



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 16:13–18

Gospel of Matthew

“Is Peter the Rock?”

TRANSCRIPT

There was a Bible teacher who was rather prominent during the first part of the 20th century who did a great deal of expository ministry over the Western world. Used to love to lead his hearers back to the days before sectarianism existed in the Christian church and to remind them that the early church was very simple. He used to say that, “All the medicine was in the bottle, but there were no labels. For instance, there were Christians in Rome, but no Romanists. Men believed in bishops, but there were no Episcopalians. Men believed in predestination, but there were no Presbyterians. There was lay preaching, but no Methodists [laughter]. Men believed in justification by faith, but there were no Lutherans. Many held the truth of believer’s baptism but there were no Baptists. Men trembled at the Word of God, but there were no Quakers [laughter]. Believers observed the Lord’s Supper, but there were no Plymouth Brethren. The elders took care to preserve the holiness of God’s house, but there were no Exclusive Brethren. The church was an army of salvation but there was no Salvation Army. In short, the saints gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus, but no one dared to use a name of a sectarian nature. They had the goods,” he concluded, “without the labels.”

Now that, of course, is what we would like to see carried out in practice in Believers Chapel. We don’t want to attack others, but we do want to point out that in the Scriptures, we do have the goods, and we don’t have the labels, and it is much better for it to be that way it seems to us. The

Scripture reading for today is found in Matthew chapter 16, and we are reading verses 13 through 18.

Matthew chapter 16 verse 13 through verse 18:

“When Jesus came into the borders of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

You notice, incidentally—I won’t be saying anything about this in the message—that the favorite term that our Lord Jesus had for himself was the term, Son of Man, and there it appears again.

“And they said, ‘Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He saith unto them, ‘But who say ye that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’”

Now by the way, some of your texts have “the gates of hell.” The original text has the term for Hades, and the reason that some of the modern versions, and even in the revised version of the Scofield Bible, the term, Hades, is preferred is because the term hell in English is more properly a rendering of the Greek word, *gehenna*, which means something like “fiery hell” or “lake of fire,” and is used for the lake of fire. So that Hades, the realm of the departed dead—a term that really encompasses both the blessed dead and the lost dead—is the term that is used here, and therefore

the expression, Hades, is a little more appropriate and uh not capable of some misunderstanding. Well, may God bless this reading of his inspired Word.

The subject for today is, “Is Peter the Rock?” The retirement to Caesarea Philippi afforded the Lord opportunity to ask two questions: what do the people think of him? And then, what do the disciples think of him? And out of the answers to these two questions have come texts that have become battlegrounds within professing Christendom. I am sure that if you have any acquaintance at all with the history of Christianity, that you know not only from that history but from practical experience that the text, “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church,” has been a battleground. And you probably also know that “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” has also been a battleground.

Now we want to consider today the first of these texts, Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18. It is basic to the position of a large, professing Christian church’s claims to be *the* church of Jesus Christ. It is avowed by them that Jesus Christ founded a church upon the earth. That, of course, is a truth. It is also by their avowal that the fact that the church was given power to govern and teach all mankind. That, I think, is a kind of half-truth. And then the third of their fundamental and basic stands is that that the Roman church is that church, which I personally feel is false.

If you were to visit St. Peter’s Church in Rome, you, in the inside of the interior of the Basilica would notice the text, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” So we’re coming to a text which has some important doctrinal implications, and surprisingly, the viewpoints of the Romanists coincide with the viewpoints of many Protestants. We shall see that not all of the Romanists believe that Peter is the rock, either.

The situation at which these questions were asked should be reviewed and will you just allow me for a few moments to review the scene at which the Lord Jesus spoke these questions. Remember, he had withdrawn to the area of Caesarea Philippi, about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, near the city of Caesarea, but called Caesarea Philippi or Caesarea of Philip because it was

founded by Herod Philip in honor of the Emperor Caesar, and also to distinguish it from the Caesarea that was located on the Mediterranean seashore. There, majestic Mount Herman was in the distance and could be seen, a mountain of over 9,000 feet altitude. It was a beautiful area. It was a secluded area. It was the kind of area to which you might go to pray, and to speak of spiritual things. Luke tells us that the Lord Jesus did go to that place in order to pray, and so he prayed and then he taught the apostles.

Now he taught them many things that had to do with his coming death in Jerusalem. We shall, in the next few weeks, discuss them as we continue the exposition of the Gospel of Matthew. But he was there not so much to pray with them as to pray no doubt for them. We never read of the Lord Jesus saying, now let's have a prayer meeting. He never said anything like that. As far as we know, he never prayed with the disciples, though he prayed much for them. There was always that fine difference between him and them. And he observed it, but he prayed, and no doubt he prayed in the light of the coming truths that he must reveal to them. That was the place, Caesarea Philippi.

The persons who are involved are called here the disciples. We gather from the context that the apostles were the ones to whom he was speaking. And then there is one apostle who stands out above the others. His name is Simon Peter, called often by biblical scholars *primus inter pares*, or first among equals. First among equals in the sense that he had no true primacy over the others so far as privilege is concerned, but he was nevertheless the acknowledged leader of the twelve. I think in every one of the lists of the apostles, Peter's name is listed first. He is never given a primacy of position, but a primacy, evidently, by virtue of his own Christian leadership.

Now we are inclined to think of Peter as the blunderer. We remember that at the transfiguration, it is Peter who blurts out, not knowing that he was saying, so the Scripture says, “Lord, it's good to be here, let's build three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, one for Elijah,” and then he was interrupted by the voice from heaven. The voice from heaven countermanded his orders or his desires so to speak, and Peter was shown to have blundered in that statement.

Then later on it is he who says the Lord Jesus pays tribute when the tribute gatherers ask him, and Jesus again had to rebuke him for answering out of place. In chapter 18 and verse 21 and 22 he asks the Lord Jesus, should we forgive up to seven times? And the Lord Jesus says, no not seven times, Peter, seventy times seven. And then we also remember that later on at the occasion of the last Passover and the first Lord’s Supper and the Upper Room Discourse, when the Lord Jesus took up the basin of water and began to wash the disciples’ feet, when he came to Peter, Peter said, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” And the Lord Jesus said Peter if I don’t wash your feet, you don’t have any part with me. He said, well, then bathe me all over. And the Lord Jesus had to give him another little lecture and say, “he that has been bathed all over needeth not saved to get his feet washed.” So Peter was constantly blundering it would seem.

Now we must say this for the apostle, because one of these days I’m going to have to face him face to face [laughter], in spite of the fact that he appears as the blunder so often, there is no question but that he deserved to be *primus inter pares*. He was a magnificent Christian man with a great testimony, and one to whom God reveals something surpassingly marvelous, as we see in this passage. And he has given us not only those sermons of his in the book of Acts, and those evidences of his Christian devotion there, but he has also given us two of the epistles of the New Testament. So Peter, if you’re listening, I want you to hear that, too.

But now it would seem, we talk about him as the blunderer, it would seem that here at least finally he has uttered something which the Lord Jesus has approved. I wonder if that’s the reason why in just a few moments when the Lord Jesus said that he is going to have to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die there and be raised again that Peter took him and said, “That be far from thee Lord, this shall not be unto thee.” Peter finally saying well I got I finally found a way to answer the Lord so that he’s approving, and I think I’ll look for another compliment there and that be far from the Lord, and so the Lord had to turn and say to him, “Get thee behind me Satan!” So Peter is prominent here.

Now the interrogation is described by Matthew very simply. When the disciples were gathered together the Lord Jesus asked them the simple question, who do men say that I, the Son of man, am? One might ask, why the questions? Why question the apostles? I can imagine someone saying, well he wanted to teach them like Socrates taught them, he wanted to teach them by asking questions, by interrogation. Possibly.

I think we can also think of some other reasons why he asked them these questions. Creeds always pose dangers for us. The dangers of creeds are simply that the creeds tend to become ossified, and consequently they seem to inhibit further development in the knowledge of the Word of God. There are some great creeds that have expressed very beautifully aspects of the Christian faith. We know them, for example, as the canons of the Synod of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Belgic Confession, and various others that have been very useful at certain times in the Christian church. But creeds tend to become limiting things, and they tend to limit development in the knowledge of the Word of God.

Now we have been told by the Lord Jesus that the Holy Spirit is here as a teacher, and since he's still here, and we're still here, we assume that he is still teaching. And therefore, there is or could be further light to break upon the Word of God. So creeds pose dangers for us, but creeds also serve a very effective purpose, and every one of us ought to have a creed. It's our personal faith. For you see, the process of crystallizing what we believe into a statement is a very helpful and useful thing. It's a means by which our convictions may become solidified, made definite.

I've always found that writing something, putting it down on paper, tends to make me think through it carefully. So it is possible the Lord Jesus, having given the apostles the revelation that he has given to them, desired that they crystallize what they have learned into statements to which they might give allegiance. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”—that's a straight statement to which Peter was forced.

Then I think also he may have asked these questions because he wanted them to realize the gulf that has now developed and is developing between them and the leaders of [the Jews]. He

wanted them to come to realize exactly what had happened. They were by their activities, by the profession of trust in him, identifying themselves with someone who was out of favor with the authorities in Jerusalem. And I think that he probably wanted them to realize the depth of that commitment to him. And by asking them the question, who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am, and then leading up to, who do you say that I am, he caused them to realize just how far their position had become from the position of the leaders in Jerusalem who were calling him now an apostate and an opponent of Judaism. So the questions then may have served some of these purposes.

The two questions are, first, a general one and then an individual one. Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? The answers are very interesting. They're all favorable. I don't hear or read of anyone saying there are some of them who say that you are the servant of Beelzebub. They all turn to the great men of the Old Testament and say—or the New Testament, John the Baptist—and say, some say you are John the Baptist. Well that was natural. John the Baptist had a kind of ministry of repentance that was very much like the Lord's ministry. As a matter of fact, their message was the same: repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand. That's not surprising.

Then the fact that some said, you are Elijah is not surprising either, because Elijah was a great prophet and his ministry was characterized by two things. It was characterized by the fact that it was an appeal to the nation Israel in a time of apostasy to repent and return to Jehovah. And then, in addition, Elijah accompanied his ministry with miracles. It was one of the great ages of the miraculous, and so it would be natural that someone might associate the Lord Jesus with Elijah, especially since as we shall see a few weeks from now it was the belief of Judaism that Elijah was going to come again before the Second Advent.

And then that some should think of identifying him with Jeremiah is also understandable, because Jeremiah was the great weeping prophet, and he wept over the disobedience of the nation Israel. He wept over the reasons by which they were called into captivity. And there is none who has wept more over the sins of Israel than the Lord Jesus. When he came to Jerusalem he wept over the

city and their disobedience. In the Old Testament, in the greatest of the servant songs, it is said that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. So you can see why someone might say he’s the reincarnation of the prophet Jeremiah.

Now the Lord doesn’t linger over these things. The facts are, of course, that the strains of all of the prophets meet in the Lord Jesus. Whatever Amos had that was good is found in the Lord Jesus. Whatever Joel had that that was good is found in the Lord Jesus. Whatever Jonah had that was good is found in the Lord Jesus. “He who spoke to the men of olden times through the prophets as in these last days has spoken unto us through his Son,” and so we shouldn’t be surprised that the great Prophet should combine in himself all of those beauties of the characters implanted by the Holy Spirit of the Old Testament prophets. He is the preeminent prophet promised by Moses.

But that doesn’t interest him. He doesn’t want to develop that. He turns to them individually and personally and says, but who say ye that I am? Incidentally, the Authorized Version, which is a paragon of English, has one of its mistakes in English. It has, *whom* say ye that I, the Son of Man, am? And I notice that this version that I’m reading has corrected that error and has, *who* say ye that I am? That’s good English.

Now the question is an important one. Our Lord is asking them to express themselves. You know, I frequently have students come to me and say, what do you think about such and such a theological problem or exegetical problem, and I say, well that’s a great problem, uh professor so-and-so says this and professor such-and-such says this, and professor woe-be-gone says this, and then the students notice that I’m trying to put them off a little bit, but they’ll say, but what do you say about it? And sometimes I answer and sometimes I’m embarrassed, I don’t know the answer. But it is an attempt to elicit a personal response.

That’s what our Lord wanted here. But who say ye that I am? I know they’re saying I’m Jeremiah and Moses and John the Baptist and Jeremiah and a son of Beelzebub and the rest, but I’m interested in what you think about me. And it’s here that Peter gives us his great confession. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Now this statement incidentally in its contents include all that the later church concluded about him. That is, his humanity, he’s the Messiah, the Messianic King promised of the seed of David in the Old Testament, and he also is the divine Son of God. Because he is Son of God, he is related by nature to the Father in heaven. Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God, is later in our creeds as, “very man of very man and very God of very God.”

But now having made this great confession, the Lord Jesus then responds by saying, Peter, blessed art thou. Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jonah, for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee by my Father who is in heaven. And I say unto thee that thou art *petrus* and upon this *petra* I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. It’s always important that we heed the Word of God and that we pay attention to the Scriptures as they are before us. That’s extremely important. It is the error of many of us at one time or another to wrest the Scriptures and make them say something that they don’t really say. Anybody who has ever studied the Bible has probably been guilty of that. It’s one of the great dangers that we must face.

Now Peter talks about it in his second epistle. He said that in the case of the apostle Paul’s writings there were some things that were very difficult to understand in them. I can identify with that, can also say Peter there are some very difficult things in your writings, too. When I get to heaven I won’t mind telling him that either, because I’m sure others have already told him that.

But Peter went on to say that these difficult things are things that others in their study have sought to torture, the Greek word is really, “to torture.” Now when you torture a person, you make him say something he really doesn’t want to say. So people take the Scriptures, and they make them say something that they don’t really want to say. They torture them. They wrest them. That’s something we must avoid doing and particularly when we come to a passage such as this, especially because it’s so easy to do it. So difficult to say, “I don’t know.”

There is a story told of a little lad sitting on a curb in Johannesburg in South Africa many years ago. He was reading the New Testament, and a member of the religious order passed by and

recognizing him as a child of the family that belonged to his flock he said, “My boy what’s that book that you’re reading?”

He said, “It’s the New Testament, Father.”

“But that’s not for an ignorant little boy like you to be reading,” the Father said.

The lad replied, “Sure, but I have a search warrant to read it.”

“A search warrant? Well what do you mean?”

“Why, it says right here, search the Scriptures, so I’m after doing what I’m told,” the little boy is supposed to have said. Well that’s what we want to do, search the Scriptures, because the Scriptures are the Word of God.

Now Simon Bar-jonah, you’re blessed. You have come to understand something which you did not understand by flesh and blood. You have come to understand this by divine revelation. You’re blessed for that reason. And I say to you that you are *petras*, that’s the Greek term for “Peter,” and upon this *petra*, a related word—upon this rock—I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Well, it is evident here that Peter is being given information about the foundation of the church. But who or what is the rock? That’s the question.

Now there are those who say it is very obvious. Peter is the rock. Does he not say, thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church? This is the view of the Romanists, and of course, it is the view of many Protestants, too. It is the view of some of the recent interpreters of this epistle. For example, David Hill, who has written a commentary very recently on the Gospel of Matthew, has said that this is the meaning: Peter is the rock. Oscar Kuhlman, a very respected continental scholar, has affirmed that Peter is the rock. Professor Kuhlman is not a Romanist, but a member of a Protestant church.

William Barclay, a Britisher, a member of the Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian Church, has affirmed Peter is the rock. So obviously, there is some evidence for Peter being the rock. It’s obvious there are arguments that could be presented in support of that.

Now, in a message like this, we don't have time to discuss all of the angles of this. I wish I could, I wish it were possible for me to speak about the language that our Lord may have spoken in, the Aramaic language, and the relationship that that has to this distinction in terms that are found here in verse 18, *Petrus* and *petra*, but we just don't have time to discuss it in that detail.

Let me just say a few things that lead me to believe that this is not the meaning of this text. It seems to me that it would have been far more natural, first of all, for our Lord, if he had meant Peter to say, I say unto thee, thou art Peter and upon thee I will build my church. That would have been very simple. That would have settled all of the questions of the text. There would be no possibility of misunderstanding. So I find it very difficult for me at least to understand, thou art Peter and upon this rock. I find it very difficult to take that to mean Peter.

Furthermore, the term *petra*, which is the Greek word translated “rock” here is a word that in the Old Testament was never used of men, always used of God. You can go back and look its usage up in the Old Testament and confirm that. It is referred to Jehovah, he is the rock, in a number of places. We are even told in the New Testament that Christ is the rock. But never is a man called a rock.

Furthermore, that interpretation cannot account for the change in terms, *petras* to *petra*. Thou art *petras*. That word, incidentally, means something like a stone or a pebble. And upon this *petra*, *petra* means a great mass of rock, like a cliff. Upon this *petra*. If he meant Peter, why didn't he say, thou art *petras* and upon this *petras* I will build my church. So this interpretation cannot account for that change.

Now of course, if Peter really is the foundation of the church, that can explain a lot of things. Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 2 that he was a hypocrite. And the Lord Jesus calls him Satan here in just a moment or two, and that might explain the whole thing, how the church came to be what it is and have the difficulties that it has, because it's built on a hypocrite. That's what the world says of us anyway—that we're nothing but a collection of hypocrites, because they examine our lives

on Monday through Saturday and then look at our professions on Sunday. That might explain everything.

But I do remember too that the Lord Jesus, according to the Gospel of John, did not commit himself to men because he knew what was in men, and it seems inconceivable, incredible, to me, a fantastic, exegetical castle in the air to affirm that a church is built upon a man. Even a man as great as Peter.

Dr. Ironside said he was attending an open air meeting years ago out west, and a friend of his was preaching very earnestly. A great big Irishman, half-drunk, stepped out and tried to break up the meeting. He kept shouting out as he followed the preacher with his fists doubled up, “What did the Lord say to Peter? Why don’t you tell us what the Lord said to Peter? That’s what we want to know! What did the Lord say to Peter?” The preacher was having difficulty preaching with, what did the Lord say to people Peter? Until finally he stopped, there was a quiet in the audience, and he shouted out, “The Lord said to Peter, get thee behind me Satan!” [laughter] and according to Dr. Ironside, that dropped that man in his tracks. He wanted him to say, I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom heaven, and he forgot that the Lord had said to Peter also, get thee behind me, Satan.

It is the creed of the Roman church that the Bible is to be interpreted according to the unanimous consent of the holy fathers. Pope Pius IV in an official statement made that observation. He said, specifically, “Nor will I ever understand it, the Word, or interpret it, except according to the unanimous consent of the holy fathers.” In other words, we are to interpret the Bible as it has been interpreted unanimously by the holy fathers.

There was a Roman Catholic scholar by the name of Lenoy who made a study of the interpretation of this text in the church fathers of the first few centuries. He discovered a rather interesting thing. He discovered in the first place that Chrysostom did not agree with the Romanist interpretation. He was their greatest preacher. He discovered that Augustine did not agree with it. He discovered that Origen, one of the greatest scholars, did not agree with it, and he discovered also that Jerome, the greatest Roman Catholic scholar who translated the Vulgate, their official text, did not

agree with it either. These men did not agree with the unanimous opinion, so-called the traditions of the fathers. They did not interpret it that way.

This is what they said. Chrysostom said, “On this stone,” that is to say, on the faith of this confession, I will build my church and this confession is thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Ambrose, who was very influential in Augustine’s life said, then the Lord replies to him, Peter, on this stone I will build my church—that is to say on this confession of the universal faith I will build the faithful that they may have life, in his commentary on Ephesians. The great Augustine said, what is the meaning of saying of Jesus Christ? It is this, I will build my church on this faith on what has just been said, to wit: thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. That he said on in his comments on the first epistle of John. Then he also said in his comments on the Gospel of John, on this rock which thou has confessed, I will build my church for the rock is Christ. And then Jerome said, the rock is Christ, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. So you can see it’s impossible for us to interpret this passage according to the unanimous tradition of the fathers.

Mr. Lenoy counted the comments of the fathers, looked at 85 interpretations of this passage from the church fathers. He found that 17 of the fathers believed that Peter was the rock—17 out of 85. That eight of them believed the apostles were the rock. Forty-four of them believed that the statement of verse 17 was the rock, and 16 of them believed that Jesus Christ was the rock. So were 60 out of the 85 of the church fathers believed that the statement, “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church,” has to do with the truth that the church is grounded upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

So then, I do not think that this is the interpretation that we are to understand of this passage. Furthermore, even if it were true that Peter is the rock, the Romanists would still have to prove that Peter’s authority is transmissible to others and then they would have to prove that it has been transmitted to the church in Rome. They would have to prove that it has been transmitted to the bishops of the church in Rome, and they would have to prove that Peter was the first bishop of

the church in Rome and had the authority to transmit his authority or that his authority was transmissible. All of these things, of course, are totally unprovable.

Well, is the rock the apostles? After all, you could understand the Lord Jesus to be speaking representatively, when he says, but who say *ye* that I am? We could understand Peter to be speaking up for the apostles and saying, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, and then the rock would be the apostles as a body. He will build the church on the apostles. Now we know that the remainder of the New Testament does affirm that the church has been grounded in the testimony of the apostles. But again here it would seem to me that the Lord would have said, but I say unto *you*, plural, you are plural, Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. So I cannot accept that interpretation.

Is the rock then Christ? Christ himself? Well if the rock were intended to be Jesus Christ himself, then why did he not say, and I say also unto thee thou art *petras*, but upon me? Thou art a little pebble. Thou art a man of rock but upon me, the true rock, I will build my church. So I do not think really that we are to understand Christ as the rock, except insofar as I will now, in exposition of the fourth view, include that.

I think with the great majority of the interpreters of the past that our Lord is referring to the statement that Peter has just made. When he says, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus responds and says, I say unto thee that thou art *petrus* but upon this great mass—this great cliff of a statement: thou art the Christ the Son of the living God—I will build my church, upon this great confession, Peter, that you have just made.

Now we must be careful to mention, and when we say the church is built upon a confession, we don't mean that it's built upon a series of words, a series of phrases, a sentence. We don't mean that. We mean it is built upon the truth that is conveyed in that statement which includes our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the church is built upon our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, as the Son of the living God, so that all that is included, all that is found in the statement, Christ is the rock, is included in this. That accounts for the distinction in the terms *petrus* and *petra*. Thou art *petrus*, a

pebble, but upon this *petra*, this great statement concerning my person and my work, I will build the church.

It is the view of the apostles in the second chapter of Peter’s first letter. He does say the Lord Jesus is a rock, a *petra* of offense—even uses the very word *petra* that is used here. So Peter, if he were here, I think would say, you’re right, Lewis. If just read my first epistle, you would know. I say there that Christ is the rock. I understood it that way.

And then finally, this is the view of the vast majority of the interpreters, both Catholic and Protestants. But occasionally church policy is required to overcome interpretation. That’s what we must avoid.

Now he says, thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church. I won’t say much about this now, but you’ll notice this is the first occasion of the word, church, in the New Testament. We have not had it up to this point. We have had it two times more in the 18th chapter of this Gospel. We never have it in Matthew otherwise. We never have it in Mark at all. We do not have it in Luke. We do not have it in John. We do not have it in the book of Acts until the 5th chapter. But here is its foundation, the testimony to Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

He concludes by saying that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. What he means by that is that Satan and his legions, their kingdom shall not overcome the church which rests upon the authority and power of the Son of God. The psalmist prayed, “Lord lead me to a rock that is higher than I.” That is the rock that is higher than we are. And if we stand upon that rock we are safe and secure.

Now let me notice a couple of things by way of conclusion. Did you notice that when Peter blurted out the statement, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, that Jesus said to him, blessed art thou Simon Bar-jonah? Incidentally, if Peter was an apostolic succession, the head of a long line, I am too. Bar-jonah means, son—or as the Aramaic word for son, Jonah—is the word for Jonah or John, so it was Peter, son of John. Peter Johnson. You see? [Laughter] Apostolic

succession—a simple matter of interpretation.[Sustained laughter] I see that enlightenment has come to you, too. [More laughter]

Now Peter is told, Simon Bar-jonah, blessed art thou for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee. In other words, Peter has knowledge that differs from the world's. He has not attained it by study, simply. He has not attained it by the exercise of his human reason. He has not attained it by empiricistic thinking. He has obtained it by a revelation. Every true believer has come into the family of God in a similar way. In fact, when the Lord Jesus in John chapter 6 says, no man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him, he goes on to say that this is what it says in the Old Testament Scriptures. They shall all be taught of me. What is meant by that is that all the messianic company are individuals who have been taught by God. Put it in theological language, all the messianic company is composed of people, every one of them is a person who has been personally enlightened by the Holy Spirit and brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jonah, flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee but my Father who is in heaven.

And the marks of the special knowledge which comes to the true believer include the sense of certainty that we have that what we say concerning the Lord Jesus is true, that our hope is sure because it is founded upon him who is a rock. We cannot sink through the rock. The rock is stable and secure, and it has the mark of permanence. A truth that we obtain is not some homemade religion which we have derived from the contributions that our friends may have made. The truth that we have is something that God has, in this marvelous enlightening work of the Holy Spirit, his internal testimony, it is by that that we have come to the sense of certainty that Christianity is true, that the Son of God is the Messiah, he is Son of the living God and our faith grounded in him is sure to stand all of the tests of life and eternity. And it has a sense of rest about it.

We don't keep flitting about looking for the foundation of our faith in anything that his human because we have now had a higher testimony, the testimony of God himself. Every Christian—I notice a lot of you in the audience are saying, yeah that's right Lewis, that's right—because you know this personal testimony that has come to you. It is the distinguishing thing that

marks off the genuine believer from others. It is the thing of which the apostle speaks when he says, he that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of his. That’s the final test that we belong to the family.

Now of course, I wouldn’t be much of a preacher if I didn’t ask you the personal question. Peter has expressed it for himself. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. But who say ye that he is? What do you yourself say? Is he the Messiah, the Son of the living God? Is he the divine human Son of God who has offered a sacrifice promised by the Old Testament Scriptures that provides forgiveness of sins for sinners? Is he that for you? Have you put your trust in him? Are you resting upon him and him alone, and is there that sense of assurance in your heart brought there by God the Holy Spirit that you do know God through him?

I do pray, earnestly desire, appeal to you that you consider this question, for it’s the question that means life or death. Oh, if you’re troubled at all, may God lead you to go home, get down by your bedside and pray, O God—if you don’t know these truths—reveal these truths to me as you have revealed them to the apostles and others down through the years. Jesus Christ has provided an atonement for sinners, and if God has brought you to the knowledge of yourself then you belong to that company, you’re a candidate for this salvation. May you come to him. How terrible, as I’ve often said, how terrible to come into an audience like this, hear the gospel preached, and then to go out the door never having responded to the message of the Lord Jesus. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for the greatness of the Word of God, and we thank Thee for the testimony of the Apostle Peter, who at the instigation of the Holy Spirit uttered this magnificent statement, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Truly, Lord, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Our hope for time and for eternity is resting upon Thee.

O God, if there are some in this audience who have not yet come to him, give them no rest or peace until they rest in Christ. O, reveal the truth to them we do pray, that they, too, with the whole messianic company may be taught of Thee.

May grace, mercy, and peace go with us as we leave.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.