

Jesus Made His First Mention of the Church

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to walk by faith and avoid the false teachings of those who add to the Word of God or take away from the Word of God. In this topic, we will see that Jesus made His first mention to the disciples about the fact that He would build His church.

Jesus wanted to teach the disciples some very important lessons and so He took them to the area of Caesarea Philippi. This city was located in an area where most of the people were Gentiles, about 25 miles north of the area of Galilee. It was also near Mount Hermon, which will be important in the next chapter of Matthew. Jesus wanted to spend time just teaching His disciples without interruptions from people who wanted to be healed or for some other reason. Times like this were important as Jesus prepared the disciples for the time when He would return to heaven and He wanted them to be equipped for the ministry that they would have at that time.

Matthew 16:13-14 says, “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some *say* John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’” In these verses, we see that after Jesus and the disciples had walked to the area of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked the disciples a question. It was a very simple question but Jesus was going to use this first question to prepare the disciples for the second question that He had for them. Jesus just asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Jesus knew what others were saying about Him but Jesus wanted the disciples to learn to clearly explain who Jesus really is.

The disciples answered that people had many different opinions about who Jesus was. Some people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist and that he had come back to life. In Matthew 14:1-2, we read, “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.’” Here, we see that Herod was one of those who thought Jesus might be John the Baptist. We see later, in chapter 14, that Herod murdered John the Baptist. As a result, his conscience bothered him. Whenever he heard about Jesus, he wondered if John had risen from the dead. Here, we see one of the consequences of a guilty conscience.

Other people said that Jesus was Elijah. Four hundred years earlier, Malachi had written in the last two verses of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” Those who said that Jesus might be Elijah were looking for Him to come before “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” and so those people were expecting the Christ to come and become their eternal king. Other people thought that Jesus was Jeremiah or one of the other Old Testament prophets who had been restored to life.

After listening to their answers, Jesus asked, and was answered by Peter, in Matthew 16:15-18, “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’” This question, “But who do you say that I am?” was the question that the disciples must answer clearly if they were going to be effective disciples for Jesus once He returned to heaven. In fact, that is also the key question that all Christians today must also answer clearly if we are going to be effective witnesses for Christ.

Peter spoke for disciples as he answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” In just these few words, Peter gave a clear answer to the question of Jesus. The title “Christ” means *the Anointed One* and that means *the Messiah or the Son of God*. Jesus then pointed out a very important lesson to Peter and the other disciples. Jesus made it clear that Peter did not learn who Jesus was from the opinions of others. Instead, Jesus said that it was the Father that had revealed this truth to the disciples. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 says, “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Verse 9 is taken from Isaiah 64:4.

The Father had revealed to Peter, and the other disciples, that Jesus is the Christ through the Holy Spirit. This meant that the Holy Spirit had worked in the heart of Peter and that he had spiritual life, even though the Holy Spirit did not come to indwell the disciples until the Day of Pentecost. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” In the Old Testament, we see that it was also the Holy Spirit that worked in the hearts to give spiritual life. Proverbs 2:10-11 says, “When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; Understanding will keep you.” Then, 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the LORD does not see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”

Then, Jesus made His first statement about the church, as verse 18 says, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” The word translated “Peter” is “petros” and means *a small stone*. In contrast, the word translated “rock” is “Petra”, which means *a great massive stone*. That is the word that is used twice in 1 Corinthians 10:4, where we read, “And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” Christ is the great massive Rock upon which the church is built.

Because the church is built on that foundation, even the gates of Hades cannot have victory against the church. In fact, John 16:11 says, “Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” When Jesus said on the cross “It is finished”, the judgment of Satan was completed and he is now

on death row waiting for that sentence to be carried out. As Jesus was concluding the Sermon on the Mount, He said in Matthew 7:24-25, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.” This same word for “rock” is used twice in those verses.

Jesus went on to say in Matthew 16:19-20, “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.” The keeper of the keys has the power to open and to shut. In the New Testament, keys are used to speak of power and authority of various kinds. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’” Here, we see that Christ is the One who has all authority. However, Jesus delegated to the disciples, and through them to all Christians, the authority and privilege to share the Gospel with those who are not Christians. The night of His resurrection, Jesus told the disciples in John 20:22-23, “And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained.’” Those who are drawn to Christ by the Father (John 6:44) have the door of eternal life opened to them. Those who reject that message of eternal life continue in their sins and will one day experience eternal judgment.

Jesus then gave a commandment to the disciples. He told them, at that time, that they were not to tell anyone that He was Jesus the Christ. This commandment was only for the period from that day through the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus and until the day they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Luke 24:46-49 says, “Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.’” Jesus knew that if the disciples said He was the Christ at that time, the religious leaders would immediately try to kill Him. Jesus was going to be crucified at the time that the Father had appointed, not when the religious leaders determined to kill Him. As a result, Jesus told the disciples to say nothing about the fact that Jesus is the Christ until the time appointed by the Father.

However, that appointed time came on the Day of Pentecost and that commandment was no longer necessary. As a result, we are now all to be witnesses of the fact that Jesus is the Christ. However, we are to be witnesses of the fact that Jesus is the Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and not in our own strength. If we depend on our own strength, we will accomplish nothing. That is why we want to show our physical and spiritual children what it means to be witnesses of the fact that Jesus is the Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to witness in the power of the Holy Spirit so that you are able to witness with boldness.