



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sermon Series: "Jesus, Who?"
"He is the One!" Text(s): *Matthew 16.13-20.*

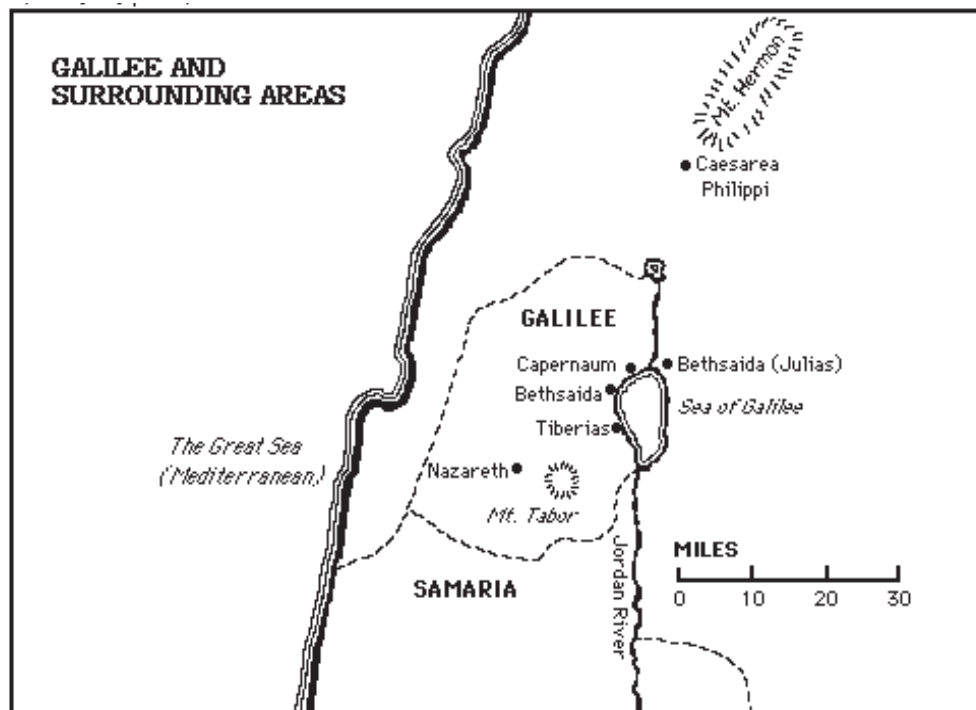
□ **Day #1—Monday, August 24th. Read: Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21. –Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?**

Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah and Lord was a turning point in Jesus' ministry, as well as in the disciple's lives. To confess Jesus as Savior and Lord is essential in every believer's life. When someone confesses Jesus as Lord and Savior, they become a member of the church that Jesus is building. The church is empowered, through the Holy Spirit, to engage and battle the very powers of sin, death, and hell. In order to fight this "good fight of faith," Jesus gives to His church the "Keys to the Kingdom."

Jesus took His disciples into Gentile territory, into the region of Caesarea Philippi. (See the map below). They were about 120 miles from Jerusalem in the northern part of Israel. The region was strongly identified with various religions: It had been a center for Baal worship; the Greek god Pan had shrines there; and Herod the Great had built a temple there to honor Augustus Caesar. It was in the midst of all of this pagan superstition that Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God. Possibly, Peter may have made this confession within sight of Caesar's temple! It is in this *theo-cultural* milieu, and upon Peter's confession, that Jesus announced what would have shocked His disciples...He would *not* establish an earthly kingdom, but He is going to *build His church!*

Here we reach the climax of the first part of Matthew's Gospel, in which we have seen varied reactions to the authoritative ministry, and identity, of Jesus. How other people understood Jesus is summarized in verse 14, where Jesus is placed in the category of the prophets. It is Peter who makes the definitive statement for which the first part of Matthew's story has been preparing: Jesus is the *Messiah, the Son of God*.

Often, throughout Jesus' mission, Jesus would tell His disciples and the people *keep his identity secret*. The reason will become clear in vs. 22ff. However, Matthew (alone) includes in vs. 17–19, a more positive response, which makes it clear that what Peter had said was true, however it might be to misunderstood by the people (and the disciples). Indeed, it was a revelation from God, and the fact that it was Peter who had received it indicated the important role he was to play in the development of the Messiah's mission.



Consider/Reflect: Who do you say Jesus is? The Lord? A “Buddy?” A Savior? A Wise teacher? A proper understanding of the identity of Jesus will inform how we *approach* Jesus and what we expect and/or need from Jesus.

□ **Day #2—Tuesday, August 25th. Read: Matthew 16.16-18. —Examine: The Text and its Message.**

This is the first time anyone in Matthew’s narrative has given Jesus the title *Christ* (“Messiah”), although Matthew himself has used the title “Messiah” in his Gospel earlier (*Matthew 1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4 and 11:2*). The title “Christ” (v.16) is transliterated from the Greek word, *Christos*. The Greek translates the Hebrew word, “*Messiah*” or “*Messiah*,” which literally means, the “Anointed one.”

Peter proclaimed that Jesus is the divinely chosen deliverer promised in the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, particularly through the prophets, God revealed that He would one day “anoint” His servant who would bring salvation and restoration to Israel and the world.

This text has been foundational for the Roman Catholic Church and their understanding of the doctrine of “Apostolic Succession.” This is the belief that Peter was the first, primary leader (“Father” “Papa” “Pope”) of the church. Peter is the “rock” upon which Jesus will lead His church. Consequently, every other future leader would *succeed* from Peter. It is sometimes suggested that because the word for “rock” in Greek, *Petra*, differs from the proper name *Petros* (“Peter”), the “rock” referred to is not Peter himself but the confession he has just made of Jesus as Messiah. In Aramaic, however, the same term *kefa* would appear in both places; the change in Greek is due to the fact that *Petra*, the normal word for “rock,” is feminine in gender, and therefore not suitable as a name for Simon!

Tomorrow, we will explore more thoroughly, the issue of Peter and his name. Suffice it to say that the Protestant church affirms that this text does not directly say anything about the church in Rome, or about any succession beyond the unique founding role of Peter himself.

Consider/Reflect: When and how did you come to *recognize Jesus as your Messiah*?

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, August 26th. Read: Again: Matthew 16.16-18. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Today, we will expand upon two, particular phrases within this dialogue between Jesus and Peter:

“This rock” (v. 18). Three different interpretations have arisen in the church’s history pursuant to Jesus’ statement, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” As I briefly mentioned yesterday, some (our Catholic brothers and sisters) take Peter as the “rock” and use the text to justify the belief that Peter was the first “Pope.” An important linguistic issue here is that the name, “Peter” in Greek (*Petros*) means “little stone,” and “rock” (Greek: *Petra*) indicates a massive rock formation. What is suggested is that Peter, a “little stone,” will be the beginning of the church understood as a “massive rock formation.” Second, some take Peter’s confession of Christ as the “rock” and thus see the church as what is being built by those who likewise confess Jesus as the Son of God. Third and closely related to option two, it is Peter’s recognition of Jesus as God’s Son (Messiah) which serves as the foundation (i.e. “rock”) for the church. Clearly, the Roman Catholic tradition affirms option one and Protestants generally hold options two and three.

“The gates of Hades” (v.18). “Gates” focuses attention on the fortifications that surrounded ancient cities and suggests perhaps a metaphor for Satan’s armies. Others note that “Hades” represents death in Scripture and see a promise that death cannot conquer Jesus’ life and mission. Because Jesus is the Son of God, Satan can never prevail against those who belong to Jesus—His church! In addition, “gates” represent in the Bible a place of authority and power. The city gate was to a Jew what City Hall is to people in the Western world. Important business was transacted at the city gate (*Deuteronomy 16:18; 17:8; Ruth 4:11*).

Thus, “the gates of Hades” would symbolize the organized power of death and Satan. However, by His death and resurrection, Jesus Messiah, the Son of God, has conquered the power of death and hell; death can no longer hold (keep behind the “gates”?) any of Jesus’ people. Jesus will “storm the gates” and deliver the captives! These truths are certainly verified by *1 Corinthians 15:50ff; Hebrews 2:14–15*, and other Scriptures.

Consider/Reflect: “O great God, you are the rock upon which I must build my life. You have called me out from the shifting sand of a life lived in estrangement from You. You have made my soul for Your peace and You will not despise my longing for the holiness of Your deep love. O Holy One, remind me again that Your love and Your sovereignty will not be defeated by anything—even the gates of Hades. Amen.” (Adapted from Thomas Merton, *A Book of Hours*, 147).

☐ **Day #4--Thursday, August 27th. Read: Matthew 16.18; Matthew 21.42; Psalm 118.22; Isaiah 28.16; Acts 4.10-12. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus tells Peter that He will build His (Jesus’) church. Jesus Christ is the “solid rock” on which the church is built. The Old Testament prophets said so (*Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16*). Jesus Himself said this (*Matthew 21:42*), and so did Peter and the other Apostles (*Acts 4:10–12*). Paul also stated that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ (*1 Corinthians 3:11*). This foundation was laid by the Apostles and prophets as they preached Christ to the lost (*1 Corinthians 2:1–2; 3:11; Ephesians 2:20*).

This is the first occurrence of this word “church” in the New Testament. It is the Greek word *ekklesia* from which we get our English word “ecclesiastical.” The literal meaning is “a called-out assembly.” The word is used 114 times in the New Testament and in 90 of these the word refers to a local church (assembly). However, in this first use of *ekklesia*, it seems likely that Jesus had the worldwide church in mind. He was not just building a local assembly, but a universal church composed of all who make the same confession of faith that Peter made.

The word *ekklesia* was not new to the disciples. This word was applied to the popular assembly of Greek citizens that helped to govern a city or district (*Acts 19:32, 39, 41*). In addition, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint*, used *ekklesia* to describe the congregation of Israel when it was gathered for religious activity (*Deuteronomy 31:30; Judges 20:2*). However, this does not mean that the Old Testament congregation of Israel was a “church” in the same sense as the churches of the New Testament. Rather, Jesus was introducing something new to His disciples.

For example, Jesus spoke about “My church” in contrast to these other assemblies. This church was to be something new and different; for in His church, Jesus Christ would *unite* believing Jews and Gentiles and form a new temple, a new body (*Ephesians 2:11–3:12*). In His church, natural distinctions would be unimportant (*Galatians 3:28*). Jesus Christ would be the Builder of this church and the Head of this church (*Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18*). Each believer in this church is a “living stone” (*1 Peter 2:5*). Believers would meet in local congregations, or assemblies, to worship Jesus and to serve Him; but they would also belong to the church universal (small “c” catholic) being built by Jesus Christ. There is an *oneness* to the people of God (*Ephesians 4:1–6*) that, despite our different theologies and practices, ought to be revealed to the world through love and unity (*John 17:20–26*).

Consider/Reflect/Pray: “Grant us grace, heavenly Father, to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior and so remain on the unshakable rock of our salvation. Thank you that you have made me, through my baptism, a member of your Church globally and locally. Amen.”

☐ **Day #5— Friday, August 28th. Read: Matthew 16.19. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Jesus transitions from the description of His part in establishing the church, to a description of the church’s function in the world:

“Keys of the kingdom of heaven” (v.19). This is another metaphor. Keys were symbolic in Old Testament times of a chief steward’s position (*Isaiah 22:15, 22; Luke 11:52*). A trusted steward kept the keys to his master’s possessions and dispensed them accordingly. To have the “keys” was to have authority in the household (For example, “the keys of death and Hades” described in *Revelation 1:18* and “the key of David” in *Revelation 3:7*, which Jesus possesses). Jesus clearly is speaking of a very central and significant role that the church fulfills.

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus’ church would be established and Peter and the other apostles would have important roles in it. “The kingdom of heaven” is *not* heaven, for no man on earth carries the keys to heaven! (All of the jokes about “St. Peter at the gate” stem from this misunderstanding). We use keys to open doors. Peter was given the privilege of opening “the door of faith” to the Jews at Pentecost (*Acts 2*), to the Samaritans (*Acts 8:14ff*), and to the Gentiles (*Acts 10*). Nevertheless, the other Apostles shared this authority as well (*Matthew 18:18*), and Paul had the privilege of “opening the door of faith” to the Gentiles outside of Palestine (*Acts 14:27*). Nowhere in this passage, or in the rest of the New Testament, are we told that Peter or his successors had any special position or privilege in the church. Peter himself, in his two epistles, claimed to be nothing more than an Apostle (*1 Peter 1:1*), an elder (*1 Peter 5:1*), and a servant of Jesus Christ (*2 Peter 1:1*).

“Binding and loosing.” The Greek syntax offers no clear indications of meanings. It is best to see the role Jesus assigns here in relation to His statement concerning foundations. A response of faith opens the door to new life in Christ. A rejection closes the door on life and confirms ultimate judgment. This privilege of binding and loosing was seen in Peter’s life as he had the privilege on the day of Pentecost to proclaim the gospel and announce to all those who responded in saving faith that their sins had been forgiven (*Acts 2*). He was able to do the same thing with the household of Cornelius (*Acts 10-11*; cf. *Acts 15:19-20*). In addition, again, the same privilege was given all the disciples (*John 20:22-23*). This same authority is given to the church (RHLC) today!

Consider/Reflect: Can you remember a time when something was “unlocked” for you through the ministry of the church? What do you need to have “unlocked” in your life?

□ **Day #6-Saturday, August 29th. Read: Matthew 16.19-20; (Acts 2.14-28). —Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.**

We need to spend a little more time on this significant verse. Binding and loosing was a very familiar phrase to the Jews, for their rabbis often spoke of “binding and loosing,” that is, forbidding or permitting actions based on God’s laws. Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:19 referred to Peter. However, His statement later in Matthew 18:18 included all of the Apostles. As the representatives of their Lord, they would exercise authority according to His Word. The Greek verbs in Matthew 16:19 are most important. The *Expanded Translation* by Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest reads:

“And whatever you bind on earth [forbid to be done], shall have been already bound...in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth [permit to be done], shall have already been loosed in heaven.”

These are future perfect verbs (i.e. “will *have been* bound,” “will *have been* loosed”), and suggests that the divine decision precedes the church’s declaration of it on earth. Jesus did not say that God would obey what the disciples (then and now) did on earth, but that they should do on earth whatever God had already willed. The church does not get a human’s will done in heaven; it obeys God’s will on earth.

Being the first to confess that Jesus was the Christ, Peter got this commission before the rest; and with these “keys,” on the day of Pentecost, he first “opened the door of faith” to the *Jews*, and then, in the person of Cornelius, he was honored to do the same to the *Gentiles*. Consequently, in the lists of the apostles, Peter is always first named. Read Peter’s sermon at Pentecost and see how he proclaimed Jesus as the Christ (*Acts 2*).

Again, as we already discussed, interestingly, the Apostles were not to share this truth about Jesus being the Son of God with other people until after His resurrection and ascension. The nation in general, and certainly the religious leaders in particular, were not yet ready for this message.

Consider/Reflect: How do you interpret the insight (*v.17*), power (*v.18*), and authority (*v.19*) given to Peter?

Pray and Prepare for Worship Tomorrow...

Sermon Series: “Jesus, Who?”

Scripture Texts:

Jerimiah 15.15-21

Romans 12.9-21

Matthew 16.21-28