

# Christ and His Church

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's pray and ask for God's help as we come to his word. Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Well, friends, here we are this evening, coming to the middle of Matthew chapter 16. And do you know that up till now, and actually for the rest of the gospel, Matthew is only really trying to tell us one thing. Did you know that? 28 chapters, over a thousand verses covering three years of events of Jesus' life, and he wants to tell us one thing. Or maybe I should put it a little differently. He actually does want to tell us lots of things, but they are all like fruit and branches and whatever that hang off the main stump and root and main part of this tree. And what's that one main thing? Well, we arrive at it this evening. Here it is in verse 16 on the lips of Peter. Jesus, you are the Christ, the Christ.

We have this evening what we could call, and others have called, the great confession. Matthew famously ends his gospel in chapter 28 with the great commission. Well, here, if you like, we have the great confession. Peter confesses Jesus is the Christ. And this is what Matthew has been kind of driving towards in his gospel up to this point. So as we come to this passage this evening, we're coming to a real hinge. And actually, it works like this in Mark and Luke as well.

This confession of Peter is a huge point in the gospel and a huge hinge point. From here, it is the road to Jerusalem. As we're going to see next week, it is the road to the cross for Jesus. But it all hinges, follows on this great confession that Jesus is the Christ. So what does this word Christ mean?

Well, we could just think, perhaps it's Jesus' surname. He is Jesus Christ. But it isn't his surname. It's a title, a designation. It is a title that would have perked the ears of any Jewish person. Oh, the Christ, we're waiting for him. So Christ, the word actually means anointed or Messiah.

[ 3 : 0 2 ] Messiah, the long-promised Savior and King of God's people. He is the one first promised, and if you like, kind of whispered and spoken about back in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, as a snake crusher is promised. And again and again throughout the Old Testament, we see and learn more and more of one who is to come. And so if you like, since Genesis chapter 3, we've been waiting for this person and waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. And here he is. Peter says, Jesus, you are the one.

You are the Christ. So let me just start with a question that we're going to answer a little bit later. Because we could be sitting there thinking, well, what does it matter?

What does it matter that Jesus is the Christ? Well, I want to raise the stakes a little bit, or actually I think the text will go on to raise the stakes a little bit and say it matters because eternity hangs on that question. That eternities hang on that question, that heaven and hell hang on that question. But we're going to come and see that in a little bit. First, I want us to go to our first point. Let's look at our first point and come back to that later. Who is Jesus? Who is Jesus? And then we'll see what he's doing and what it means for us. So firstly, who is Jesus? Well, he's the Christ.

In verse 13, Jesus arrives at Caesarea Philippi and he asks his disciples, well, who do people say the Son of Man is? Now, when he's speaking about the Son of Man, he's referring to himself. It's one of Jesus' favorite ways of talking about himself. It can be used to mean a man, a kind of a human, not necessarily divine, like at the book of Ezekiel, we speak about a Son of Man. But it can be used as a divine title, like in Daniel chapter 7, and that's how it's being used here. And Jesus wants, if you like, to take a kind of straw poll. I guess he couldn't put out a kind of Google form or a vote on WhatsApp or whatever it is. So he asks his disciple to kind of take the temperatures of those that are around him, or they have already taken the temperature, taken a little bit of conversation with those who've been around them. And he says, well, who do the crowds, who do they say that I am? And what do the crowds answer? Well, they say, some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, some say Jeremiah, or some another prophet. Now, the crowds, those that have been kind of following Jesus and hearing some of what he's been saying, in one sense, that they are on the right lines. You could say they're warm-ish, not freezing cold, but far from being burning hot. Did you ever play that game at home? You'd hide something cold, cold, cold, hot, hot. Did you ever do that? Maybe that was just in our family growing up.

Okay, but you know what I mean, right? They're sort of warm-ish. John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, they're all prophets, teachers sent by God. And they see something in what Jesus is doing that looks like their ministries. But are they right? Is Jesus John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other Old Testament prophet? Well, no, no. Verse 15, Jesus asks a second question. He says, who do you say that I am?

[ 6 : 34 ] He turns to his disciples and says, who do you say that I am? And they don't say John the Baptist, they don't say Elijah, they don't say Jeremiah, but Peter answers, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And note here, Jesus doesn't deny it. He doesn't reject it. No, he fully accepts it, doesn't he? He's saying, look, in this sentence, he's affirming, I am the Son of man, the Son of God, the Christ, the King. And it's interesting to know where Jesus is doing this. We learn that they're in Caesarea Philippi, and it's a big Roman town named in honor of, well, Caesar. And Jesus doing this here, it's a little bit like being at the White House, or Downing Street, or Buckingham Palace, or perhaps being in Rome itself and saying that the president, the prime minister, that Caesar, that they are not ultimately king. No, Jesus is king. Matthew wants us to know one central thing in his gospel. Everything is driving home towards this point. Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Christ. He is king above all.

I think it's fair to say that in our kind of cultural moment at the moment, in the last few months, or perhaps maybe six months or a year, Jesus has been getting some, quite a lot of airtime among some of our cultural elites or cultural commentators. Joe Rogan on his podcast, Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist and author. He hosts these kind of roundtable discussions on the Bible, and they have experts on all these things. Tom Holland, the historian, not the Spider-Man actor, at least not that I know the Spider-Man actor. Maybe there are others too, but these people seem to be saying a lot and writing a lot and podcasting and YouTubing a lot about Jesus.

And they do so because they see something of our Christian heritage, if you like, in the West being lost. And they're interested in it, I guess. Now, what they say in one sense might be all very well, and they may have some common grace insights to give for history or living today. I haven't read everything they've said. But, but, as far as I've read or can see, especially the likes of Rogan or Peterson, something is missing. Something is missing. What's missing? A bended knee. A bended knee. A confession that Jesus is the Christ, the King, my Lord and Saviour, the one to whom I give my life and my all. Because if Jesus is the Christ, we owe him our worship, our lives, everything. That the Messiah is the long-promised king to rule and defend God's people, the prophet to teach us, the priest to save us, we are to bow in worship to him. And so, dear friends, the question Jesus asks his disciples echoes down to us here this evening. Who do you say that I am? And actually, dear friends, as we're going to go on to see, there is no more important question to answer in all the world. It is a matter of eternity, of eternal life and death. And so, friends, this evening, for each one of us here, how do we answer that question? Is Jesus just a good moral teacher? Just a kind of first century influencer?

He just gave the Western world some good morals that actually we quite like that maybe are just slipping away. Is the Lord Jesus just a life coach to help us kind of get over the bumps of life?

Or do we confess with Peter, Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one to whom I repent of my sin and turn to and cling to for life? There is only one option. He is the Christ. Are we bending our knee to him? But just before we move on to our second point, I want us to note how Peter arrived at this confession. How was it that he got there and worked all this out after all this way, the time that he's been with Jesus? So how did he arrive at it? Verse 17. 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. So how did Simon Peter, Peter, how did he come to his confession? It wasn't through his father's teaching, if you like, nor through any flesh and blood that revealed this to him. His mom, a class teacher, another disciple. No, ultimately, ultimately, Peter came to see who Jesus was because God opened his eyes. He took the scales from his eyes that he could see. It was a work of God's saving grace and mercy that led Peter to see.

[12:17] Why? Why did it need to be that way? Because Peter could not do it for himself. No one can do it for himself. We've been seeing that in Ephesians, haven't we, in the morning, dead in our trespasses and sins. The dead cannot revive themselves to life. No, we need God in his grace and mercy to come and give us life. I came across two wonderful quotes this past week from Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards was an American pastor and missionary in the 18th century.

And here's what Jonathan Edwards says. To take upon yourself to work out redemption is a greater thing than if you had taken upon you to create a world.

It is easier, says Jonathan Edwards, it is easier to create a planet, a new world, than to save ourselves. Such is the depth of our sin. It's easier to say to Elon Musk, forget Mars. SpaceX don't need to go there.

How about you create a new planet full of life and hang it somewhere between Jupiter and Saturn? It is easier to do that than it is to save ourselves and confess Jesus as the Christ.

But here is Edwards again. But I am bold to say that the work of God in the conversion of one soul, one soul, is a more glorious work of God than the creation of the whole material world.

[13:52] The great confession of Peter, of any who confess Jesus as Lord, as the Christ, as their Savior, is more glorious than the creation of the world. So dear friends, what does that mean?

It means tonight if you confess Jesus as the Christ, as your Lord, praise God. Rejoice and be glad that you heard the gospel and God worked in your heart to save you, to take the scales from your eyes, to unplug your ears and to give you life. Now to clarify, this isn't a kind of mechanical override thing, that God kind of comes and overrides Peter or anyone who saved in such a way that they are now only like a kind of puppet on a string. No, not at all. God works in our hearts in such a way as that we come most freely and are made willing by his grace. But doesn't it lead us to such praise and humility and wonder at his grace? No one is left to boast. For it is God himself who's revealed the Lord Jesus to us. But if you don't know Jesus this evening, if when we ask the question, who do you say

Jesus is and you're saying teacher or person of interest or something like that, but you didn't say he's not the Christ, what do I do with this? Very simply, you run to Jesus and he will save you.

Run to Jesus. Confess him as the Christ. Christ turn from your sin. Bow the knee and he will save you. Matthew wants to teach us one thing, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. But actually, of course, it's slightly more than that, isn't it? It's that we would confess Jesus as the Christ, that the knowing is an active thing, a living thing, that we would bow the knee to him. Now, the Lord Jesus turns and Matthew records for us and tells us what Jesus is doing. Jesus goes on to describe what the Christ is doing. And that brings us to our second point. So first, who is Jesus? He's the Christ.

Second point, what is Jesus doing? What does the Christ do? Answer, he's building and governing his church. Verse 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. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

[ 16 : 39 ] As I've been looking at this all, as I've been looking at this all week, and we've been thinking about who Jesus is, and then he turns to think about the church and the kingdom of heaven all week, I've been wrestling with the question, well, why? Why does he not just say, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, this has been revealed by my Father in heaven. Full stop. And then we can go down to verse 20. What is the link, the connection here? And I think seeing this helps open this up for us. Why? Well, because what do kings have? Kings have kingdoms. Kingdoms. Somewhere to rule over.

If you ever met a king, and it wouldn't be too impertinent to ask, I guess if you ever meet a king or a queen or some member of a royal family, maybe you just wouldn't get to ask this kind of thing, and they would just kind of look at you. But if you ever met a king, and someone says, hello, I'm a king, which even as I described it, seems like a strange thing if it's going to happen down the street somewhere. But what would you say? The king of, oh, I didn't realize. The king of what?

The king of where? The king of where? Where do you rule? And Jesus here now comes to talk about what he's doing, because in his identity, he's coming to tell them, this is where I rule. Jesus is the king of heaven, the king of heaven, and he's bringing his rule and reign into the earth through what?

Now, if you were here this morning, I would do a kind of question and answer thing with you, because this is exactly where we landed this morning. Jesus is the king who rules in all the earth, and he's bringing his reign, his kingdom into this world through what? Through the church.

Through the church. His kingdom grows through the church. The church. The church. What did we hear this morning? It's the embryo, the show home, the earthly embassy, the earthly embassy of heaven for what God is doing here on earth. And what is God doing here on earth in his Messiah? He's establishing his rule and reign where Jesus is reigning and establishing his rule here on earth through his church. What is an embassy set up to do? An embassy, some of you here may well have worked in embassies, but if you work in an embassy overseas, what are you there to do? You're there to advance the interests of your home country on foreign land, on foreign soil.

[ 19 : 10 ] And that is what Jesus is showing us here. He is building his church. That is what the Messiah is doing, extending his rule across the earth. So I just want to ask two questions about the church that Jesus is building that he goes on to tell us here. Firstly, how strong is it? Or to put it the other way, who can defeat it? Who or what can defeat it? And secondly, how is he building his church?

So firstly, how strong is it or who can defeat it? And secondly, how is he building it? Well, how strong is his church? What does Jesus say? I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Jesus' church is so strong that death itself cannot overcome it.

Or put the other way, what can defeat God's church? Nothing. Nothing. Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell won't prevail against it. Literally, that is, the gates of Hades, that the realm of the dead will not prevail against Christ's church in this world. Friends, you know as well as I do that death's cold grip comes for every kind of human building project. Buildings crumble, institutions die. As trivial as this, I was listening to the radio the other day. This is going to show you how old I am, really. And it was a kids competition and the prize for the competition was a £25 Amazon voucher. So to phone in, answer some questions and what do you get? £25 when you're what, eight or whatever.

It's just amazing, isn't it? So win the prize, get the voucher. But all I could think about was when I was growing up, there was no Amazon. It was, here's your Woolworths voucher. If you don't know what Woolworths is, speak to me at the end, okay? But that's what it was. We want a Woolworths voucher. That was it.

But what's the point? Woolworths is gone. Maybe in 20, 10 or 20 or 100 years, Amazon will be gone. And you young people will be driving around saying, oh in my day the kids competition was an Amazon voucher but now it's something else or whatever it is. Every human project comes to die. Comes to die and waste and waste away and end up in a museum somewhere. And whether it's nations or emperors or prime ministers or false gods or whatever it is, everything dies. But not the church of Jesus Christ. Not the church of Jesus Christ. Gates are defensive language, aren't they? The picture, if you like, is of a city with their city gates shut. And everything that enters the realm of Hades goes in but the gates are shut.

[ 22 : 13 ] It does not come out. But Jesus says, that will not happen to what I'm building. Death has no claim, no hold, no grip, no power over Christ's church. We're going to sing at the end the line of the hymn, no power of hell can ever pluck me from his hand. The gates of death will never close over any who belong to his church. Though we die, yet the claim of death is gone and we will live. Dear friends, I hope that gives you confidence. I hope you give, gives you confidence as we think about that in Scotland today. We got two jabs and inoculations this morning. I was thinking about this passage this evening. It is saying a lot of the same stuff that we got from Ephesians. I don't want to steal any of Joe's thunder this morning and say this is a third jab, but it is a reminder of what we had.

A glorious truth that Christ is building his church and not even death, not even death, can stand against it. So how is Jesus building his church? That's our second question. How strong is it? It is undefeatable. It is eternal. How is Jesus building it? Now before answering that question, there is one stunning surprise in how he's building his church. There is one kind of blow your mind, I didn't ever see anything like this coming, but that's next week, but that's next week, okay? You can read on after the service, so it's fine. And actually that surprise is why in verse 20, Jesus tells his disciples not to tell anyone he's the Christ because Peter's had this great confession and the disciples have heard it, but they don't fully understand it. And there is something more we're going to learn about how Christ is building his church and especially for his role as the cornerstone.

But he does begin to tell his disciples here. And in verse 18 and verse 19, he's telling them how he's building his church. So how would we summarize it? He said he's building his church through the teaching and message of the apostles. He's building his church through the teaching and message of the apostles.

And that all starts there in verse 18 with Peter. What does he say in verse 18? He says, you are Peter and on this rock, I will build my church. He's building on Peter or this rock. Now, what we have here is a play on words. Peter's name in Greek and rock in Greek sound very, very similar.

So there's a play on words going on here that's setting up Peter in some kind of way to have a role amongst Christ's church. And there is no doubt that Peter has a role, doesn't he, in taking the gospel out.

[ 25 : 15 ] If we fast forward to Acts, Peter's there preaching at Pentecost. He's the one who's at Cornelius' house, receives instruction about the gospel going to the Gentiles. He is a big player.

He goes out with the gospel message and he teaches about the Lord Jesus. And what he does in Acts and what all the apostles go on to do, what the Lord Jesus is going to say to them here is actually all bound up with what's going on in heaven. Look at verse 19. He says to Peter, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. But more naturally, that verse really reads, whatever you bind on earth has already been bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth has already been loosed in heaven. So what is that saying? It's all to say that the apostles are continuing Christ's work in a special way in laying the foundation of the church. That's what Jesus is saying. That the apostles, Peter and Paul, as we thought about this morning, go out in a unique and a special way as the apostles to lay the foundation of the church that Jesus is building.

He's giving architectural plans, isn't he? I will build my church. Here are the drawings. Here's what the foundation looks like. And the foundation is what have we seen in Ephesians? It is Christ and the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone. But we do need an important clarification before we move on. He's building his church through the message and preaching of the apostles, but there is one important clarification because this verse has been grossly kind of misunderstood and mishandled by the Roman Catholic Church who have used this verse and really this verse exclusively to say that Jesus here is setting up Peter as a pope or as the first pope, as a kind of chief minister over the church.

But friends, that is not what is happening here. Let me just underscore a few reasons why. Well, what does Jesus say about the church? He is building whose church? My church. The church has one head and it is Jesus Christ. He is the head of the church, the Lord Jesus. There is no rival.

Secondly, if you look down at the verses, there's no mention of an office here. There's no mention of a special kind of office or role being given to Peter. There's certainly no mention of ongoing succession, as if Peter being described as a rock is somehow going to be him and any who would come after him. For what it's worth, there's no mention of Rome. And also to add that the context of this is actually in a discussion with the disciples. When Jesus says, who do you say that I am? He's asking all of them. And Peter is kind of speaking up as a spokesman. And in verse 20, the Lord Jesus returns to addressing all of them. Peter is a spokesman, but I think they're all in view. Let me just add one other thing here. The binding and loosing language that's used here is also used of all the rest of the disciples in Matthew 18, not just Peter. So no, this verse is not setting Peter up as a pope. No, only part of the apostolic foundation and message that goes out. Now, dear friends, some of you this evening may have family members or your background is part of the Roman Catholic

[ 29 : 03 ] Church. If you have more questions about that, please come and speak to me. Please come and speak to me or someone who brought you, someone on the welcome team, we'd be delighted to speak more about that to you. But no, Peter is just part of this apostolic foundation. So Jesus is building his church through the message of the apostles, which is Christ's message. Now, just one more thing to point out from the text before some application. What's this about the keys? Jesus says, I will give you some keys. So what's he talking about? He's very simply talking about the preaching of the gospel.

As the apostles go out and teach and bring their message from the Bible, as the people respond to the Lord Jesus, so if you'd like, the door is unlocked and opened and people come in. But as people reject Christ and reject the message of the apostles, so the doors are locked. We've all seen or perhaps come across the cartoon of Peter, Peter at the pearly gates of heaven with the keys. We used to sing a song about it in Scouts growing up. And this is where that cartoon comes from. But do you see how it gets the place all wrong? Why? The cartoon is Peter at the pearly gates of heaven deciding who gets in and out with the keys. But no, what's he saying here? He's saying, no, this is happening on earth.

So on earth he has the keys. But very, very simply, accept Jesus is the Christ, respond to the gospel, and the doors are opened. Not because Peter has that power, but because that's the heavenly reality being shown here on earth. Reject Christ. Reject the message of the apostles, and the door is locked.

Not because Peter has that power, but because it's showing what is actually a heavenly reality here on earth. In short, Jesus builds and governs and rules his church through the apostles' message.

And so let me give you some implications of that for us. First, on building the church, Jesus is building his church. He's building his church through the message of the apostles. And if he's doing that, then that's the message we need to hear. It's what we have here in our New Testament, isn't it? And so even when it's unpopular, when Paul or Peter is not flavor of the month, to reject their teaching is to reject the teaching of Jesus himself. But since Christ's church can never be destroyed, it means, dear friends, that at the very heart of what we do in our church life is going to be preaching the message of the Lord Jesus through his apostles to the church.

[ 31 : 55 ] That is going to sit at the heart of it here. But let me encourage others of us involved in taking this message out. Dear friends, whether it's in creche or Sunday school amongst our youth or students, whether it's in your family or an SU group, if you are taking out the message of Christ and the apostles, you're working in something that will never be destroyed. The gates of hell will never prevail against that message. So lean into it and teach it. And we do not ever want to abandon it.

But actually, a second implication of what's going on here isn't that Jesus is just building his church, but it is that he's governing his church. He's ruling his church. That's what the keys is talking about. He's governing and ruling through his apostles. Christ rules through his word. And the message of the apostles. And that authority is now given to ministers and elders. Now, there is an implication of this teaching of the keys and of the binding and loosing. There is an implication of it that we're going to come back to when we get to Matthew chapter 18. But very simply, what I want to drive home to us is that as you hear your ministers, Joe and Donald, your elders, teach the apostolic faith and message from the Bible, it is a binding one. Something is going on as our hearts are moved towards the Lord Jesus or moved away from him or moved away from him. And so that is a message then we want to lean into, to hear what is given to us and trust God's word as he rules through it and through the ministers that we've been given. Concretely then, let me give you one other example of what it means that Christ is ruling through his word and through his ministers. If you come to faith in this church, you're not a Christian, you come to faith as an adult, you might, and you want to be a member of the church, you'll be asked to come and meet with the elders with the session of the church. And they'll listen to you, give your testimony, speak about how you came to know the Lord Jesus, about how he's your savior and you turned from sin. By grace alone, Christ has saved us.

And they'll welcome you into membership. And these verses mean that is a very, very real thing. As elders of the church, as they extend a welcome to you and affirm you into membership, it does not make you a Christian, but something very real, it is going on encouraging to hear God's minister say, yes, we see in you that you have turned to the Lord Jesus. You've confessed Jesus is the Christ.

That is a wonderful affirmation and encouragement to us that we have received him. But indeed, the opposite is also true. If in this church family or in a gospel-believing church where this message is taught and Christ is king, if a minister or someone comes to you and says, look, I don't think the way you are living, I don't think the way you are speaking now actually shows that Jesus is your Lord. Be warned. That is also the keys working, the binding and loosing working the other way.

Not because they have the power to put people in and out of heaven, not at all. No, it is just the work of the heavenly reality being shown and explained in this world.

[ 35 : 38 ] And so, dear friends, that is why the stakes of this passage are as big as they are. I said right at the start of this that eternity hangs on confessing Jesus as the Christ. Heaven and hell rest on this. And I hope we can see that starting to come into view. Why is that? Because Jesus is the Christ and the Christ is building his church and ruling his church. And he's building on the foundation of the apostles and their teaching. And they have the power to bind and loose. And if you respond to Jesus and confess him as Lord, the doors are flung open wide and you are brought into his church that will last forever. That's what we read in 1 Peter chapter 2. That's what Peter himself says. We are now living stones. Jesus is the cornerstone of this building that built on the foundation of the apostles and we are now living stones, all part of what he's building. So if you know the Lord Jesus, if you belong to him, you are part of something that will never be destroyed. Never be destroyed.

And when we die and when our days on this life come to an end, we will go on being part of the church, triumphant, in glory, forever, forever. For Jesus is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So dear friend, my encouragement to you this evening is confess Christ. Confess Christ as Lord and Messiah and you will be, you are, and will be forever, all into eternity, safe with him forever. Let's pray.

Amen. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are the Christ, the son of the living God. We thank you that you are building your church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And so we rejoice that this gospel has come to us freely and we respond to you with love and thanksgiving and pray that you would help us to love you, to trust you and to follow you all our days, knowing that in you, in your body, of which you are head, we are truly safe forever. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.