

"Upon This Rock"

Matthew 16:13-20

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Introduction:

Over the past week, probably all of us have seen the results of some kind of poll. In fact, probably most of us are sick of polls! Here we are only nine days away from the 2008 presidential election, and it seems that the news is almost consumed with polls concerning which way certain groups of people will vote. Most major universities (including UW Madison) now have at least one class exclusively focused on how to conduct polls and how to interpret the results. Polls have become so important, in fact, that according to an article in the New York Times, there are now **"polls that are being used to evaluate the polls."** With this in mind, and right here at the peak of this election season, I would like for us to remember that there was a time when Jesus, during His ministry, also asked questions concerning the public's opinion of who He was. Jesus took a survey. Jesus wanted to know. If you will, please look with me at **Matthew 16**. In just a few minutes, we will be looking at **Matthew 16:13-20**. **▶PPT▶** In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1530**.

We are about to find that Jesus and His disciples are in a place called Caesarea Philippi. As I understand it, the main feature in Caesarea Philippi was a huge rock cliff with several caves in it, and in the ancient world, there were pagan temples built in front of those caves. In fact, water still comes from those caves and is the main tributary to the Jordan River. So basically, the Jordan River starts at the base of the huge rock cliff in Caesarea Philippi, the cliff that is pictured on the wall behind me. With this as background, I would like to invite you to look with me at an opinion poll commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ as he was about two years into his 3-½ year earthly ministry—**Matthew 16:13-20**...

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus 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. ¹⁸ "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in

heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

And so the original polling question is found back up in **verse 13**, where Jesus asks the question, **"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"** At first, the question may seem a little ridiculous, and yet we need to realize that with Jesus, the correct answer to this question is essential to salvation—even today! So Jesus asked His disciples what people were saying about Him, and in **verse 14**, we see the answers as the disciples start comparing Jesus to some of their greatest heroes from the past. Some said He was like John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

We notice that all of these are all honorable opinions—these are all very positive views, and yet it is possible for people to have a positive view of Christ, while at the same time being wrong. And we are reminded here that when it comes to Jesus, the majority will always be wrong. And so Jesus gets very personal. In **verse 15**, He focuses in and He says to His disciples, **"But who do you say that I am?"**

At that point, I can imagine a moment of stunned silence as the disciples start thinking about a concept that they were almost afraid to express in words. The disciples were eye-witnesses. They had seen the miracles. They had been with Jesus almost constantly. They had heard everything, they had seen everything. And so we come to Peter, and Peter realizes that the answers already given are not good enough, and so Peter responds (in **verse 16**) by saying, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Jesus then responds by saying that this correct answer had come not from Peter, but from God Himself.

And in the blessing (in **verse 18**), Jesus said, **"And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church."** It is important to realize that at this point Jesus uses the word **"church"** for the very first time in the Scriptures. This morning, then, I would like for us to focus our attention on this statement, and I would like for us to consider several lessons concerning the Lord's church based on this one passage.

I. One of the first things we notice about the church (based on what we have just read) is that the Lord's church has been built on a solid FOUNDATION. »PPT»

Some time ago, I read the story of a little boy who grew up building sandcastles near his home on the Atlantic coast. One year, for several days in a row, a group of older kids would come along and kick those castles down. Finally, the boy decided that he would put some old cinder blocks, and rocks, and chunks of old concrete in the base of his castles, and so he built his castles on top of those rocks. And when the older kids came back and started kicking in the sandcastles with their bare feet, they never came back again!

We could almost say something similar about the Lord's church. There are people all around us who would love to destroy the church. Various man-made denominations try to take away its importance. And yet Jesus tells us here in **Matthew 16** that His church was to be built upon the **"rock."**

The word for **"Peter"** here means **"stone"** or **"pebble,"** the word is **"PETROS"** (it is masculine in gender). But when Jesus comes to building His church, He says that it will be built upon the **"PETRA,"** which is a different Greek word (feminine in gender), referring to **"bedrock,"** a **"rock ledge,"** or a **"cliff."** In other words, Jesus turns to Peter, and He says, **"You are a stone, and upon this bedrock I will build My church."** We learn from this that the church was not built upon Peter himself.

If you ever go and see St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, one of the first things you notice when you go in the door is a long line over along the right-hand side of this huge building. **»PPT»** And when you look carefully, you realize that hundreds of people are standing in line to see a statue of the apostle Peter. This is the main attraction. But people are not waiting in line just to admire the sculpture—it was not made by a famous artist, it is not really beautiful—but they are standing in line for a chance to kiss Peter's foot. His foot is right there at eye level. The whole statue is really dark—perhaps made out of bronze or something, very tarnished, dark brown—but when you look very carefully, Peter's right foot is as shiny as polished gold, as a result of the constant kissing and rubbing over who knows how many hundreds of years. And yet is this what Jesus was saying? Was Jesus saying in this passage that Peter is to be honored for all time as the founder of a world religion? Was Jesus saying that people should travel for hundreds of miles to kiss the toe on a bronze statue of the apostle Peter? No, He was not! There were two words used here—Peter was the little stone, and the church was to be built upon the bedrock. **»PPT»**

What, then, is the rock? Well, the bedrock is what Peter said on that occasion—Peter's statement that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Let us never forget this! People may say that the Lord's church is not important, but let us remember that the Lord's church is built on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Years later, the apostle Paul would say in **1 Corinthians 3:11**, **"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."** Jesus is the foundation of the church, and going back to those kids who kicked the sandcastle, there is a Judgment Day coming. Those in the church will be saved, and the feet of those who kick the sand will meet the rock upon whom the church is built. So first of all, we learn from **Matthew 16** that Jesus is the foundation of the church.

II. As we go back to Matthew 16:18, we find that Jesus not only is the foundation, but He is also the builder. »PPT»

Jesus said, **"Upon this rock, I will build My church."** Jesus is the builder. We know from **Mark 6:3** that Jesus was a carpenter. Can you imagine what would happen if someone claims to discover a table that had been built by Jesus Christ? We can be sure that the claim would be challenged. Archaeologists would do their own independent research. They would compare it to other tables made during the same

time in history. There would be a huge investigation, and rightly so. How much would such a table be worth? It would almost certainly end up at a museum in a climate-controlled room behind bullet proof glass. Obviously, there is no such table. But just for argument's sake, let's apply this line of thinking to the church. Jesus promised to build His church. And so if we find a church out there that claims to be a church that Jesus built, wouldn't we also demand some kind of proof? Wouldn't we also demand some kind of investigation? How would we know whether a church had been built by Jesus or not? And would it be arrogant for us to investigate? No, it would be expected! Just going around saying, "**Hey, we're the church that Jesus built,**" does not really prove anything. So, what are we looking for in a church?

Obviously, we would want a church that wears the name of Christ. I think in this regard we would truly appreciate the words of Martin Luther. At one point in his life, Luther responded to some people who had started referring to themselves as "**Lutherans.**" This is his response—he said, "**In the first place, I pray you to leave my name alone, and not to call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? ...I have not been crucified for any one. How then does it befit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of Christ? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with them all; and let us call ourselves only Christians....**" We would certainly agree with Martin Luther in that regard! If Christ is the builder of the church, then the church should bear His name.

What else should we look for in a church that was built by Christ? Well, going back to **Matthew 16:18**, we would also want to find a church that was established at the appropriate time. It is significant that Jesus says, "**I will build My church.**" It was something that would happen in the future. At the time He said it, the church was not yet built, but it was something He was going to do. In fact, in every reference to the church or the kingdom before **Acts 2**, the reference is to something in the future, and in each reference to the church after **Acts 2**, the reference is to something already in existence. And so the Lord's church was established on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**. We do not have time for an in-depth study of **Acts 2** this morning, but if you would like to read about the "**opening day**" of the Lord's church, we would encourage anyone to investigate by reading **Acts 2**. Peter preached the first sermon, the people responded by asking, "**What must we do to be saved?**," Peter told them to change their hearts and be immersed for the forgiveness of their sins, 3,000 people were baptized, and the very last line in **Acts 2** says that, "**...the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.**" The Lord was adding the saved to the church on a daily basis. It all started right there in **Acts 2**! Jesus is the builder of the church.

Is it possible to simply be a Christian without ever joining a man-made denomination? Absolutely! We would ask the question: When those 3,000 people were baptized in **Acts 2**, which denomination did they join? If we could go back in time and ask them which denomination they joined, they would look at us like were crazy—they would not understand the question. Those 3,000 people were simply Christians—they were baptized into Christ hundreds of years before even the first man-made denomination came into existence. And if they could be Christians

without joining any denomination, then we are saying the same thing today. It is possible to simply be a Christian—a member of the church that was built by Jesus nearly 2,000 years ago. Jesus is the builder of the church.

III. As we look back at Matthew 16, we also find that Jesus is the owner of the church. »PPT»

The idea is very personal, the relationship is intimate as Jesus says, ***"Upon this rock I will build My church."*** The church belongs to Jesus Christ. As the church, the Lord owns us. The word ***"church,"*** of course, literally refers to those who are ***"called out."*** The church is not a building—this building is nothing. But as people, we have been ***"called out"*** of the world, we are different, we are strange, and as a group of people who have been ***"called out"*** of the world, we belong to Jesus Christ.

Now if the church belongs to Jesus, that means that the church does not belong to me. That means that this is not ***"my church,"*** this is not ***"your church,"*** but the church itself belongs to Jesus. Well, what if I want to change some point of doctrine? What if I say, ***"You know, being immersed in water is pretty humiliating, there's no real glory in it, so from now on if you want to go to heaven you need to be able to slam dunk a basketball."*** And so we build a gym, and we start training people in how to jump, and we start inviting in the best coaches to help us train. Well, I cannot do that, because it is not MY church! The church does not wear my name. The church does not belong to me, so I have no right to change what the church teaches.

Well, how did the church come to belong to Christ? Who gave Him the right to dictate what we believe here? Well, in **Acts 20:28**, the apostle Paul was talking to the elders of the church in Ephesus, and he told them to, ***"...shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*** What gives Jesus the right? He bought it. But He did not have to go to the bank to borrow the money, He did not have to take out a mortgage, but the Bible says that He bought the church ***"with His own blood."*** And so when we put a sign out in front of this building that says ***"church of Christ,"*** it is not so much a formal title as it is a description. We are saying that the people who meet here are a group of people who belong to Jesus Christ. We are Christ's church. Jesus owns us. We belong to the Lord.

IV. So we have learned that Jesus is the foundation of the church, we have learned that Jesus is the builder of the church, and we have learned that Jesus is the owner of the church, but before we close this morning, we should notice one more very important lesson, as we look down at verse 19, we also find a lesson about what the church teaches as we discover that Jesus is the AUTHORITY of the church. »PPT»

In **verse 19**, we find an interesting statement as Jesus says, ***"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been***

loosed in heaven.” And so we see the concept of keys being given. This past week, I read an interesting piece of trivia as it has been discovered that the average person has a keychain with at least 9 keys on it, and the average person does not know what at least three of those keys are for. I think all of us understand what it means to have a key to something. It means that we have permission, and when we take one of our keys and give it to another person, we are also giving them our permission. For example, no one has a right to be in my house if I am not there. However, if I give you a key to my house, I am saying that you have my authority to go there. But if I do not want people just wandering in and out of my house, I will lock it when I am gone, and if someone does not have a key, then they are breaking the law by being there.

In the same way, if I give someone the keys to my car, then I am giving them my permission to drive it. It is a great privilege to be entrusted with a key. But we would also say that it is a tremendous responsibility. Perhaps you can remember the first time your dad gave you the keys to the family car. What a sense of freedom! But at the same time, what a sense of responsibility! For most of us, we had to take a class and pass a test. We had to practice. We had to prove that we were responsible. Some of us had to pay the insurance or pay for the gas. It was a responsibility.

And I would say in a similar way that Jesus was entrusting the apostles with a tremendous responsibility. The way this verse is worded is very interesting. Notice how Jesus says (in **verse 19**), **“...whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”** Jesus was not saying, **“You guys just go out and make up your own rules for the church,”** but Jesus was saying, **“The words that you will speak will have already been decided upon in heaven.”** Jesus, then, was giving the apostles His permission to speak with the authority of heaven. Perhaps in a similar way, when a police officer carries a badge, it does not mean that he can just go out and make up his own rules, but it means that he speaks with authority—it means that his word carries the weight of the law—it means that he is speaking on behalf of a higher power.

The apostles, then, went out and preached the word of God, and as they spoke, their words had already been authorized in heaven. They were speaking with God’s permission. Going back to the first day of the church, we find that Peter and the other apostles were the ones who stood up to preach the first gospel sermon. They were using their keys! And even in the days following, the Bible tells us in **Acts 2:42** that the new Christians, **“...were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”** The early Christians knew that the apostles were speaking with God’s permission.

A little bit later, in **Galatians 1:11-12**, the apostle Paul said the same thing. Paul said, **“For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”** Paul didn’t get it from Peter—he got it directly from the Lord! For this reason, the

Lord's church today does not have a man-made creed. Some of you know that several years ago I went to a religious bookstore and purchased a copy of the New Testament, but instead of having my name engraved on the front, I had them engrave something else, **"The Official Creed of the Churches of Christ."** When it comes to our creed, this is it. We do not have God's permission to make up our own teaching, we are not like those man-made religious groups who have a convention every year to vote on what they will believe over the following year—but we are to teach only what we can find in the Scriptures. And so when we go and tell someone what they need to do to go to heaven, we are not saying, **"Here are my rules for getting to heaven,"** but we are saying, **"Here is what God says, and we would encourage you to follow the Scriptures."** So it is not out of arrogance, but it is actually out of great humility. Our only authority that we have as a church is the inspired word of God.

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of our study of this very important passage, we are inviting all people to investigate. And again, if someone said, **"I have discovered a table made by Jesus the Carpenter,"** we would demand to see the evidence. And yet when people say, **"Here is a church built by Jesus,"** our society tends to say, **"Oh yeah, whatever."** But this morning we have presented evidence, and we have looked at several qualities of that church that Jesus promised to build:

- The church is built upon the statement that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
- The church is built by Jesus Himself and not by any human founder.
- The church is owned by Christ; that is, He purchased it with His own blood.
- And finally, the only authority of the church is the inspired word of God that was written down by the apostles and the other inspired writers of the New Testament.

How can we find the Lord's church today? I would suggest that you have already found it. You are sitting in a congregation of the Lord's people right now. We are not perfect, but...

- We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
- We trace our roots to Jesus—we do not claim any human founder.
- Those of us who are Christians have been purchased by the blood of Christ—He is our Owner.
- Our only authority as a church is the inspired word of God. When it comes to a creed, this is it (the Bible). We do not have any earthly headquarters. We do not have any convention telling us what to believe. But our only authority as a congregation is the inspired word of God.

We are not inviting you to join a social club, we are not just offering a place to hang out every Sunday morning, but we are offering God's plan of salvation. The Bible teaches that Jesus came to earth and died for our sins. He was buried, and then He was raised up on the third day. We respond to that good news by reenacting that

sacrifice in our own lives. We die to sin; that is, we turn away from all forms of sin. We allow ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins, and when we come up out of the water, we start living the Christian life. At the point of baptism, the Lord adds us to His church. It is possible to be a Christian today without ever becoming a member of any man-made religious denomination. If you have any questions about God's plan, we hope you will pull one of us aside after the service this morning, but if you are ready to obey the good news in your life right now, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org