doesn't exalt Peter above us as the one with all of the power and authority, as the Roman Catholics have sought to do in their abuse of this text. They have used this text to identify Peter as the first Pope, though the first person identified as "pope" was Gregory I in 604 A.D. -- more than 500 years after Peter. (It is interesting to note that Gregory refused the title, as it wasn't bestowed upon him by the church, but by the emperor, Mauritius. However, Gregory's successor, Boniface III, took the title unto himself).

In all of this discussion, I am fearful that people have missed the great promise of this verse. Jesus said, "I will build My church." Many sermons have been preached on this phrase alone, as it is incredibly rich. I have personally heard several sermons from this text. I remember when we purchased our church building in DeKalb, we invited Dr. Richard Mayhue, the vice-president and dean of the Master's Seminary, to come and preach for us at our building dedication service. He preached from this phrase. I have my notes from that time in my hand. He preached on the seven hallmarks of a Christ-built church. It is built upon a ...

1. Permanent foundation - on Christ Himself.
2. Personal involvement - "I"
3. Positive expectation - "will"
4. Powerful advance - "build"
5. Paid in full - "My"
6. People-centered priority - "church"
7. Promise of success - "the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

So, we could spend much time on this phrase, alone. I want to focus on the main point. Jesus has promised to build His church. "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). Now, as a pastor, this has tremendous implications. I labor, week in and week out, to build the church. Paul called himself, "a wise master builder" of the church, laying a foundation upon Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:10). And yet, it is Jesus who builds the church.

This doesn't mean that I sit back and relax, because Jesus is building His church and I have nothing to do. There is plenty that a pastor must do. This week at our dinner table, the discussion around the table revolved around work. We were discussing what different people do to earn a living. We asked Hanna, our four year-old, "What does dad do?" She said, "He is a pastor." We asked her what dad does as a pastor. She said, "preach...and sing...and have people over to our house." That was her perspective on my job.

Do you want to hear my perspective? Jesus said, "the kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows--how, he himself does not know" (Mark 4:26-27). I labor and I study and I strive to do everything that I can possibly do to cast seeds upon the soil of your hearts. I go to bed at night exhausted, and then I get up and do it again. God uses that seed and grows His church. How does that take place? I'm not sure. But God uses His word in the life of His people to grow in their love for Him and to serve others from the grace that works in them.

I look around at what God has done here at Rock Valley Bible Church, and I take no credit for it. Certainly I have labored. Certainly I have toiled. But, my labor and my toil has been the grace of God within me (1 Cor. 15:10). And His working in you has grown and matured you as well. And many of you have given much time and effort to serve the people of this church. Yet, again, it isn't you. It is the grace of God within you.

I remember talking with a good friend about two years ago about how we were involved in the starting of Kishwaukee Bible Church and how we moved up here to Rockford to plant Rock Valley Bible Church. He said, "You should write a manual on how to plant churches. You have done it twice now. You might help others who are in the same situation." As I have thought about what we have done, we haven't had much of a strategic plan. Many times when churches begin, they have a complete plan of the types of people that they want to target: young families or singles. Then, based upon the people they are seeking to reach, they find music that will appeal to them. Then, they try to preach sermons that would attract these types of people--addressing their felt needs. They try to paint the walls the right color and have the physical layout of the church building be just right.

We haven't done any of that. I have never taken a class on church planting. I have never been to a church planting seminar. I don't consider myself an expert on doing this. I have simply sought to take the one tool that God has given pastors, the Bible. And have taken this tool and studied it and sought to teach it as best as I now how. And the truth of the Scripture has taken root in you and you have grown and have sought to serve others and tell others of the grace of Christ in your life. And Jesus has built His church.

Any growth that has come has simply been a fulfillment of the promise of Jesus made long ago to Peter and the apostles, "I will build My church." I will tell you that this truth has comforted me greatly over the years. Jesus will do His work in our church. My task is to be faithful to the work that He has called me to do: preach and teach and lead and serve (and to sing). Your task is to be faith to the work that He has called you to do: grow and love and serve and help and spread the word in whatever ways that you can. In so doing, Christ will be honored in all we do. *Whether we grow to 1,000 or stay at 100, Jesus is building His church.*

Now, our final point. The promised church is, ...
6. The Powerful Church (verse 18b-20).

Jesus said, "the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (verse 18b). Again, there is dispute over what these gates are. I believe that the most simple and straightforward explanation is that the gates of Hades refer to death and dying. In the New Testament, Hades most often refers to the grave. The gates of Hades are what leads to the grave, which is death and dying. In the Old Testament, "the gates of Hades" is often used to refer to death (Job 17:16; 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18; Isa. 38:10). In Revelation 1:18 this is clearly seen when Jesus said, "I have the keys of death and Hades." I believe that Jesus is simply saying that the church will never die. It will continue on. It will always be there. Why? Because Jesus is building the church. This speaks to the power of the church. It will be triumphant.

In verse 19, we get another view of the power of the church. Jesus told Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Again, there is great discussion about the meaning of this verse. I think that the most simple way to take this is to realize that Jesus gave Peter the keys to open to the Jews and to the Gentiles the church. This is recorded for us clearly in the book of Acts. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit descended upon the early church. They began to speak in languages unknown to them, but known to others. When Peter stood to explain the phenomenon and preach the gospel, thousands of Jewish people were saved. In Acts 3, again it was the ministry of Peter that brought thousands more Jews into the church. Acts describes the opening of the door of Messiah's kingdom to the Jews. In Acts 10, you see Peter opening the door of Messiah's kingdom to the Gentiles. According to a divine vision, Peter travelled to Joppa to see Cornelius, and "his relatives and close friends" (Acts 10:24), all of whom were Gentiles. When Peter preached, the Holy Spirit descended upon these Gentiles and they spoke in tongues as did the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. This was a big deal, because the apostles later gathered to hear what took place through the mouth of Peter. They concluded that "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). It is the power of the Messianic age. The gospel came to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. And Peter was the one through whom all of this took place. He opened the door with the "keys" Jesus gave him.

Verse 19 continues on, "and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Again, I believe that this is a testimony as to the power of the church. Jesus is saying that what takes place on earth has heavenly implications. The things bound here upon the earth are bound in heaven. The things loosed here upon the earth are loosed in heaven.

The Roman Catholic church takes these statements and holds on to them and wield their spiritual authority as if they were in charge of everything. They take what they can and they push it to its extreme in their quest for power. (By the way, it's not only the Roman Catholic church that does this. The leadership of other churches can wield a heavy hand and lord it over people). But Peter never did this. Though he, himself, was given the keys and the authority, he encouraged his fellow elders to do as he did, "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

Peter is given this authority here, but in Matthew 18:18, this authority is given to the church as well. Jesus' words in Matthew 18 deal with how to restore sinning members of a congregation back into the fold. In the process, we see exactly how this binding and loosing works. I believe that God has given spiritual discernment and authority to the body of Christ as a collective whole. And when a person remains hardened in sin and won't listen to the private reproof of a brother, nor to the counsel of two or three, nor to the pleadings of the entire church, Jesus says that they are as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer, unforgiven and in need of repentance. As the church disciplines them, they are bound on earth and in heaven. As the church receives them back based upon their repentance, their sins are loosed here on earth and in heaven. This is the authority of the body of Christ. It's not top-down dictatorial. It's a matter of church-wide discernment. Certainly, the leaders of the church take the lead in this and bear the primary responsibility. This is the power of the church.

As we step back from our passage this morning, we see that Jesus has revealed who He was -- He was the Messiah; and what His plan would be -- He would build the church. The message now comes to you. Are you in sync with God's plan?

Is Jesus your Christ? Is Jesus your Messiah? Is Jesus your Savior? Jesus "warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ" (verse 20). But now, that's not the case. Today is the day of good news. Today is the day to proclaim the name of Christ to the world. Are you doing this? How about your involvement in the church, which Jesus promised to bless? The church is God's plan. How well do you know the people of the church? How well do you serve the people of the church? How well do you give to advance the cause of the church?

The kingdom of Christ will be established upon the person of Jesus, the Messiah, and the plan of Jesus, the church. May those at Rock Valley Bible Church be fully engaged in His plans.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 4, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
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