

“The Keys of the Kingdom”
The Gospel According to Matthew 16:13-20
Sunday, October 16th, 2016

It’s one of my favorite illustrations on authority, and I’ve likely shared it with you before, but it’s so good!

The captain of a ship looked out into the dark night across the waters and saw faint lights in the distance. A ship! Immediately he told his signalman to send a message, “Alter your course 10 degrees south.”

Promptly a return message was received on the ship: “Alter your course 10 degrees north.”

The captain was bothered that his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message: “Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am the captain!”

Soon another message was received: Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am Seaman 3rd Class Jones.”

Frustrated now, the captain sent a third message, knowing it should evoke respect: “Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am a battleship!”

Then the reply came “Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am a lighthouse.”

Which body or entity is the most important on this earth? Would that be the strongest country in terms of economic health, influence and military power? What about the European Union or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)? Could it be the media? How about the United Nations?

What body or organization would you say is the most important from God’s perspective? It would be the entity that He calls “the apple of (His) eye,” (Psalm 17:8; Zechariah 2:8); His body (I Corinthians 12; Colossians 1:18, 24; 3:15), His bride (Revelation 21:9), His own special people (Titus 2:14; I Peter 2:9). The most important institution on earth is the Church. And the highest office, presently, in that most important of institutions, is that of elder. Serving as an elder in Christ’s church is the highest position a man can attain on this earth in our day.

Jim Garfield knew that to be true. You’ll remember James Abram Garfield was the 20th President of the United States, serving less than four months before he was assassinated. Garfield was a member of the church and served as an elder. When Garfield relinquished his role as elder, he stated, “I resign the highest office in the land to become president of the United States.”

Last Sunday, we began a brief sermon series of 3 messages concerning the importance of the eldership to the Church. Elder Larry McAuley preached what I’ve heard from many was an outstanding message in Acts Chapter 20 emphasizing the dangers to the church, and the necessity of watchmen in the church to prepare for and counteract such spiritual attacks.

Today, we turn to another passage in the New Testament – the **Gospel According to Matthew 16:13-20**, what should be (or become) a familiar passage on the authority God has given His Church. Here, we’ll see Jesus instructing us on three of the marks of His Church – the **truth** of the Church, the **power** of the Church, and the **authority** of the Church.

Matthew 16:13-20:

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

¹⁴ So they said, “Some *say* John the Baptist, some 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 answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to 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 also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

²⁰ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.”

MP 1 - Verses 13-17 give us the Truth of the Church;

MP 2 – Verse 18 gives us the Power of the Church;

MP 3 – Verse 19 gives us the Authority of the Church.

As we look back at verses 13-17, we see a dialogue between the Lord Jesus Christ and His followers (disciples). Jesus begins (v. 13) by asking His disciples what was the common opinion of Him. Their response is in verse 14 – “Some *say* John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Those are some real spiritual heavyweights in the Scriptures – John the Baptizer who served as herald preparing the way for Jesus early in the gospel accounts; Elijah, the Old Testament prophet taken by God into heaven by a chariot of fire while he was still alive; and Jeremiah, the weeping prophet called to bring the word of God to bear on His hardened people.

But, Jesus then asks a more penetrating question of his disciples when He asks in verse 15, “But who do you say that I am?” We can imagine the disciples looked at each other, hesitating to speak, since some of them may have shared the same opinion as the common people. Or they may have looked for someone from among them to answer that question and risk being chastised by their Teacher. What we do know is that Peter speaks up, and his statement in verse 16 is a confession for the ages. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Peter gives one assertion, but it has two parts. Jesus is the Christ *and* He is the Son of God. Let’s break down those parts, and as we do so, we’ll uncover the **Truth of the Church**.

The word “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name, as Dietmeier is mine. “Christ” is a title, which means “anointed one.” In calling his Teacher, Jesus, the anointed one, Peter reveals his understanding that Jesus is the Messiah predicted throughout the Old Testament. God promised to send a Deliverer for His people, and Peter here recognizes that Deliverer is Jesus the Christ.

And, Peter’s words also reveal that Jesus is no mere man. He calls Him “the Son of the living God.” The Bible defines Jesus Christ as God the Son; He is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – which consists of God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are one God, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory. Jesus was, and is today, fully God, and fully man in one person; two distinct natures in one body.

God the Son was walking with His disciples there in Caesarea Philippi, and He was carrying on a conversation with His followers, who recognized Him as the living God. And, He affirmed

Peter's confession in verse 17, when He said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

"Simon Bar-Jonah" means "Simon, son of Jonah." "Simon" was Peter's original name. Jesus stresses that Peter (Simon) would not have come to that conclusion of Jesus, if God the Father hadn't first given that revelation to him. So, it is true of every one of us. We cannot acknowledge, or even recognize, Jesus as the Christ unless God first gives us the mind to understand and a heart to believe. God must remove the scales from our eyes in order for us to see His only begotten Son, Jesus as Master and Lord, as the anointed one.

This describes me at one point in my life, even though I was raised in the fellowship of the Church. My mother ensured that I received baptism at an early age, that I was regularly in Sunday School and worship and youth activities. She was faithful to keep me and my siblings plugged in with God's people...but I didn't recognize Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God until some years later when those seeds planted and watered throughout my childhood bloomed into a new life, a saved life, when God revealed Jesus as My Savior and Lord at an evangelistic performance by Barry McGuire at RAF Lakenheath in August 1981.

It may be that some hearing my voice are where I was before God revealed Jesus to me. Friend, look at your life, your habits, your desires and goals. *Do they reflect a life patterned after the Bible? Do you think of God? Do you spend regular time with Him in prayer, song, and His Word, the Bible?* It is likely that God may be bringing upon you a sense of conviction of your sin, and shame for your selfish life. Don't let that shame go easily – don't discount it. Consider what God may be doing to bring you to spiritual life in His Son, Jesus Christ. Turn away from yourself, and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Peter's confession is the confession of every true Christian, and every true church. It is our confession because Truth is a Person. In **John 14:6**, Jesus answered His disciple Thomas, "I am the way, the Truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Having seen the **truth of the Church** in verses 13-17, we next see **the power of the Church** in verse 18. Jesus is speaking, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." I love this verse; it gives such confidence and strength.

What is the rock upon which Jesus will build His Church? Could it mean that Jesus would build the Church on the person of Peter? Not exactly. Bishop JC Ryle says of that possibility, "To speak of an erring, fallible child of Adam as the foundation of the spiritual temple is very unlike the ordinary language of Scripture. Above all, no reason can be given why our Lord should not have said, 'I will build my Church on (you, Peter) – if such had been His meaning, instead of saying, 'I will build My church upon *this rock*.'" (Ryle, 193)

The meaning of "this rock" here in verse 19 appears to be the truth of our Lord's Messiahship which Peter had just confessed. It is as though our Lord had said, '(You) are rightly called by the name Peter (stone), for you have confessed that mighty truth, on which, as on a rock, I will build My church.'" (Ryle, 193)

The Bible says that Jesus is the church's cornerstone and foundation. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets as a group, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief

cornerstone (**Ephesians 2:19-20** and **Matthew 21:42**). Then, every believer builds on that foundation.

We notice that Jesus is the One Who builds the Church. There is no more powerful Builder than God Himself! Jesus does not here refer to the physical structure, like this beautiful building we built 2 years ago. He's referring to the people of God as the Church. The Church is built through the faithful preaching of the whole counsel of God's Word, and the right application of it in our lives, brothers and sisters in Christ! The Church is strengthened when God the Spirit applies the Word preached to our thinking, our living, and our interacting with others in love and grace.

Some take this verse to mean that Satan will never defeat the church. But the gates Jesus speaks of here are defensive weapons. They are fortifications against attack. Therefore, hell's defenses will not prevail as the gospel goes on the offensive to win people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Hell cannot thwart the advance of the gospel. The meaning of the promise here in verse 19 is that the power of Satan can never destroy the people of Christ! The church will overcome hell's defenses, and Jesus will build His Church.

Over the past several days, we've all seen the destruction of Hurricane Matthew, first in Haiti and the Caribbean, and then more recently in the southeastern United States, particularly Florida and North Carolina, where the waters continue to rise in rivers that have outgrown their banks and continue to destroy property and take human life.

A much stronger storm hit our southern states several decades ago. In August 1969, some of you will remember Hurricane Camille which struck the Gulf Coast from Gulfport to Biloxi, Mississippi. A wall of water 30 feet high, driven by winds in excess of 200 miles an hour smashed everything before it.

A group of foolish people were celebrating at a hurricane party in an apartment building on the coast. They trusted their shelter, but the hurricane destroyed it and them.

Jesus will build His church to be hurricane proof. Neither the storm of God's judgment nor the waters of death will sweep it away!

So far, we've seen the **truth of the church** and the **power of the church**. As we come to verse 19, we now see the **authority of the church**. "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

What, specifically, are the keys of the church? Perhaps the best answer is given by the *Heidelberg Catechism*, "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." (Q & A 83)

Binding and loosing mean forbidding and permitting. Naturally, if a professing Christian continued to do or to believe what was forbidden, refusing to repent, he (or she) would be disciplined; conversely, if he/she repented from evil, he/she would be forgiven and restored to full fellowship with the local church.

We should ask how the key to the kingdom of preaching of God's Word binds and looses? Again, I defer to the *Heidelberg Catechism* – "The kingdom of heaven is opened (loosed) by

proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers...that, as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith, God, because of Christ's merit, truly forgives all their sins.

The kingdom of heaven is closed (bound), 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." (Q & A 84)

Likewise, we must also ask how the key to the kingdom of Christian discipline binds and loosens? Those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives, and who after repeated...admonitions, refuse to abandon their errors and evil ways, and who after being reported to the church, that is, to those ordained by the church for that purpose, fail to respond also to the church's admonitions—such persons the church excludes from the Christian community by withholding the sacraments from them, and God also excludes them from the kingdom of Christ.

Such persons, when promising and demonstrating genuine reform, are received again as members of Christ and of his church." (Q & A 85)

There are no longer in our day any apostles or prophets in the biblical sense. Christ, as the King and Head of the Church, rules the church through a delegated, appointed leadership. Those leaders are the elders of the local congregation. The elders are to be men of character and compassion; they are the spiritual leaders of the local congregation, answerable to Jesus Christ Himself.

Not everyone is eligible to be an elder in Christ's Church. Nor should they be. The church consists of believers in Jesus Christ whom God has gifted for certain roles and ministries. Some, few, will be gifted for the eldership. Paul says the man who senses God's call on his life to serve as an elder desires a noble task (**I Timothy 3:1**). Simply because a man is successful in his work or social life isn't also an indication that he is elder material.

Next week, we'll discuss the Bible's qualifications for elders as we find them in the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus, the first chapter, verses 5-9. The members of Trinity Church will again have the opportunity to nominate men from the congregation who fit these qualifications. Surely you must already be in prayer for such an important responsibility.

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Notice the acronym (TPA) – Trinity Presbytery of Aledo (TPA) – this applies to us!

May it be the aim of each of us leaving this place today to be in submission to Christ and the elders of His church.

Hebrews 13:17 – “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”