

Christ & Ekklesia

(Matt. 16.13-20)

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After today's sermon, you will be able to understand Jesus' ID, your ID, and your mission:

- Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of the Living God.
- You are little stones, *derived* from the Rock.
- The Church's mission statement: "to populate Heaven."

(Mark 7) Jesus left Israel with his disciples after a dispute with the Elders of Israel regarding the matter of traditions — "unless you wash, you are not one of us." The Elders demanded that the disciples follow the traditions; the disciples refused to comply. Now, after a long time ministering abroad, the disciples are about to re-enter Israel, and Jesus has great news for them: membership! Not membership into the Pharisees' sect, with empty rituals and forms, but membership into the Kingdom of Heaven, the Church of the Living God.

1. Jesus introduces the subject of membership into the Kingdom of Heaven with a question: "Who do the people say the Son of Man is?"

At this, the disciples reported what the people were saying — all great names: John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Elijah, the prophets. It is worth noting that, especially with Elijah's name involved, the people's expectations about Jesus were actually very low.

Why? Because they thought of Jesus as less than the Christ.

2. Now Jesus makes things personal: He asks, "Who do you say I am?"

Peter (representing all the disciples) said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Here you have three titles that reveal Jesus' ID:

- **Son of Man** — He is the perfect man: sinless, obedient, righteous.

- **Son of God** — He is divine. He is one with the Father and shares the same essence with the Father.
- **The Christ** — He is anointed to reign. His reign is filled with peace, righteousness, and joy, and it shall have no end.

3. Upon Peter's confessing Christ's identity, Jesus now reveals Peter's ID.

Jesus said two meaningful things:

“Blessed are you, Peter [...], for my Father has revealed this to you.” and “You are *Petrus* (little stone), and upon this *Petra* (rock) I will build my *ekklesia* (church).”

Let us start with the easier statement to understand — the first one: Jesus is talking about the work of the Holy Spirit in saving people. It is His job to reveal the Son to believers. The work the Holy Spirit does inside of you to believe in Christ is called “regeneration.”

“The preacher preaches to the ears, only the Holy Spirit preaches to the heart. The preacher baptizes with water, only the Holy Spirit floods the heart. The preacher gives the elements of communion, only the Holy Spirit applies the truth of communion to the heart. The preacher makes you a member of the church, only the Holy Spirit makes you a member of Heaven.”

Now, onto the second statement, which has sparked such controversy throughout the history of the church.

The question is: Who is the rock on which the church is built? Is it Peter, Peter's confession, or Jesus Himself?

Catholics claim Peter is the rock and that he is the first Pope of the church. Protestants, mainly to dispute the Catholic interpretation, have said Peter's confession is the rock.

I have made our understanding a bit easier by applying the Greek and its translation to the three key words found in the statement we read above. By simply reading those, you should be able to interpret the statement correctly: **Jesus is the rock on which the church is built.**

Even Peter testifies to this interpretation. **At the beginning** of his ministry, he said in Acts 4:11–12, “Jesus is the stone that was rejected, which has become the cornerstone; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we

must be saved.” He also said **at the end of his ministry**, in 1 Peter 2:4–8, that all believers are “living stones” that come from Jesus, the Rock.

Just as the word *Christian* is derived from *Christ*, so *Petrus* (stones) is derived from *Petra* (the Rock).

Lastly, “And the gates of Hades (hell, death) will not prevail!”

- In a corporate and universal sense, the church will never die. Kingdoms rise and fall, economies rise and fall, countries rise and fall — but the church of Christ remains.
- In an individual sense, Christians have eternal life.

4. The *Ekklesia* and the keys of the Kingdom

Lastly, another difficult verse to deal with is the one about the keys of heaven: “What you bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven.”

That is a hard verse to interpret. Does Jesus mean that the leaders of the church deliberately call all the shots? In light of many dictators in history, including the medieval church itself, that is an interpretation we naturally want to reject.

And yes — you are right! That is not what Jesus means. You want to interpret this in light of the same teaching as before: “Just as Christians are derived from Christ, so the Christians’ authority (keys) is derived from Christ too.”

The Lord’s Prayer helps you with this verse: “May your Kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” The church’s authority (keys) is subject to Heaven. Heaven tells us what to do — not the other way around.

The word *key* is not limited to authority only; it is best understood in a fourfold approach: **authority, stewardship, discipline, and preaching the Gospel.**

In light of this, it is important to make a strong contrast between the Apostles and the Religious Leaders of his time. Jesus rebukes them: “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering” (Luke 11:52).

The Pharisees kicked out Jesus’ disciples from their sect for not keeping the tradition of washing. Little did they know, they themselves were outside the Kingdom — and everyone who followed their hypocrisy was outside too.

No worries! Jesus gives His disciples a better membership than the one the Pharisees had to offer. He calls them the church (*ekklesia*). The meaning of that Greek

word is “called out.” Instead of busying themselves with exclusivist admissions, they were called to go out and preach the Gospel so that people could be saved.

Populating Heaven — that is the mission of the church!

Conclusion

Jesus finishes everything with a severe reprimand not to spread the truth yet. There would be a time when they were commanded to tell everyone that Jesus is the Messiah — but **not yet**, because Jesus first wanted to tell them about His crown: **the cross**.

Which we will see next Sunday, by God’s grace. Amen.