



CALVARY
TUSCALOOSA

TEACHING PLAN
AUGUST 6, 2017

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MATTHEW 16:13-19

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PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Matthew 16:13-19. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for our pastor, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

BIBLICAL EMPHASIS: We need to redefine the church according to the Bible. The church is a body of believers, not a building.

TEACHING AIM: The church is made up of people to whom Christ was and is revealed, and through whom a divine mission moves forward.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: John 1:19-29—The church is to proclaim “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!”

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- 1 What are some descriptions non-Christians, either people you know or references in pop culture, have used to describe the church?

- 2 In your opinion, what is the most important thing to believe about the church?

Additional Introduction Option

Divide up into small groups of 2-3 people. Take a few minutes to discuss the following question: ***What is the church?*** Then gather back together as a large group and share your thoughts.

On Sunday mornings when you are getting ready, you may say something like: “It’s time to go to church!” By implication, this statement defines church as a specific place or building. This is the way most Christians and non-Christians think about church. But the Bible defines church differently. It is not a building or a place, but a group of people united by their shared confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The church is God’s hands and feet in the world. Through the church, God’s mission goes forward.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have a volunteer read Matthew 16:13-16.

¹³ *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”* ¹⁴ *They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”* ¹⁵ *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”* ¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

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- Why did Jesus ask His disciples who people said He was? What did their responses reveal?

 - Why did people think Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets?

Jesus had to know if His disciples understood His identity, particularly if they knew that following Him entailed suffering. His question invited the disciples to reflect on the many opinions about Him. He was certainly a well-known and even polarizing figure. Because the disciples would carry His message into the world, they needed to be clear on His identity. They must be accurate. They proposed many possibilities, and each of the proposed identities was highly respectful and recognized in some way. However, Jesus has one true identity, which Peter recognized.

- Rather than question the merit of their answers, Jesus questioned the personal beliefs of His disciples. Why was this the case?

- What was significant about Peter's confession?

Jesus wanted the disciples to move beyond the culture's understanding of who He was. He wanted to know what they personally believed about Him. Peter's answer was accurate. "You are the Messiah" is a far greater claim than any of the other popular opinions. To be the Messiah meant Jesus was God's chosen servant and Son. He brought God's complete message to earth. No one ever would be greater.

MESSIAH

Transliteration of Hebrew word meaning "anointed one" that was translated into Greek as Christos. "Christ" or Messiah is therefore a name admirably suited to express both the church's link with Israel through the OT and the faith that sees in Jesus Christ the worldwide scope of the salvation in Him.

Peter's addition of "the living" was a typical Jewish way of distinguishing the living God from idols that were never alive. Those who believe this confession are the foundation of the church.

Notes:

- What are some things that we make the church about that are not this confession?
- If Jesus is who He claimed to be, then how should this affect how we view the church?

> Have a volunteer read Matthew 16:17-19.

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

This passage is one of the most analyzed sets of verses in the New Testament. Some groups are guilty of making too much of the passage, other groups too little. Approaching it without appearing to assault other Christians' cherished beliefs is hard, but possible. The key is to remember that these verses focus on Christ, and the church is to always find ways to sharpen that focus.

- What did Jesus mean by "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church"?

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- If Jesus is building a church, does that mean the church is a building? Why or why not?

Notes:

Jesus used a play on words here to underscore the importance of Peter's confession. Peter in Greek is *Petros*, and the Greek word for rock is *petra*. Peter's insight was highly significant. As the first to voice the confession, Peter set the example for the confession of all believers who follow, each one becoming a part of the building that is Christ Himself. In it each Christian is a living stone, but Christ is the cornerstone. The church is thus a group of people who are commonly committed to the confession of Jesus as Christ.

- The word for *church* in the New Testament literally means "called out ones." How does this help us to understand what Jesus meant when He used the word here?
- How have these verses been misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misused?

The word "church" appears three times in the Gospels, and all three occurrences are in Matthew. By using this word, Jesus established the church as a group of people with a common confession, not a building with a specific purpose. The Greek word draws on Old Testament imagery of the gathered congregation of God's people. The focus, therefore, is on believers who comprise the church and not on buildings that shelter them.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- 1 When you speak about church, do you refer to it as a place or a group of people? Why should we always think of the church as a people?
- 2 What else can our church do to be even more Christ-centered? How can we help this happen?
- 3 Who do you know that has misconceptions about church? How might inviting them to come see what we are about help in changing their minds?

PRAY

Praise God for establishing His church and bringing into its membership. Thank Him for all that He is doing through our church and pray that as we continue to think about church, we would be challenged and encouraged to define church the way the Bible does.

MEMORIZE

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. – Matthew 16:18

MATTHEW 16:13-19

16:13. There is no reason not to believe the events of Matthew 16 happened in chronological order and in close succession. Jesus' arrival in the region of Caesarea Philippi, twenty-five miles north of Capernaum, represented his efforts at withdrawal from his critics in 16:1-4. He chose this site, far from the distractions and interruptions of desperate crowds and hypocritical questioners, to settle the critical question of his identity with his disciples. It was a quiet place at the headwaters of the Jordan River, a place long associated with idol worship and pagan deities.

Notes:

Standing beneath the idols of a so-called deity, Pan, carved into the cliff-side, Jesus knew the timing was right to raise and settle this question. It was time to lead his disciples into a clear proclamation of his deity.

Jesus apparently had to ask his first question of the disciples more than once (asked is in the imperfect Greek tense, and delivers the meaning, "he asked repeatedly"). Perhaps he went around the circle, asking each disciple individually. This question prompted the disciples to share what they had heard from the people. By the parallel with 16:15, we know that the Son of Man here is a substitute for the personal pronoun "I." But in the context of the following verses (esp. vv. 16,20,27-28), it also foreshadowed the divine revelation of Jesus' messianic identity and mission.

16:14. During the two years the disciples had been with Jesus, they had overheard many rumors, speculations, and questions from the thousands of people who had seen Jesus. Virtually all of them assumed Jesus to be a prophetic forerunner to the Messiah rather than the Messiah himself. If any of those guesses were true, they would have implied a prophet coming back from the dead to minister

in Israel. And all the guesses revealed some degree of accurate perception on the part of the people. All recognized God's authority behind the words and works of Jesus, because all the prophets listed here were known to be God's mouthpieces.

Notes:

Some people, like Herod (14:1-2), thought Jesus was John the Baptizer reincarnated. Others saw Jesus' miracles, especially the resurrection of the dead (9:18-26), and they thought of Elijah the miracle worker (1 Kgs. 17-2 Kgs. 2; esp. 17:17-24). Also, since John was "Elijah who was to come" (11:14; 17:12; Mal. 4:5), this would explain why these two names were next to each other, both in this conversation and in the people's minds. Elijah was seen as a forerunner of the Messiah, as was John.

Still others thought Jesus was Jeremiah, the prophet of doom who prophesied during the final decades before Judah was exiled to Babylon. The list included several of the other prophets, including Isaiah, whose prophecies Jesus fulfilled in Matthew and from whom Jesus quoted quite often.

16:15-16. In these verses Jesus asked a second, more pointed question: But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am? Notice that Jesus did not ask who the disciples thought he was, or who they believed he was, but who they said he was. Jesus wanted to know what they were ready to confess verbally about his identity. This was the point at which they needed to step across the line and commit to the reality of him as Christ or stay behind with the rest of the blind speculators.

Although Jesus asked all the disciples, it was Simon Peter—the forthright spokesman for the Twelve—who answered for them all. (We are to assume that the other eleven agreed with Peter's confession.) Peter, who stepped out of the boat

with wavering faith in 14:28-31, now stepped out again with much more steady faith to confess the truth about Jesus.

Notes:

In Peter's answer, the pronoun "you" is emphatic: "You are the Christ" (the Greek title equivalent to the Hebrew "Messiah," both meaning "Anointed One"). By the utterance of the word Christ, Peter attributed to Jesus all the hopes and promises, all the prophecies and all the messianic honor of the entire Hebrew Scriptures. No longer was Jesus merely a miracle-working prophet from God. He was now the king himself, the Savior who was promised. He was truly the one and only Son of the living God.

Here before the disciples stood the hope and salvation of Israel and all the earth. Certainly the Twelve had not been totally ignorant of this reality in the preceding weeks and months, but they finally had reached a degree of certainty. Now they were able to articulate the truth with confidence. Even as the reality took form in their minds, they must have felt a compulsion to bow down in awe before Jesus.

There were many false gods in the secular cultures surrounding the Jews, but only one God was living. The rest were dead and inactive. This included those gods carved into the high rock wall where they were standing. When Peter confessed Jesus as this "living" Son of God, he recognized Jesus as the unique, promised Son of prophecy (e.g., Isa. 7:14; 9:6-7). He was the true God as opposed to the dead deities of this world (cf. Deut. 5:26; Pss. 42:2; 84:2; Rom. 9:26; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:23; Rev. 7:2; 15:7).

16:17. We can read into Jesus' words his relief and joy that his disciples had finally been gripped by this reality. They had passed the test. He immediately pronounced Peter blessed, meaning that Peter

had been the recipient of God's favor or blessing in the form of truth revealed to Peter's mind. It was not man who revealed this to Peter. The truth of Jesus' identity is one of the "secrets" of 13:11, easily understandable once it is revealed. But it is undiscoverable by natural, human means until God chooses to make it known. Only my Father in heaven was the source of such understanding about the Son. Here "my Father" took on extra significance in light of Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Son of the living God."

Notes:

16:18. Parts of Jesus' declaration about Peter were intentionally parallel to Peter's declaration about Jesus. Jesus began with the emphatic I tell you, drawing a parallel between what he was about to say and Peter's confession.

You are Peter parallels You are the Christ. Peter's given name was Simon, but Jesus had nicknamed him Peter, meaning "rock" (John 1:42). Peter was actually the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic "Cephas." The New Testament authors, under the inspiration of the Spirit, translated "Cephas" to "Peter" for their Greek-speaking readers.

Jesus' words presented a deliberate wordplay in the text, and it is probably the most controversial statement in Matthew: You are Peter (Greek, Petros, "rock"), and on this rock (Greek, petra) I will build my church. Upon this statement the Roman Catholic church has based its doctrine of Peter being appointed the first in a long line of popes. Jesus' statements of Peter's authority in the next verse provide the basis for the Roman Catholic church's erroneous teachings regarding the authority of the papal office.

And, equally in error, many Protestants have reacted against the Roman Catholic interpretation by going to the other extreme, allowing the "rock" (petra) to mean anything but Peter himself.

Matthew's record of Jesus' wordplay on Peter's name is significant. Petros is a masculine singular noun. Petra is feminine. And while clearly related, they represent a distinction. The masculine singular form refers to Peter as one singular rock. The feminine form may be understood to represent bedrock or a rock quarry. It is reasonable to understand Jesus' statement to mean that Peter was one rock among a rock quarry (the disciples). It was upon this quarry of disciples (cf. "living stones," 1 Pet. 2:5) and their understanding of Peter's confession that Jesus would build his church.

This interpretation fits with the apostle Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:19-22—that the church is "God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole [stone] building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord... a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

What Jesus was saying is that Peter would be a "first among equals" in the history of Jesus' church. Peter would be the initial spokesman among those who would become the custodians of the revealed truth about Jesus' identity—the heart of the revealed gospel. Peter was the first to proclaim the truth about Jesus. In fact, in the Book of Acts, Peter is the first spokesman for the fledgling church before the entire world.

But we lose sight of Peter almost completely after Acts 12 (when Paul gains prominence). This shows that Peter, while unique as the outspoken leader of the first church builders, was not any more significant than other devoted followers of Jesus. In fact, Peter was called into account more than once by other church leaders and by Paul himself (Acts 11:1-8; Gal. 2:11-14).

The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, means “gathering.” It comes from a verb meaning literally “call out from,” and was used in a variety of ways in the first century. It could refer to any gathering of people for any purpose, including synagogue gatherings. This was Jesus’ church as opposed to any other assemblies. His church would take on his characteristics.

We must be careful not to read into this exchange of Jesus with his disciples our own understanding of the word church. Certainly Jesus had in mind what the Christian church would begin to look like. In fact, he began to define it and set its guidelines for operation here and in Matthew 18. But when he spoke to the disciples here at Caesarea Philippi, he did not expect them to have the fully developed picture of “church” that believers would have even a few decades later—after the fuller plan was revealed by God in the Book of Acts and in the epistles of the New Testament. What the disciples heard from Jesus that day was, “On this rock quarry of disciples, I will build my community of believers.”

It is significant that Jesus called the church my church. Jesus took his place as the center and owner of this community of followers. It is he who would be their means of entrance into the community, and it is he whom they would follow. His name, his character, his person, and his principles are to be represented by the church.

It is critical to understand that the words church and kingdom are two different words referring to two different realities. They are not synonymous or interchangeable. And the one (church) does not replace the other (kingdom). “Church” refers to a people; “kingdom” refers to a reign. Furthermore, the church does not subsume the kingdom, although it is part of it. Nor does the church replace the nation of Israel in the unfolding

of the kingdom. Any attempt to make it so must require major allegorizing of the covenants (rather than interpreting them consistently and literally), which results in significant doctrinal error.

The church does not render God's covenant with David (2 Sam. 7) and David's kingdom obsolete. The Son of David will rule from David's throne (Israel) over the earth, and the church (the king's bride) will share in it, but the church cannot replace it. "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:25-29). A study of the usages of the words *basileia* (kingdom) and *ekklesia* (church) will demonstrate a great difference between the two.

The gates of Hades was a phrase which referred to death, particularly the power of death. The gates of a city were a symbol of the city's strength. Jesus was saying, "My church is unstoppable. Satan cannot corral it. Nothing can overpower or silence my community of faith, not even the power of death itself. My church will go on, even if its individual members should die."

16:19. Jesus declared that to Peter (and the disciples) he would give the keys of the kingdom of heaven. It is likely that Jesus was referring to the keys commonly held by the scribes as a symbol of their teaching function. They were the "teachers" of Scripture. In this sense, Jesus was appointing the disciples as the initial teachers in his church. As elsewhere in Matthew, "heaven" is a euphemism for "God," so "kingdom of heaven" means "kingdom of God." Those who were the teachers of Scripture were the gatekeepers for all humanity. They were at the threshold of God's expanding kingdom as revealed in his Word.

The verbs bound and loosed (in the Greek future perfect tense) indicate the process was not yet complete. Jesus seems to have been instructing

these teachers to be certain that before they taught some doctrine, it was something that had already been determined in heaven.

What are these keys by which the disciples, or subsequent teachers, open the way for people's understanding of the kingdom? From the immediate context as well as the broader context of the New Testament, we are safe in saying that these keys represent the supernaturally revealed truth of God, which Peter and the other disciples had just begun to receive.

If we conduct ourselves according to God's guidelines here on earth, we can take it on faith that our actions and decisions on earth are in accord with what has already been decided in heaven. We do not need specific direction or confirmation in each situation; we have God's word on it that his instruction, given to us in the Bible and properly carried out with a right heart, will achieve his will on earth.