

Jesus said 'I will build my Church'

Matthew 16 v13-20: Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"¹⁴ "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet."¹⁵ "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ "Good for you, Simon son of John!" answered Jesus. "For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven." ²⁰ Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Ephesians 2v20-22: You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord. In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit.

1 Peter 1v6-7 Be glad about this, even though it may now be necessary for you to be sad for a while because of the many kinds of trials you suffer. Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine. Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. Then you will receive praise and glory and honour on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed.."

Antiques roadshow

Do you ever get a tune stuck in your head? Even though I rarely watch the programme, I often get the theme tune from the antiques roadshow stuck in my head? On this show an antiques expert comes to your town, and you can take along any old artefact you have lying around to get it valued. There are usually people that have found some old item in their loft that they think might be worth a few pounds. A renowned expert does a careful examination of it. Everyone around the table has an opinion on what it is worth. But there is just one person there that can reveal its true worth. The expert. Often it is just rubbish, but occasionally, he will start to get excited, and sees something that he thinks is really valuable. He looks to find some authentication, perhaps a signature or a hallmark, then he looks at its condition and judges what it would be worth if it was restored and transformed to its former glory. Then, with cameras ready to film the reactions of the owner, and with the home viewers all guessing the price, this is about as exciting as the programme gets. Then the antiques expert reveals its true value and it is a huge amount. At first the lady owner cannot speak, then her eyes well up with tears, this is a life-changing sum. Then she finally speaks and confesses "I have been using it as a door stop for the last 10 years"! What was once viewed as old and dreary has taken on a new life, as its true value has now been outed.

What is your value?

What value is placed on you? Different people will have different opinions about you, on who you are and what you are worth. A scientist might say, that if your body is reduced to just to the chemicals you are made out of, forget the plentiful gases and water, and you are just 15% carbon, and 1.5% calcium, 1% Phosphorus, and traces of other minerals. Then you are worth about £4. But ask a black market organ transplanter, and he might give you £200,000 for just a kidney? But only the expert, only God himself, can reveal your true value. God sent his only son to die on the cross for you, and would have done if you had people the only person alive. That is much you are loved by God, that is how much you are valued. That is your real price tag. It is a wonderful moment when the first time you realise how much God loves you, and what you are really worth to him. You are priceless.

Beyond the Comfort Zone

Jesus wanted to know how people valued him, and he took the disciples on a spiritual retreat to find out. The disciples did not like leaving Jewish territory and going into Gentile territory. But Jesus had taken them 25 miles north of Galilee into pagan territory, and 1700 feet higher, to a city called Caesarea Philippi. It was near a grotto devoted to the Greek God Pan, and there was also a Roman temple for the worship of Ceasar. Perhaps an unusual place for a divine revelation, but it is often when we get taken out of our normal surroundings that we can see with a fresh perspective, which is why Christian retreat centres are so important nowadays. It gave Jesus a chance to escape the crowds of Galilee and have some special time with his disciples, and take them into a new important lesson.

Who do they think I am?

Jesus had given up being a carpenter builder at about 30 years old, and become a Rabbi, with his own disciples. They were a mixed bunch including a tax collector, a freedom fighter, some tradesmen and fishermen. Jesus had many other followers including women that helped finance his ministry. Then there were the thousands that came to hear him, and see him do miracles, and the Religious leaders that opposed him. They all had an opinion about how important he was, or not, to the Jewish world.

There was though something very different about this new Rabbi called Jesus. His teaching was fresh and extra-ordinary. He seemed to enlighten and explain the scriptures like no-one else, and then there were his extra-ordinary and supernatural miracles. No one knew of such a person before in their life time. But who is this unusual Rabbi, exactly how significant is he?

Jesus asked the disciples a question, but a strange one. He did not say, what do people think **about** me, or say about me. He said '**Who** do these people say I am'. Perhaps a leading question, and he would have already known the answer, but this is part of his discipling methodology and he is leading his disciples into an important learning point. Simon Peter often acted as spokesperson for the group, and he gives Jesus a range of conclusions that the people had come to.

His response may be a familiar passage to you but have you ever thought about what he is actually saying. He keys into a theory that had found its way into the Jewish system of teaching, and that was the doctrine of transmigration of souls i.e. the soul, or very essence of a person, can move from one body to another. The souls of the famous prophets and heroes from Jewish history were believed to still be around, having detached themselves from their bodies, and could appear **again** in a time of national crisis to carry on their great works.

Some people were saying that Jesus was John the Baptist, the first acclaimed Jewish prophet for hundreds of years, until he criticised Herod and got imprisoned for a while, then had his head chopped off. The people confused Herod by telling him that Jesus was John the Baptist come back (Luke 9v7)!

Others said Elijah had returned, as foretold by the minor prophet Malachi i.e. "before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah. (Malachi 4v5). Elijah had done a famous miracles by raising to life the only son of a widow who had died when he was lodging with them. When Jesus and his disciples met a funeral procession of a widows only son at the gates of the village Nain, and he raised the young man to life in a copy-cat miracle, then of course many starting seeing him as Elijah.

Some said he was the judgement prophet Jeremiah, and had come to pass judgement on them. Jeremiah y had some 'previous', as many thought that he had come back already as the minor prophet Zechariah, so this would be a third appearance, you just can't keep Jeremiah away! The disciples concluded that some say you are other prophets.

Who do you think I am?

Then Jesus puts his disciples on the spot. So what about you guys, do you believe in all that transmigration stuff? Who do **you** say I am?

Perhaps there was a moment of silence here, hesitation and no-one wanting to speak first and say something wrong. Simon Peter, stepped forward as spokesman, and opened his mouth. Some-one has to say something, but I am not sure Peter was going to say until he actually spoke.

"You are the Messiah – the son of the living God"

The Jews believed that the Messiah would be a future King of Israel, that would gather the dispersed Jews back into Israel and usher in a new era of peace, power and prosperity. For first century Jews that meant defeating the Romans too. There was not normally divinity attached to this belief. So Simon Peter, is taking this a stage further, not only is Jesus the Messiah, a bold claim in itself, but he was also giving him a divine title, the Son of God. I wonder if the other disciples looked at the fisherman, and thought woah – where did that come from? Perhaps the disciples looked at Jesus with fresh eyes at this revelation. Wow, yes- he is the messiah, the son of God.

But then Jesus is amazed, because Peter did not make this up himself, but the spirit of God is all over him and just revealed that to him. Peter the foul-mouthed hairy-bottomed fisherman who on first meeting Jesus told him to go away because he felt he had behaved so badly and shouldn't be in his presence. He tells Peter.

“Good for you, Simon Peter son of John!” answered Jesus. “For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven.” (Matt 16v18).

Peter would not fully understand his own words, until after the resurrection, but nevertheless in this moment he reveals the truth. This is not just a prophet, even a mighty one, not even just the messiah, this is the Son of God. That is his true value. The truth is out.

Pebble, Rock, Cornerstone

Jesus is amazed at Peter, and perhaps in the moment gets a prophetic insight himself of what Peter is to become and all the thousands of people that he will lead to faith in Him, becoming a great leader of the emerging church.

(v18) Jesus tells Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it.

Just like we often give children two Christian names, with the second one often a family generational name, or named after a relative you want remembering or honouring. In the time of Jesus, it was common to have two names, the first a Jewish name and the second a Greek name, such as John Mark, and Simon Peter.

The Greek word for the male name Peter is actually Petros which can mean rock or a pebble stone. The female derivative of the word Rock is Petra, which can only mean Rock. Jesus says here Petros you are a Petra. So the jury is no longer in session, any doubt if you are a pebble stone or Rock is gone; you are a Rock full-stop.

But let's be clear Peter is not the foundation of the church, he is not the cornerstone. In ancient building practices, the cornerstone was the principal stone placed at the corner of the edifice. The cornerstone was usually one of the largest, the most solid, and the most carefully constructed of any in the building. Paul describes Jesus as the Cornerstone that His church would be built upon, which would be a unified body of believers, both Jew and Gentile (Eph 2 v20-22). This was prophesied of Jesus in Isaiah **“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line.” (Is 28:16-17)**

Peter has shown via his words of faith that he is authentic, that God has placed his mark on him, through the Holy Spirit and the revelation he brings. The truth is out. Peter is the real deal here. This is the type of faith that God is looking for. He is authenticated by the hallmark of the Holy Spirit on him, and revealing truth about Jesus to him.

So I believe that Jesus is saying that he sees a rock-like faith in Peter. It will be tested, and he will make mistakes, but he will come through true and strong for Jesus. On this rock-like faith Jesus can build his church. He will bring others into this gathering of the faithful. The church will be built on and though those with this rock-like faith.

Keys to the Kingdom

Jesus then went on to say to Peter (v19) **“¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”** Keys were a symbol of authority and control.

So picture in your head Peter being given the keys to the kingdom of God, what do you imagine that looks like. Who has got a picture of St. Peter with along flowing beard with a big bunch of keys hanging down by his waist, guarding the pearly gates and you can't get into heaven unless Peter lets you in through this gate. But that is not a biblical image. It is a mash-up of this verse and one in John's vision of the age to come, in the book of Revelation. which describes a New Jerusalem that descends from Heaven to Earth, so is not in heaven. It then says it has 12 gates, each made out of a single pearl and they are never shut. [i.e. “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl..” (Revelation 21:21); “will

never be shut by day—and there will be no night there” (Revelation 21:22–25)]. There is no mention of Peter in the book of Revelations. He is not hanging around some future gates with a bunch of keys.

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, it's the presence and rule of God, which you enter by being born again. In its fullness it will be experienced when Jesus comes again, the age to come. But as believers we already have one foot in the kingdom of God, as we have been born of the Spirit. Being a Christian is about experiencing God now and carrying on the ministry of Jesus, now waiting until we die.

Peter and these other early disciples had got the first hand down-load from Jesus, and they were now stewards of these fresh revelations of Gods kingdom. The keys were the authority given to them from these new kingdom truths. Armed with this understanding they could unlock the gates for new believers to enter into these same truths, and be welcomed into kingdom life. It is Peter living out his rock-like faith, with an obedience and willingness to share it with others that are the keys to unlocking the kingdom of God to the Jews and the Gentiles.

Paul said that he was the Apostle to the Gentiles and Peter was the Apostle to the Jews (Galatians 2v7-8) i.e. which meant preaching the Good News of Jesus to them, although clearly Peter also reached out to Gentiles as he did when he brought faith to the whole household of a Roman centurion of the Italian Regiment, called Cornelius, to faith. Peter and Paul spread the faith just as Jesus had told them i.e to begin in Jerusalem, then to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the known world. Peter did this in Jerusalem, in Samaria, in provinces now in Turkey, Corinth in Greece, Rome in Italy, and most likely other countries not mentioned. So whilst he undoubtedly reached out to Gentiles too, his main focus were the Jews in Judea, and those scattered around the known world. This is him unlocking the gates of heaven, as he steps out with rock-like faith, the truth on his lips, and the spirit flowing through him, authenticating his words with mighty deeds. People even lay the sick on the route that Peter was going to take, so that his shadow might fall on them and heal them (Acts 5v15).

Authentication

When you accept that Jesus died for you on the cross to save you from all you have done wrong, and you choose to follow him and be adopted into the family of God, then he gives you the Holy Spirit, this is your hallmark that you are born again. This is your authentication as a Christian, the mark of the spirit on you.

The Holy Spirit working through you, are your keys to the kingdom. His work of the Holy Spirit is to lead people to truth to lead them to Jesus. The power of the holy spirit, the gifts of the holy spirit, should all be about people encountering Jesus, having a new hunger for Jesus. We are in trouble when we start using the gifts of the Spirit, or the presence of Holy Spirit to point towards ourselves, or a speaker, or about how great the worship is, or exalt some-one as a great healer. The whole purpose of the Holy Spirit is to lead people to Jesus and transform their lives, the whole purpose of the Spirit is to make Jesus famous, the whole purpose of the Spirit is to exalt his name on Earth, to bring people into a deeper and more intimate relationship with him and see their lives transformed by him.

If we make the Holy Spirit all about Jesus then we will be fine. He will not only transform our lives but then makes us into transformers unlocking the kingdom to those we meet, as he moves in and through us to others.

Transformation – Jesus, Paul, William Booth

God is all about transformations. Peter a fishermen who at first was so embarrassed by his own behaviour, that he told Jesus to get away from him because he was a sinful man [Luke 5v8]. Yet God pursued him, identifies him with his Spirit as his own, and transforms him into a disciple with a rock-life faith. He is the one that steps out of the fishing boat to walk on water when he sees Jesus doing the same. He is the one that steps out the front door of their building at Pentecost and preaches to vast crowds. He steps out with his rock-like faith and unlocks the kingdom to 3000 new believers in that one day. (Acts 2v41) He is transformed so that he can transform others.

God is all about transformation. A keen Jewish Pharisee Saul Paul of Tarsus was trying to please God by ridding the Jewish community of the troublesome Jesus sect. Yet God pursued him, Jesus meets him on the road to Damascus, and identifies him with his Spirit as his own, and transforms him into a disciple with a rock-life faith. He steps out his missionary journeys where has stones thrown at him in nearly every town, but establishes the Church all over the Gentile world when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. He changes the map. He was transformed so that he could transform others.

When I was a student in Aston, I went for year to the Salvation Armies Snow Hill Citadel. Why because I liked the story of William Booth. I arrived on my first day, and a big man in uniform on the door looked at me in my bright yellow cords, and charity shop jacket with my 'rock against racism' badge and asked me Are you a salvationist. I thought for a moment, and respond I believe in the salvation that comes from Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, and the transforming power of his holy spirit. Can I still come in?

God is all about transformation. When his family lost all their money, William Booth became an apprentice pawn-broker at the age of 13. Yet God pursued him, identified him by His Spirit , and transformed him into a disciple with a rock-like faith. This self-taught, preacher come evangelist, come social reformer, was physically attacked almost daily in the pubs where he taught that alcohol was a vice, and was even physically attacked by the church of England because he was happy to have women working on an equal basis to men. Many lives were transformed and many people saved through the ministry of William Booth. He was transformed so that he could transform others.

Peter, Paul, and Captain Booth all had the hallmark of the Holy Spirit on their lives, which authenticated them, made them the real deal. He one faced many attacks, persecutions, self-doubt, and difficulties, but it was giving thanks in these hard times that made them even stronger. Peter said in his first book **“Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. (1 Peter 1v7)** They each developed this rock-like faith, which drove them on to be transformers, but they could do nothing in their own strength, only through Jesus, only through his Spirit. He was made great in not in their strengths but in their weaknesses.

They were all great in their own, but God is no longer building his Church on Peter, or on Paul or on William Booth. Why, because they are all dead. He has to build his church now on you, on us, on the Christians alive today. We have to have a rock-like faith, and use the keys he's given us, the Gospel truth, to build his Church and bring others into the Kingdom of God. There is no Plan B. It's us or no-one ! We are transformed to transform.

Living stones

In Peters first book it says **“Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple” (1 Peter 2v5)**

We have great value placed on us by God, we are authenticated by the hallmark of the holy spirit on our lives, and we the gospel truth on our lips. . We are called to a rock-like faith where we use the gospel as the keys letting others into his kingdom, seeing their lives transformed and the church built on us.

So Peter's pleas is for us to give our lives as living stones, or living rocks. Make ourselves available to the master builder, and build our lives on his cornerstone, led by his spirit.

The Building Site

Today I am giving this talk outdoors on a building site, and where we stand a church building will be built. The size of this church building will depend on the architects plans.

On this Island, a church will be built, not a church building but a church. The size of this church will depend on how many of you here today, and those like you on the island, pick up the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and share the truth of Jesus Christ, the Good News of the Gospel, with those you know.

Jesus has no plan B for this island, you are it. The size of the church depends on you, being a living stone, having a rock-like faith, being transformed yourself so that you can transform others, and bring them in to faith and eternal life.

Where is your rock?

Where is your living stone today. Is it still in the quarry, in the dark, because you have never given your life over to Jesus and been saved. You need Jesus to blast you out of the dark quarry and into the light, with his explosive grace and love. He values you greatly, he will authenticate you by giving you his Holy Spirit, and if you let him he will restore you into what God had always intended for your life, and transform you so that you can transform others.

Perhaps you once made the decision to follow Jesus, but then you didn't get anywhere. You saw the light, were loaded into the lorry but you never reached the building site, because for some reason there was a flat battery, and you are stranded with one foot in your old life and one in your new. He still loves you, he forgives you again and again for letting him down, and calls you today to recommit your life to him, recharge that battery, get moving, and step into the plans and purposed that he has for your life.

Perhaps your stone has arrived at the site, but you are stuck at Good Inwards. Everyone around is getting stuck in and have great testimonies, but something had been holding you back. So close, but not yet in the hands of the master builder. Why, because though you are leading a good and righteous life, you are afraid of letting go and letting God, of putting your all in with him. Letting him take charge of your time, your career, your retirement finances, or whatever. We are transformed not so that we can find our place in heaven, but we are transformed so that we can carry on the ministry of Jesus, reaching out and changing our work places, our families our friends.

Or perhaps you have said, here I am Lord, in my weakness, take me and use me, I am wholly available to you. Thankyou for valuing me, and giving me a great price tag. Be my strength, and work in me through your Spirit, transform me, so I can transform others, so I can build your church, so I can see your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Today, he calls you to be a living stone, in the hands of the master-builder, and with a rock-like faith, pick up the keys, the gospel truth to unlock the kingdom of God to others, and help him build his church on this island.

Amen