

August , 23 2020

Speaker: Eric Naus **Series:** Better Together, Reflections on the Nature of the Church

Sermon Title & Passage: “Church on the Rock” – Matthew 16:13-20

Read Matthew 16:13-20 aloud as a group and then work through the following questions:

1. In verses 13-14, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples respond with answers common in their day: people said Jesus was a prophet – a spokesman for God among many others. Perhaps he was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other prophet come back to life before the great Day of the Lord (see Matt. 14:1-2, Malachi 4:5-6, Deut. 18:15-18). In your experience, if you were to “take a poll” among people you know in your workplace, neighborhood, and sphere of relationships, who would people say that Jesus is? How do their answers compare with people’s responses in Jesus’ day?
2. It’s not enough to judge Jesus by public opinion. Christianity requires every person to make their own assessment. In vs. 15, Jesus turns to the disciples and asks them, “Who do *you* say that I am?” How would you answer that question at this point in your life? What journey have you traveled in your life to reach your current conclusions about the nature and significance of Jesus?
3. In verses 16-17, what is the significance of Peter’s answer? Why does Jesus insist that such an answer must have been “revealed” by the Father?
4. In verse 18, Jesus plays on Simon’s nickname “Peter.” Peter is a name which means “rock.” Jesus had nicknamed Simon “Rocky” when he first called him (see John 1:42). Now, Jesus draws out the significance of the name, pointing at Peter and declaring “on *this* rock I will build my church.” Peter, as a leader among equals, would be a foundation stone for Jesus’ church. This squares with subsequent teaching in Scripture that all the Apostles, in partnership with Peter, would have a founding role for the church (see Ephesians 2:19-22, Revelation 21:14). Why is it so important to affirm the unique and unrepeatable role of Peter and the Apostles in the founding of the church? How does our understanding of the Apostles’ role in founding the church relate to our appreciation of Scripture and its authority for the church?
5. Also in verse 18, Jesus says that, “the gates of Hades shall not prevail” against the church. Hades is a reference to the grave, or the realm of the dead. The “gates of Hades” portrays death as a prison with gates or bars. So, Jesus is saying that even death itself will not be able to stop his church! As you think about church history, how have Jesus’ words proved true again and again? How does this promise relate to Jesus’ own resurrection? How should Jesus’ words embolden the church in the face of recent challenges in our world?

6. In verse 19, Jesus gives the “keys” of the kingdom to Peter (and by suggestion, to all the Apostles). These keys represent the authority to proclaim and guard the gospel, a message which “binds” or “looses” people in their relationship with God. These keys are apparently given to every Christian as well (see Matthew 18:17-18). If God has entrusted his church with such powerful keys, what does that imply about our responsibility to proclaim and guard gospel?

7. In verse 20, Jesus instructs the disciples not to broadcast his identity as the Messiah. Apparently, he wanted to avoid misunderstanding about the nature of his kingship, as he begins to head directly to the cross. After his death and resurrection, Jesus will instruct the disciples to proclaim his identity to the ends of the earth (see Matt. 28:18-20)! Why is it so important to understand Jesus not just as a king, but as a crucified and risen king?