

“We Will Prevail”

Matthew 16:13-20

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For this study we will be in Matthew 16:13-20. As we come to this Memorial Weekend I am grateful to the Lord for all those who have served our country, past and present and for the sacrifices they have and are making for us to have the freedoms we have. I am also struck by the the tapestry of ministries here with all the diversity of people impacted by Gospel ministry and it was incredibly encouraging to me just to see the evidence of what happens when a faithful, Gospel ministry occurs, especially the impact the Lord had through Harry Reeder as he was a faithful minister of the Gospel. Hopefully we will continue to make a commitment in our own personal lives to have that same type of Gospel ministry. We commit to the Lord and commit to the faithfulness of His Word, His truth and Good News.

This is the Word of God. Matthew 16:13-20 says [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.*

Prayer:

Father, we thank You for Your Word, Your truth and the opportunity to hear from Your Word. Lord, I prayed that You would use me, a man who desperately needs your Holy Spirit to guide me in delivering Your message. I pray that You would clear our minds, help us to be singular, and focus on Your perfect and holy Word. We pray this in Christ’s Name. Amen.

This is an interesting passage for many different reasons. One, Jesus goes to an area of the world that we have no record of Him ministering in. It's an area of the world that, quite frankly, was kind of the epicenter of the pagan world at the time. Caesarea Philippi was known as an area of pagan gods in really moral behavior, yet Jesus goes some 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, north of His home base of ministry, Capernaum, to share a very vital truth with the Disciples. He goes to an area that, who for most people they would have never darkened the door to this area, especially Jews. They wouldn't have gone up there. The Jewish leaders would not have followed Him there and for some reason He takes the disciples to this place.

Jesus chose to deliver some sort of graduation speech to His Disciples at this particular location. In this pagan setting, He encourages His Disciples to build a church that would overcome the worst of evils. Caesarea Philippi has this unique physical structure, and they call it the gates of hell. If you've ever gone on the trip to Israel with Pastor Reeder, then you know where I'm talking about for it's a huge rock cliff and in that cliff there's a cave that has within it a water source. That water source has been running for thousands of years. That water source is actually part of the headwaters of the Jordan River as it flows into the Sea of Galilee. What is so interesting about this particular area is that back then, those individuals in Greek culture actually

thought that water source was a gateway to the underworld. They actually believed that certain pagan gods would travel to the underworld during the winter and come back in the spring, and they would use this water source to travel.

Even if you go there now, you see all of these ruins of old temples that were built there and markings of the goat-footed god of shepherds, Pan, which was the son of Hermes. There are all these goat cemeteries as they sacrificed to the false god Pan, who was actually half man, half goat. Pan was considered to be the god of panic because he was a frightful god trying to scare people. He was also a fertility god. Back then the people of Caesarea Philippi would go to these particular temples and they would perform very immoral acts. They would sacrifice things, do sexual behaviors that were we won't mention here but they were acts that were the darkest of the darkest. The reason they did these acts is because they thought by doing these things, they could entice the gods to come back to pay a visit. So, they did this all the time and it's fascinating to me that Jesus took them to this location to teach them this particular truth.

In this study I want us to look at three particular things that Jesus teaches them in this graduation ceremony, if you will. The reason why I use that term graduation ceremony is because the Disciples at this point had been with Christ for over two years and they had seen Jesus perform miracles. They'd been involved in this different ministry. They had seen Jesus do all kinds of things and they still anticipated Him coming back as a powerful Messiah that would overthrow the Roman Empire. Here they are probably drawing the conclusion of this ministry, thinking, 'When is He going to flip the switch? When is He going to change and actually take over? When are we going to be His vice regents and be able to rule with Him?' Yet, Jesus, takes them on a different turn. He takes them to a very evil place and He does it to teach them a lesson.

I think Jesus picks this location for several reasons. One, for the physical representation of what that cave meant. Jesus did a great job of using physical, actual representations in our world to give symbolism to spiritual truths. I think a second reason why He did it and it's interesting because I was reading this in Matthew Henry's commentary, the Jewish religious leaders would not have followed Him there. He could really have a private conversation with these guys for the most part. There might have been some people around, but they really wouldn't have teamed up and it follows him there. Actually, other people probably would have stopped just north of Bethsaida and thought, "my goodness, what is he doing going there?" Also I think He goes there to teach them some principles.

It's interesting how God does this, and we can see this throughout the Bible. Before a person was about to take on a very difficult task, God spends a good bit of time encouraging them with the truth. Right after this, if you read a little further in Matthew, you'll notice that Christ is about to tell them, kind of for the first time, 'I'm going to be crucified. I'm going to die. This is going to end differently than you think it's going to end.' He actually goes on and tells them that three separate times. It's pretty interesting that the Scriptures are clear that these men writing it, didn't really understand what He was saying, but before He goes into somewhat of a dire prophetic message, He wants to build them up. That's what this passage is, building them up.

Today, I hope that as we hear these truths, we too would be built up in a very similar pagan society, in a very similar situation where things around us are becoming more and more like this first century location. We too can be built up in the truth of what Christ is teaching these men. Christ provides three things that I want to talk about in this study. He provides more, but three, I think encompass our overarching principles here. The first is, He wants to provide clarity as to who He is. That's the most important part of this message. Secondly, He wants to instill confidence in each person in Christ, and also in the church collectively. Thirdly, He

reinforces their calling, their commissioning of the Gospel ministry. Let's go back into the text and start at Matthew 16:13.

Matthew 16:13 says [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?"* Jesus was an expert in engaging our senses in the learning process. One of the most effective, impactful ways to help people understand and engage their faith is to ask them questions. It's one of the most effective tools of evangelism because you get to hear where people's hearts are. He basically wants to know what people are saying about Him if He really needed to know from them. He already knew but He wanted them to hear themselves answer it, and then He's going to back it up with the truth. Here are some of the answers they give Him.

Matthew 16:14-16 says [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."* The answers they give in verse 14 were casual believers with wrong thoughts about the Messiah. You see, as far as their fleshly mind would take them was to Prophet status. Without Divine revelation we all at best see Jesus as a good man, at worst as someone that didn't even exist. We even see that today for we see that anybody worth their weight in scholarship as a historian will tell you that there was a historical Jesus., but what they won't tell you without divine revelation is that He is our Lord. It takes more than that.

Most of these people that the disciples are referring to were followers who stayed around and gathered to see a spectacular moment or benefit by association. They wanted to see a miracle and in Christ states this earlier in this text that a lot of these people were motivated by that. They didn't have the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, but then Peter steps in and says something really encouraging to Christ – ‘You are *the* Christ, the Son of *the* living God.’ This is not a dead God, but a living God. He is the Christ, He is Diving, He is the Messiah, the Redeemer and the Savior. There's so much behind that statement – the Christ. What does Jesus do?

Matthew 16:17 says [17] *And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! (Why?) For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.* Can you imagine how good Peter feels at that moment? On one hand, it's kind of a mix of emotions because he didn't come up with that himself, but on the other hand, there's evidence of Divine activity in his life. The Holy Spirit has given him that insight. Praise the Lord. I mean, how encouraging would that be if Jesus said that to you? I know if He looked at me and said, ‘Blessed are you Ray for flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you, but the Holy Spirit,’ yes I'd be praising the Lord.

Christ has something we don't need to miss here. Probably the most important thing here He is indirectly saying is that we need the Holy Spirit to be able to see the truth of the Gospel. When we realize that it changes the way we interact with the world around us. We go from being angry, frustrated, upset and irritated that people say such foolish things to a position of saying if it were not for the grace of God there go I. Then we in turn interact in a different way. I am so guilty many times to watch a short video or read an article from somebody who isn't a Christian and think, ‘I cannot believe they think that way. What in the world are they thinking?’ Then the first thing that I can go to many times in my flesh is, ‘how dare them’ or ‘they're just so hateful, so awful.’ Yes, their behavior is that, but ultimately, the reason why they say what they say is because they're darkened, they're blinded and they need the Holy Spirit to see the truth. So rather than get upset or angry with them, we should pray. I think the Holy Spirit is moving me that way. As I read this passage, I'm reminded that they desperately need our prayers and if we know

them personally, they desperately need to hear the truth of the Gospel and that the Holy Spirit would open their eyes to hearing that truth.

It's interesting in his commentary on this moment, John Calvin says this; 'The mind of man is destitute of that which is necessary for perceiving the mysteries of heavenly wisdom which are hidden in Christ, and even that all the senses of men are deficient in this respect till God opens our eyes to perceive His glory in Christ.' The so true. So, what does that do for us? I think it really shows us that there's two important elements to God glorifying ministry and Christ is showing them this right here in this passage.

The two elements that we have to have to continue to press forward in God-glorifying, Christ-centered ministry, is first to lift up Christ as Savior like Peter does – You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, and we do that through the power and work of the Holy Spirit. Paul talks about this in Romans 8:9-11 which says [9] *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. [10] But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. [11] If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.* First and foremost is that Christ provides this clarity to them and in their ministry moving forward, no matter the trials and tribulations, is that Christ is to be lifted up, that He is to be the One that their ministry should be focused on. He says that same thing to us today.

The second practice that He teaches is to instill confidence in them. Let's continue in the text. Matthew 16:18 says [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.* We have to be careful here because some of the times this verse has been misinterpreted. Christ is not saying that Peter, in which his name in the Greek form would mean Stone, that the church is built on Peter. He is saying is really kind of interesting in the Greek language – Peter, which is a certain gender form of that Greek word actually means stone and the word rock in this verse, from the same Greek word actually means cliff or foundation.

Christ is telling Peter he is one of many stones that are going to be built on the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Peter's ministry in Gospel proclamation is going to be a stone built on the foundation of Christ. In Ephesians 2 we see where the foundation of the New Testament Church is and it's built on the cornerstone of Christ. The Prophets and the Apostles are building up on that foundation. We see even Paul speaks to this. Christ uses the term rock here. The Word of God here, is not speaking to Peter's personhood as the object of the foundation, but rather to Himself.

Even Peter refers to Christ as the rock and we see this in I Peter 2:6 which says [2] For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious (referring to Christ), and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame." Then Paul shares this truth in I Corinthians 3:10-11 which says [10] *According to the grace of God given to me (Paul), like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. [11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* If you try to lay a foundation on anyone or anything else it will just fall through. The message of Christ here is that Peter and others do and will preach the message of Jesus Christ, which will build up the church.

As this message is preached and as that faithful ministry goes, what we will find here is the second truth, and that is the gates of hell will not prevail. I remember when I went to Israel in

2015 with Pastor Reeder, and on that trip we saw a huge horseshoe seating area right in front of the springs, in front of that cave and that district of Caesarea Philippi. There were about 50 of us and we are fanned out in that area as Pastor Reeder sat in the middle as he read this passage in Matthew 16 and was describing things to us. We don't know exactly where the apostles were, but I'm envisioning in my mind this physical illustration right behind him of this pagan place that seems vast and overwhelming, but yet it will not prevail. It's amazing to me to see how Christ used this as an opportunity to teach.

This Rock, Christ will not be overcome by any scheme of Satan. Thousands of years later, through the twists and turns of history, with all cultures coming and going, we see today the truth of this prophecy, in that Christ is still reigning on His throne and His church is still here. Praise the Lord. Think about that for a minute and let the reality of the powerful presence of Christ's Church in the midst of the plethora of Satan's attacks is schemes set in. Satan continues to press us and he doesn't win. He can't extinguish Christ's church. If there ever was true evidence of any prophecy, this is it – the church has sustained and continues to sustain. When you think about any foundational institution in the world, they come and go. There's cycles in the history of the world, but the church has stayed the same. There's always been a faithful remnant, no matter what happens in culture or society. Do you believe that? No matter what happens around us, the church is still going to be here because Christ is still going to be proclaimed and exalted and He's still going to have an impact to those around us.

Lastly, Christ wants to confirm their calling and he does that by talking about the keys to the Kingdom. Jesus says in Matthew 16:19, *[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.* John MacArthur speaks to this particular verse and he says “The power behind the keys of the Kingdom is the Word of God.” These men are able to proclaim the Word, the closed canon of the Word of God, and the Scripture is what actually gives them authority. It isn't who they are, but it's their proclamation of the Scripture and the truth that gives them the authority to loose and to bind.

Every time the Word of God is preached, there is a loosening and there is a binding. There is an involvement of the Holy Spirit. There is an authority there and that's why when you preach or teach the Word of God, it is taken incredibly seriously. It's not because of anything that I am or any other preacher up here is, but it's because of the authority of the Word. What a great blessing that is, because what we find in this is there is a confirmation in the calling that no matter what happens, the Word of God will go out and it will have impact, it will have change, it will adjust lives and make a difference.

So, His confirmation to these men is basically this; trust in the Rock, that is Me, the Gospel message – preach, teach and do what you've been called to do. Guess what? There will be a return because I (Christ) have blessed your ministry. Paul states this very clearly in Romans 1:16, *¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is **the power of God** for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Pastor Reeder used to always quote this verse. The power of the Message is such that it has an incredible loosening power over the grip of sin for those who have the Holy Spirit. Those who disregard, who think they can control their own destiny, for anybody who doesn't listen to the Gospel message, there is unfortunately a very binding effect to it. Which side of that are you on today? Which side are you in – the loosening or the binding?

Lastly, I want to point out something I believe is vitally important here and may be missed, if we don't have the right perspective. As I went through the commentaries and I was

reading to prepare this study, I came across this in several different commentaries, which really was fascinating to me because all the times I've read this passage in Matthew, even the time that I sat there in Israel, I didn't really think about it. When Christ says that the gates of hell will not prevail, what's the function of a gate? It is to protect something from somebody.

I think many times in our Christian walk, we do what a coach used to tell me not to do, and that is, we play not to lose rather than play to win. We retreat many times. We're reserved. We're afraid that somebody will reject us, or maybe they'll make us out to be a fool or maybe they'll say that you can't be a part of this group – they ostracize us because of faithful ministry. So there's this defense of maybe even retreating posture that we take when God doesn't call us to that. He calls us to a very confident, offensive posture, knowing that Satan cannot prevent the light of the world from penetrating the darkest areas of the world.

What does that confident, offensive posture look like? I'll try to illustrate this by giving you a story. I'm a former long time ago, kind of quasi below average basketball player. I remember one time our coach told us that we were going to play a team that was very difficult to beat. He told us this team would full court press us the whole game and we knew that. For those that aren't familiar with basketball, it means rather than waiting at half court to play defense, as soon as you started to throw the ball in, the other team was going to be all over you. It's kind of a frenetic, hectic pace that they try to create. There are usually a lot of turnovers, a lot of issues. The coach then said, "We have to break that press. That means we have to have an offensive mindset. That means we can't stop moving." If someone stops dribbling, they can't dribble again. They have to pass it to somebody so when there's a full court press, they try to double team the person who gets the ball to make you stop dribbling. So you be really upset, really frightful, and throw the ball away and create a turnover. Right? The goal for breaking that is to keep your dribble, to spread out, to work together, to pass the ball and keep moving forward. Once you break the press a couple of times, most teams will fall back out of the press.

The same is true spiritually as Satan likes to put on a full court press on us as a church and I think as individual believers, he wants us to be frightened. He wants us to cow down. He wants us to start dribbling the ball and get in the corner. He wants to press us and double team us. He wants us to throw the ball the way and give up. He wants us to be beaten by 30 or 40 points, but if we break the press, he backs off, he flees and the only way we break the press is by trusting our great coach, our Lord Jesus Christ, because He gives us the tools to break the press. How do we break the press? How do we keep dribbling? How do we keep moving forward? How do we do these things? We do them through the means of grace, through the Gospel message – that's how we do it. We don't retreat. We keep dribbling out there with the Gospel message and when we have a chance, we keep passing it, We keep sharing it. We keep moving forward. Then Christ is the One who scores the goal. Christ is the One who gives us victory. Christ is the One that allows us to continue to prevail over the schemes of Satan. That is why I titled this study 'we will prevail.' Not we as in you and me alone, but we collectively as the bride of Christ. We collectively as the Church of Christ, will prevail because the gates of Hell will not prevail over us. Amen.

I will close with this. Maybe your thinking right now, "Ray, I don't even know what it means to be a part of this team. How do I even get on the team? How do I dribble the ball? How do I pass? How do I partake a break in the press? Because I sure do feel like Satan's got me over in the corner, and I'm just trying my best to stay alive." If you're on the team of Christ and you have a saving relationship with Jesus, then reach out to a brother and sister, reach out to me or somebody else, and let's talk about it. Let's work together as a team to try to help you break

through that press so we can pray for you, so we can fellowship, so we can gather together. But if you're not a part of the team, then I would encourage you to do that which Peter did and that is to acknowledge Christ as the Christ, the Son of the living God, our great Rock, our great Redeemer, our Savior. Jesus Christ will save you from any scheme, eternal scheme of Satan, and He will give you a chance to live for all of eternity with Him in heaven. What a blessing that is and will be! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I am so thankful for the opportunity to come in to present Your Word and thankful that You give us a chance to hear Your Word and Your truths. Lord, just as the disciples took this in, processed it, and just as they needed the Holy Spirit to show them the truth, Lord, we know that we need to rely on the Holy Spirit that You give us to show us the truth. So, Father, I pray that You would guide us now, and give us the wisdom we need to accomplish that which You've called us to accomplish, that we would not fade away, that we would not whimper, that we would not retreat and that we would be faithful in trusting You and Your promises. You are the Rock, Lord and the gates of hell will not prevail over Your church. So let us be that which You've called us to be in that light for we pray this in Christ's Name, Amen.