

Sunday, October 9, 2022 | Upon This Rock

Matthew 16:13-28 | "Church Origins"

Today, we'll be starting a new series called Upon This Rock. And this study is designed to help the believer answer two questions: "what is the church" and "what is its purpose." How a person answers those questions will significantly impact their life.

And so, like all good stories, it's best to begin at the beginning. Thus, we'll explore a passage dealing with the church's origin. When did it start? Who started it and why? When we know how this very unusual community began, we'll be able to better understand what it actually is. Because, after all, even those who were at the very start didn't fully grasp what it was. And we had best learn from their ignorance to avoid making the same faulty assumptions they made. Failure to do so turns us from being a friend of God to a foe of Jesus. And who, in the right mind, would ever want to be standing opposite of the Messiah?

Contextually, it is essential to note that Jesus has just warned his disciples about the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Sadducees (cf. Matt. 16:5-12). By "leaven," Jesus refers to the religious leaders' teaching. Apparently, how the Pharisees and Sadducees interpreted God's word was volatile and could potentially spread and corrupt the disciples' minds. Jesus would not have these legalists poison his followers, so he tells them to be wary of legalism; it has a curious way of confusing good with evil and evil with good.

The narrative then moves to an exciting dialogue about Christ's identity, which ties closely with our discussion today: the church's origin/inauguration/beginning. Needless to say, few passages are more important than this one. And at the center of this scene is the disciple's spokesman, Peter. He will act as a catalyst stimulating a hallmark discussion regarding Jesus' current mission and the future of his work.

READ: Matthew 16:13-20 (ESV)

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall

not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Jesus portrays Peter in two ways in our passage today.

i. Peter as a foundation rock (cf. Mat. 16:18).

Jesus says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Interestingly, Matthew never refers to Peter as Simon again. It was as if, at this moment, as far as the writer was concerned, Peter's identity changed when he confessed that Jesus was the Messiah.

Now, Jesus' words work as a pun in two ways. First, Peter's name (**Πέτρος**; *Petros*), literally translated, means “rock.” But not only is Jesus making a play on words, but he's also correlating that with material that was used in the foundation of a building—i.e., rock.

EXAMPLE: Show a picture of first-century foundation stones and bring out the cinder block.

It should go without saying that the foundation is the most critical part of any building. A structure will undoubtedly crumble if the walls and roof do not have a solid base on which to rest their weight. Thus, how one lays the foundation will determine the strength and longevity of a building. This was especially true in the construction of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem. According to biblical archaeologists, some (but not all) of the limestone blocks used in its construction still stand today and weigh a staggering 160,000 lbs.¹

Peter, at this moment, was selected as one of the foundation stones for the church. He would not be the church, just an essential part of the church. This called-out assembly would stand the test of time and trial, so much so that not even the "gates of hell" would be able to conquer it. Moreover, Jesus predicted that Peter and, by extension, all believers would be given the keys of heaven, welcoming or barring entry based solely on one's opinion of Jesus. No longer is admittance into heaven granted by those who adhere to the tenants of Judaism. The church is the gatekeeper of the Kingdom of God. And we know from the book of Acts that everything that Jesus predicted about Peter and the church would eventually become true. Even today, Peter's work can be seen in our own Bibles (cf. 1 & 2 Peter). And how ironic that we (non-

¹ Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, “The Stones of Herod's Temple Reveal Temple Mount History,” November 16, 2021, *Biblical Archaeology Society*, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/temple-at-jerusalem/the-stones-of-herods-temple-reveal-temple-mount-history/>, [accessed, October 7, 2022].

Jewish people living in the west) would be a part of a religion started by a middle-eastern Jewish carpenter.

APPLICATION: Like Peter, we are like construction material for his kingdom when we are fully entuned with God. When our talents, resources, and time are marshaled in wholehearted devotion to the church, we become valuable assets and tools fit for the Lord's service. The church is not a building; it's a people. Take the building away, and you still have a church. Take the people away, and all you have is a building. God's presence and power are vested in the community of faith--i.e., living/breathing human beings who confess to Jesus Christ as Lord. In fact, the word translated as "church" is the Greek term **ἐκκλησία** (*ekklēsia*), and it refers to a called-out assembly which, when Jesus used the term, could've referred to any group that held a common goal or principle. Some *ekklēsias* were political; others were special interests where sports, industry, or religion were the things tying people together. And this is why Jesus chose to call us the church because we gather weekly to proclaim that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the Messiah, the Savior of the World, and the one and only King.

But the problem the church has had since its conception is that we often are confused by the mission of the church. We'll see that it isn't about political conquest or personal gain. Core to the makeup and DNA of the church is suffering. It's about choosing to turn the other cheek rather than fighting.

READ: Matthew 16:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

ii. Peter as a stumbling block (cf. Mat. 16:23).

The Greek word translated as "hindrance" in our passage is **σκάνδαλον** (*skándalon*), and from it, we get our English term "scandal." However, when used in the first century, *skándalon* referred to any impediment or trap (i.e., string, stick, stone, etc.) that was placed in the way of something or someone that would cause them to be either ensnared or to stumble and fall. Hence, this is why some translations have Jesus saying to Peter, "You are a stumbling block to me."

EXAMPLE: Show a picture of the rock jutting from the ground.

The revelation that Jesus would be heading to Jerusalem so that he might “suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” was so counterintuitive that even though Peter had just been praised for being a foundation stone upon which the church itself would stand, he would also be called a stone of stumbling because he didn't understand Jesus' goal. And that crucial misunderstanding made Peter stand in the Messiah's way.

The Messiah standing before Peter was incompatible with who he thought the Messiah should be. Rather than suffering, Peter assumed that "the Christ" would be a political revolutionary that would conquer Rome, throwing off the shackles of oppression, to set up his rule from the seat of Jerusalem. So, when Peter heard that Jesus would suffer, he refused to believe it. He even rebuked the very one he had just proclaimed as Messiah. The Messiah wasn't supposed to die. He wasn't supposed to suffer. He was supposed to be hurt. "The Christ" was a winning character, not a losing one. Thus, while Peter was 100% right about Jesus' identity, he was 100% wrong about Jesus' mission.

APPLICATION: Dear Christian, what we think Jesus' mission is and what it actually is can sometimes be two separate things. Jesus is the Messiah but his way, from the world's perspective, is not one of gain; it is loss. It is not about winning but losing. It is not of ease but of hardship. Hear me, church. To misunderstand this principle is to become an adversary to Jesus, a Satan-like figure who stands in the way of God. To mind the things of man is to have one's own self-interests at heart; it is to care more about self-preservation than self-sacrifice; it is to pridefully think you know better than God. In so doing, we become a stumbling block rather than a foundation rock.

So, what's the takeaway?

The church's foundation comprises two materials: a *denial* of self and a *devotion* to Jesus' suffering.

READ: Matthew 16:24-28 (ESV)

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you,

there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Those who think they have everything in this life have, in reality, forfeited their own soul, never to get it back. However, those who give their life to God will be given everything in return. So, yes, we may suffer in this life. But, take heart, what suffering we experience today will be rewarded later.

So, what's the takeaway?

The church's foundation comprises two materials: a *denial* of self and a *devotion* to Jesus.

Depending on our motives, we can either be masonry material for the Kingdom of God or a rocky obstacle impeding others. We must be vigilant about what drives us because, in a moment, we can get something so right but then turn around and get something else so wrong. As we read today, Peter swung between follower and foe within the breadth of just a few minutes (cf. Matt 16:13-28). We would do well to remember that we are no better.

Thus, we should ask ourselves every day, "Am I someone humbly following Jesus? Or am I someone who is pridefully standing in his way?" If our goal is self-sacrifice, we'll be used as a foundation stone. But if our aim is self-preservation, we'll become a stone of stumbling.

Video Description

Upon This Rock | Week 1 | "Church Origins"

TEXT: Matthew 16:13-28

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: