

Sunday, May 30
Matthew 16:13-20 (The Church Invincible)
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Intro

From 303-311 Christians in the Roman Empire experienced the great persecution. Church historian Earle Cairns describes the pressure:

“The first edicts calling for persecution of the Christians came in March 303. Diocletian ordered the cessation of meetings of the Christians, the destruction of the churches, the deposition of officers of the church, the imprisonment of those who persisted in their testimony to Christ, and the destruction of the Scriptures by fire...A later edict ordered Christians to sacrifice to the pagan gods on pain of death if they refused. Eusebius pointed out that prisons became so crowded with Christian leaders and their congregations that there was not even enough room for criminals. Christians were punished by loss of property, exile, imprisonment, or execution by the sword or wild beasts. The more fortunate were sent to the Roman equivalent of a totalitarian labor camp where they were worked to death in the mines.” – *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 92-93

Church historian Kenneth Latourette says the persecution “was Empire-wide, from Britain to Arabia, but was particularly severe in the East, where Christianity had its chief numerical strength (*A History of Christianity*, 90).” In May 305 Diocletian stepped down assuming Christianity was pretty much ruined. After he left office, the eastern emperors maintained the persecution until toleration was granted in April 311. Was Diocletian successful? Was the church stamped out? What was the fallout? Let’s turn to Matthew 16 to see what Jesus has to say about the church’s staying power.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

BIG IDEA: Jesus is Lord and Savior

Point 1: Jesus identified (16:13-16, 20)

Explanation

Jesus and the disciples had gone to Caesarea Philippi = a Gentile territory northeast of Galilee. Jesus asks his disciples, “*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*” (16:13).

Son of Man = Jesus’ self-identification as both God and man. Daniel 7:13-14 speaks of “one like the son of man” who was given everlasting rule of a kingdom that won’t be destroyed, where all nations will serve him. Only God rules eternally.

John the Baptist = Herod viewed Jesus as John the Baptist raised from the dead (14:1-2); apparently others thought the same

Elijah = Malachi spoke of an Elijah who would come before the day of the Lord to bring the people to repentance before the Lord's coming (Mal 4:5-6); Jesus identified this Elijah as John the Baptist (Matt 17:10-13)

Jeremiah = some viewed Jesus like Jeremiah who pronounced judgment on Israel and suffered for it

They viewed Jesus as a prophet only. In other words, he wasn't God the Son in human flesh, and he wasn't the Messiah. Israel didn't comprehend who Jesus was.

Jesus then asks his disciples, *"But who do you say that I am (16:15)?"* Simon Peter responds, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (16:16). This is the 1st time the disciples call Jesus the Messiah. The term Messiah carried a lot of weight. In Jesus' day the people understood the Messiah to be a figure who would overthrow Rome and restore Israel's power and independence. The Messiah would be a heroic figure who would rescue the nation from Gentile oppression. The basis for this hope included:

Jeremiah 23:5-6 Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

The disciples understood Jesus to be this branch who would rescue Israel. They were right that Jesus was this Messiah. But, as we'll see next week, they were ignorant of the fact that the Messiah would first come as a suffering servant to die (see Isa 53). In his 1st coming, Jesus didn't come to rescue the nation. He came to die for our sins. Jesus said don't reveal me as the Messiah because of the expectations the people would have.

Application

Jesus as Messiah reveals a lot about who he is for his people (see Isa 9:6-7; 53:1-12; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 34:23-31; 37:21-28 for the Messiah's work).

- 1) He suffered rejection for us
- 2) He suffered crucifixion for us = took the wrath of God that our sins deserved = self-giving
- 3) He will put away all injustice = no more being sinned against
- 4) He will punish all injustice = no more need for revenge
- 5) He will eradicate our sinful nature = no more shame or consequences because of our sins
- 6) He will dwell with us forevermore = joy perfected

Point 2: Jesus revealed (16:17)

Explanation

Jesus replies: *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven"* (16:17). Blessed = privileged, especially favored because the recipient of divine favor. Peter was especially privileged because the Father had revealed to him that Jesus was the Messiah. Why did Peter understand this when most in Jesus' day did not? It wasn't flesh and blood that revealed this to Peter. It wasn't Peter himself. It wasn't other people. It was God the Father who brought this reality to Peter's attention. In order to understand divine truths, the Father must first reveal these truths to us. Peter understood this because the Father shined spiritual light on him.

Application

Why is it that we often engage in gospel conversations and there's no response? Or there's rejection? Because people are blind to the truth (2 Cor 4:4).

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The Father must impart divine light to sinners. In recent conversation, Neal Pottle asked, "Why did I believe the Bible was true when I was an unbeliever?" I could ask the same question. Why did I as an unbeliever know the Bible was true, God's ways were right and profitable, I was a sinner, and Jesus died for my sins? Because the Father revealed these to me. If we see, it's because the Father has privileged us to do so. So we praise the Father for opening our blind eyes. "I was blind but now I see."

Point 3: Jesus builds (16:18)

Explanation

Jesus responds further: *"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"* (16:18). "You are Peter" = Jesus is changing his name, signifying Peter's new role. The meaning of "on this rock I will build my church" has a significant place in church history.

1) Roman Catholic view: Peter is the first pope

- "The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock. The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head. The pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope." - [Catechism of the Catholic Church \(usccb.org\)](http://usccb.org)

- “The *Pope*, Bishop of Rome and Peter’s successor, ‘is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.’ For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as the pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.” - [Catechism of the Catholic Church \(usccb.org\)](http://usccb.org)

- Roman Catholicism understands Peter’s authority to extend over the whole church throughout the world. The authority is carried on today by the Pope and the bishops under him. Peter’s authority to bind and loose has been transferred to the Pope.

- Note that Jesus’ statement says nothing about a Pope office or Popes succeeding Peter. More on the keys in our fourth point. Paul didn’t think Peter’s power was unhindered because he rebuked Peter for hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-14.

2) Protestant reaction: the rock is Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah

- Seeking to avoid the implication that Peter is the first Pope, Protestants argued that the rock upon which the church is built is Peter’s confession that Jesus is Messiah.

- However, the fact that Peter’s name means rock indicates that Peter is the rock in question. Jesus changes Simon’s name to Peter, which means rock, and then says Peter is the foundation upon which Jesus will build his church (“rock” = bedrock or massive rock formations and the same word for “rock” in Matthew 7:24-25 was the solid foundation upon which the wise man’s house was built).

3) Alternative protestant view: the church will be built on the apostolic foundation, of which Peter belonged

- Ephesians 2 speaks of the church (“one new man” – 2:15) being “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (2:20) = apostles, not just Peter.

Note during this time the church is a future reality. Jesus will use Peter and the apostles as a foundation upon which to spread the gospel and build local churches throughout the globe!

Nature of the church

- 1) Church = local (individual churches) or universal (all believers everywhere)
- 2) One new man = Jew and Gentile united as one in Christ (Eph 2:14-16)
- 3) Israel was one ethnic people; the church is composed of all peoples
- 4) Israel was a mixed group of unbelievers and a believing remnant; the church is composed of believers only
- 5) Israel was a political nation; the church is composed of local churches spread throughout the globe = kingdom outposts

Invincibility of the church

- 1) Jesus will build it = its success hinges on Jesus' ability
 - 2) "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" = even if believers are put to death for their faith, the church won't be extinguished
- "gates of hell" = "the gates of hades"...hades was the place of the dead, so Jesus is saying that death will not prevail over the church.

Application

The church is both local and universal. Local churches do close, but the universal church never will. But if the universal church will never be extinguished, there will always be thriving local churches spread throughout the globe.

Doomsday accounts of the church conflict with 16:18. It's true that local churches who were once committed to the truth have abandoned the gospel and ceased to be Christian. It's true that local churches have closed as a result of inward focus, petty divisions, and failure to engage their community with the gospel. It's true that some local churches grow as a result of lowering the bar, watering down the gospel, and using entertainment to draw people. Many local churches have failed. At the same time God has established and preserved local churches throughout the globe, despite cultural pressures or persecution. There will always be local churches who are growing in spiritual depth. There will always be local churches that are growing numerically. While local churches are never free from the effects of sin, and they differ in degrees of health, God is raising up healthy churches in our day. Attempts to extinguish the church will always fail. Because Jesus will sustain it!

What resulted from the great persecution? Some sought martyrdom, some endured martyrdom and imprisonment. Others recanted their faith, gave up the Scriptures, and sacrificed to pagan gods. And some came to faith because of the courage of the martyrs. Diocletian attempted to end the Christian church. He failed because Christianity continued to spread. Because Jesus was building his church.

Point 4: Jesus delegates authority (16:19)

Explanation

Jesus follows up with another heavily debated statement: *"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"* (16:19).

We've seen how Roman Catholicism takes this to mean that the Pope has universal, unhindered power over the whole church. I've seen this taken to mean that believers have power to bind Satan or demons or sickness. What is Jesus getting at?

This is hard because Jesus doesn't provide a lot of detail. That's why we have bizarre interpretations. Let's first note Jesus is delegating authority to Peter.

The keys are to the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is already-not yet. God's saving reign arrived with Jesus. God's eternal kingdom will be established when Jesus returns. Whatever the binding and losing are, they relate to God's saving reign where people are being rescued from Satan's kingdom (under God's wrath, blind, slaves to sin) and transferred to Christ's kingdom (justification, sight, indwelt by the Spirit – see Col 1:13-14).

Whatever Peter binds or looses on earth will also be bound or loosed in heaven. God in heaven will be in agreement with Peter. Peter will execute heaven's authority on earth. Matthew 18:18 repeats the statement in 16:19 in the context of church discipline and extends the authority to two or three who are gathered = the authority to bind and loose isn't limited to Peter alone. In 1 Corinthians 5, the whole church performs this act of binding and loosing in church discipline.

The keys to the kingdom suggests delegated authority over God's saving reign. Peter, the other apostles, elders, and the whole church will at times exercise God's authority on earth over local churches. One way they do this is through church discipline. Another is the membership process where the elders affirm a person's profession of faith. Insofar as apostles or elders or the whole church is in agreement with God's verdict, we are binding and loosing what God is binding and losing in heaven. We are declaring God's verdict on earth. Like when we proclaim the gospel we declare that if a person repents and believes they will be saved and enter God's kingdom.

Summary

The keys and authority to bind and loose are not limited to Peter. This authority is delegated by God to elders in certain circumstances (e.g., overseeing the teaching and ministries of the church) and the congregation (e.g., overseeing church discipline and voting in the elders). God has delegated us authority in his kingdom work. When we conform to Scripture, heaven is in agreement.

Unbeliever/Conclusion

Jesus asks you today, "Who do you say that I am?" There's no option of indifference. Jesus is either Lord or he is not. You either trust Jesus as your Savior or you don't. You either trust in his finished work on the cross to pardon your sins or you trust in yourself or you fail to see your need for forgiveness. If we reject Jesus, we remain in our sins. What I hope you understand this morning is that Jesus is a glorious Messiah who secures glorious benefits for his people. And Jesus' church is invincible. The only lasting hope in this world is Jesus Christ and the church he is building.