

The Great Confession

Matthew 16:13-20

June 24, 2018

Read – abundant life in Jesus - John 10

Big idea: Christ's church is built on the great confession of faith first expressed by Peter but echoed by all true believers who enter the kingdom.

Intro –

There are some moments that change history. One such moment was when Orville and Wilber Wright first flew their Wright Flyer at Kitty Hawk on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. The brothers were diligent record keepers and they were worried about people stealing their ideas they had the foresight to document their work with photography so we have an actual photo of their historic flight.

That moment ushered in rapid change. Within 6 years there were airplane races in France. Within 12 years planes would be used in WWI. With 25 years Charles Lindbergh would fly across the Atlantic ocean. Within Orville Wright's lifetime planes propelled by jet engines would break the speed of sound.

All of those built off of the foundation of Orville and Wilber's work. But that first flight was anything but momentary to them. They had labored at their own expense using profits from their bicycle shop to build model gliders. They researched (before Google) to find a place with consistent high winds and lots of sand to practice flying their glider and refine their design, settling on Kitty Hawk and traveling there from Dayton, Ohio for months at a time for several years in a row. They realized the existing research on flight was deeply flawed so they built their own wind tunnel and tested scale models of wings to determine which design provided the greatest lift. Once they had the aerodynamics for controlled flight figured out with their glider they needed a way to propel it. Existing gasoline engines were primitive and heavy so they designed and built their own.

In our passage today we see a moment like this. It's hugely significant and foundational. And yet it builds on all that Jesus had been teaching His disciples.

Confusion, Confession, and Church. Christ is building His church through those who accurately confess Him. And He will prevail.

1. People's Confusion (16:13-14)

- a. Caesarea Philippi was a region about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Rebuilt by Herod Philip and so he named it Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from another Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast.
 - i. Appears to have been a quieter area for a time of discussion and reflection with His disciples. No mention of the crowds until middle of chapter 17. Timing of at least a week according to the beginning of ch 17.
- b. He asked them, "Who do people say that I am?"
 - i. "Son of man" was a common designation for Himself. Mark and Luke simplify it and ask it as "who do people say I am?"
 - ii. Why does He ask this?
 1. Is he looking for validation or to stroke His ego? Of course not.
 2. He is moving toward a significant moment of their expression of faith.
 3. This is the central question of the gospel, in fact of all 4 gospels, "who is He?"

- a. Every passage in every gospel is about Jesus' identity.
 - b. **John 20:31** ...these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.
- c. The people are confused.
 - i. John the Baptist – Herod in Matthew 14 expressed that view. Could also be that people had heard about John's ministry as a prophet but hadn't heard about his death and were confused, thinking that Jesus was John.
 - ii. Elijah – perhaps some thought that he rather than John the Baptist would fulfill the promise in Malachi 4 that Elijah the prophet would come and prepare the way for the Messiah.
 - iii. Jeremiah – saw the mixture of authority, personal suffering, and dire warnings and reminded them of Jeremiah
 - iv. One of the prophets – merely a prophet of God
- d. Who do people say Jesus is today in our community?
 - i. ISU outreach when I was a student – someone I know asked me why we were doing it – I said we want everyone on campus to know about Jesus. He said, "I think everyone already knows about Jesus."
 - ii. You probably wouldn't get an answer that Jesus is a resurrected OT prophet.
 - iii. You probably would get answers that are less than full expressions of faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the unique Son of the living God.
 - 1. He is a teacher
 - 2. He is our spirit brother
 - 3. He was a great prophet – but if He was a prophet but not the Son of God, then He was a false prophet, because He taught that he was more than a prophet (Sproul).
- e. Jesus' response shows that it's important what answer people give to the question.

2. Peter's **Confession** (16:15-16)

- a. Who do you say that I am?
 - i. "you" is plural so addressing all the disciples
 - ii. "you" is placed at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis
 - 1. "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
- b. Peter answered and from this point forward the "you" is singular, directed at Peter.
- c. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God
 - i. You are the Messiah we have been waiting for
 - ii. You are not just a prophet you are the Son of God making Him equal with God
 - 1. **John 5:18** For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.
 - iii. God is the living God, the true God not just some generic God but the real thing

d. The Father is the one who revealed this to Peter.

- i. Peter's faith is the work of God in his life. God had worked supernaturally in some way so that Peter grasped this. And Peter was blessed because of it.
- ii. Jesus didn't say, "Finally! Someone smart enough to get it!" because then Peter would have good reason for pride. Rather, Jesus pointed to God's work to open Peter's eyes.

3. Christ's **Church** (16:17-20)

Much debated passage.

a. Who or what is the **rock** on which Christ will build His church? (v. 18a)

- i. Jesus
- ii. The confession of faith
- iii. Peter
- iv. Complicated because this has been a key passage for the Roman Catholic Church in supporting their view of the Pope as the authoritative successor to Peter as the bishop of Rome and over the whole church.
 - 1. Typically I don't mention other religious groups by name because my goal is to teach the Bible and let it stand for itself without putting an unnecessary offense out there. But because this is such a prominent part of Roman Catholicism and a prominent distinction between Catholics and Protestants I want to address it directly.
 - 2. Cardinal J. Gibbons "The Catholic Church teaches that our Lord conferred on St. Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of his whole church, and that same spiritual authority has always resided in the popes, or bishops of Rome, as being the successors of St. Peter. Consequently, to be true followers of Christ all Christians, both among the clergy and laity, must be in communion with the See of Rome, where Peter rules in the person of his successor."
 - 3. Even if one holds to the view that the rock is Peter, there is no support in this passage or in the unfolding example in the New Testament for the authoritative succession of Peter.
 - a. Peter didn't have greater authority in the early church; indeed Paul corrects him publically in Gal. 2:11-14.
 - b. The disciples would not have asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven prompting his response in Matt 18 about humbling himself as a child if they understood ch 16 as elevating Peter.
 - c. Peter viewed himself as a "fellow elder" 1 Pet 5:1 and as a bondservant of Christ – 2 Pet 1 and warns his fellow elders to guard against lording it over those who are under his care (1 Pet 5:3).
 - d. Peter was certainly a leader in the early church but he was sent by the other apostles to Samaria in Acts 8:14, gave an account of his actions to the Jerusalem church in Acts 11:1-18 and fades out of significance after Acts 15 as Paul takes a more prominent role.

v. Returning to the 3 views

1. Jesus

- a. Jesus is described as the rock and foundation of the church in other passages.
- b. **1 Corinthians 10:4** and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.
- c. **1 Peter 2:6-8** For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."
- d. **1 Corinthians 3:11** For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- e. **Ephesians 2:20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,
- f. But this doesn't seem to be a natural reading of the passage and almost requires reading into it that Jesus points at Himself as He says "this rock."

2. The confession of faith

- a. Didn't say "on you" but "on this rock"
- b. Early view of the church expressed by Origen (died 253 AD) and Chrysostom (died 407 AD)

3. Peter

- a. "you" is singular
- b. Play off of his name Peter
 - i. You are *Petros* and on this *petra* I will build my church
 - ii. But it would seem more natural that He would say "upon you I will build my church"
- c. Peter was prominent among the apostles in the gospels and the first half of Acts
 - i. **Matthew 10:2** Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter,
 - ii. **Acts 2:14** But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea . .
 - iii. His name appears over 50 times in the first 12 chapters of Acts
- d. The apostles are described as the foundation of God's household with Christ as the cornerstone.
 - i. **Ephesians 2:20** having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,

4. This sermon will be known as the date that 1500 years of controversy in church history was finally settled :)

vi. The rock is Peter as he confesses Christ.

- 1. There is a clear word play – "You are *Petros* and upon this *petra* I will build my church."

2. The emphasis is not on Peter in his flawed humanity though but on Peter as a product of grace.
 - a. He is blessed because the Father revealed this to Him.
 - b. He immediately makes a huge misstatement resulting in a strong rebuke from Jesus (vv. 22-23)
3. Not referring to Peter as he was in himself but to him as Christ's instrument for the establishment of his church
4. Not Peter alone but the other apostles as well and Peter as the first among equals.
5. Peter and the apostles are the foundation only in a secondary sense. Christ Himself is the foundation, the cornerstone.
 - a. Jesus speaks of Himself as the builder and owner of the church – "I will build My church"
- b. Jesus will build **His church** and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. (v. 18b)
 - i. He will build it
 1. He may use Peter, the apostles, the reformers, you, but He is the one building it.
 2. The weight isn't on our shoulders.
 - ii. It is His church
 1. It's not my church. It's not your church. It's not even our church.
 - iii. Gates of Hades will not overpower it
 1. Hades is not synonymous with hell but with death. It's the place of death.
 2. **Isaiah 38:9-10** A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: ¹⁰ I said, "In the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of Sheol; I am to be deprived of the rest of my years."
 3. **Psalms 9:13** Be gracious to me, O LORD; See my affliction from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death,
 4. Death has no power to stop Christ's church. Jesus conquered death.
- c. The keys of the kingdom refer to the sharing of the **gospel** and the practice of church **discipline**. (v. 19)
 - i. The keys are used of knowledge
 1. **Luke 11:52** "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering."
 2. They (Pharisees) take away the key to knowledge by denying the Messiah
 3. Peter accomplishes this binding and loosing by proclaiming a gospel that has already been given and by making personal application on that basis (Simon the magician in Acts 8). Whatever he binds or looses will have been bound or loosed, so long as he adheres to that divinely disclosed gospel. He has no direct pipeline to heaven, still less do his decisions force heaven to comply, but he may be authoritative in binding and loosing because heaven has acted first. (Carson)

ii. Heidelberg Catechism

iii. **Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?**

1. A. The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline toward repentance. Both of them open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.

iv. **Q. How does preaching the holy gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?**

1. According to the command of Christ, The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers, each and every one, that, as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith, God, because of Christ's merit, truly forgives all their sins.
2. The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this gospel testimony.

v. Same language of binding and loosing is used in chapter 18 of church discipline

1. **Matthew 18:17-18** "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ "Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.
2. In the final step of church discipline the unrepentant professing Christian is removed from the church. The church is essentially saying, "we can't acknowledge you as a believer."

d. As before, Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone yet that He was the Christ.

- i. The people's concept of the Messiah, the Christ, was so skewed it would hinder His ability to accomplish His mission of teaching the people, showing compassion, and heading to the cross.

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4. Bringing the Word to Your Life

a. Who do **you** say Jesus is?

- i. Your answer to this question is not a point of trivia. It has eternal significance.
- ii. **John 8:24** "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."
- iii. Do you say, with Peter, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God."

b. Is Jesus using you to **build** His church?

- i. Are you part of the church?
 1. Be present. The word for church literally means a "gathering of called out ones" so at a minimum it means gathering. There is a corporate enjoyment and energy from gathering that is hindered when people are absent.
- ii. When was the last time you shared the gospel with someone, using the keys to open the doors of heaven?

- iii. Christ is building His church. That is a promise with the full certainty of the character of the one who made it. Do you have the joy of being part of the process?



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