

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. (NIV 84)

Theme: An Unbreakable Foundation

1. Jesus is the Christ
2. On him the Church is Built

Is the Church in trouble? It often seems that way. Fewer people are professing to be Christians. Those that do attend worship less often. Biblical illiteracy is rampant as less and less people read and study their Bibles. The world seems to be winning. People commit horrendous acts against each other with more frequency. Things that used to be taboo, things that God’s word talks against are now done out in the open—with pride. In fact some things that God forbids, that people just a generation or two ago were ashamed to even talk about, are now considered the height of sophistication. Yes, it seems as if the Church is in trouble—that it is losing on multiple fronts.

So what can we do? There is always the temptation to change. We have to change to keep up with the times, we are told. Maybe we start to follow evolution, or change what God says about homosexuality or sex before marriage. Or maybe we should downplay the gospel in favor of promoting how nice of people we are. Or we can make the Church more into a community center than a place of worship. Perhaps we can add something to our worship services to make them more exciting and attract more people.

But is that really the solution? Is the Church really in trouble? The answer to these questions really depends on the answer to two different questions: who Jesus is and what is the Church’s foundation.

Who is Jesus? If you were to walk around and ask random people on the street that question, you would probably get a whole bunch of different answers. The same was the case back when Jesus walked this earth. Jesus asked his disciples, **who do the people say the Son of Man is?** It was clear that the people who had seen and heard Jesus thought well of him. He did have a good reputation. The disciples answered, **Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.** While we’d all be happy with having such a reputation, it’s not good enough for Jesus. So he asked his disciples, **What about you, who do you say I am?**

Peter spoke up for the whole group, **You are the Christ.** The word, Christ, is the Greek name for the Hebrew term, Messiah. They both mean the Anointed one. The one God chose from before the beginning of the world, the one he promised to Adam, Abraham, David, and countless others. Again and again the New Testament Scriptures point to Jesus as the long-promised Messiah. John 20:31 sticks out in my mind, **these (words) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

To be anointed means to be set aside for a special service. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism into a three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet he was sent to preach God’s Word in his truth and purity. The disciples knew that well that is why they confessed in John 6, **Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life?** As a priest he offered up sacrifices on behalf of the people Christ offered up himself as a sacrifice to remove the guilt of all our sins. Paul mentions this in Ephesians 2, **Christ love us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** And finally he is a king. He fights and wins battles for us as a king leads his country in war. Christ has won the ultimate victory for us as Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15, **The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!**

Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One. But there is more to Peter's confession. **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.** Jesus is the Son of God. Many confess that. But sadly, confessing that Jesus is God's Son doesn't mean the same thing for everyone nowadays. There are some who claim that Jesus is the son of God, but not God. They say he is great, that he is our Savior, that he is far above man—but he's lower than God. They say that there was a time when he didn't exist; that he was created by God. That is not a right confession. That is not saving faith. To believe in a Jesus who isn't fully God isn't really believing in Jesus.

Again and again the Bible points out that Jesus is God. His miracles show his divine power which no mere man could accomplish. He knows all things, has been given God's authority over all things. In the opening words of his gospel, John calls Jesus God and mentions how he is eternal, **In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.** There are over a dozen passages in the New Testament alone that specifically call Jesus God. Take Paul in Romans 9 for example, **Christ...is God over all, forever praised!** Or Thomas when he laid eyes on the resurrected Jesus—he said to him, **My Lord and my God!** If Jesus wasn't God, he certainly would have corrected Thomas. But Jesus didn't—thus confirming his deity.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. What does that mean for you? Well, if Jesus is both God and man; if he is a prophet who preached God's Word to us and spoke to us directly from God; if he is a priest who sacrificed himself on the cross in order to pay the eternal punishment that we deserved; and if he is our king who won the ultimate victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil, then is he is also your Savior.

Of course, we know this. We know that because of his perfect life, his suffering and death, and his resurrection we have the gifts of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And that it is through faith in him that we receive everything he won for us. He is the world's one and only Savior. Jesus himself testified about this, **I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.** Or as Peter mentioned when talking about Jesus in Acts 4, **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**

Jesus was pleased with Peter's confession so he said to him, **Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.** Here, Jesus is using a play on words. The Greek for Peter is, *petros*, and the Greek for rock is *petra*. The Roman Catholic Church loves to point out that Peter means rock. And they claim that Peter was the first leader of the Church in Rome, and thus the first Pope. They say that the popes are successors of Peter. And since they say that Peter was the rock on which the Church was built they claim this for their popes. They use this passage to make the pope the infallible leader of the Church in all matters pertaining to morals and doctrine. And then they condemn anyone, regardless of their faith, who doesn't subject himself to the supreme authority of the pope. In other words, they take a clear confession of Christ's person and work, and twist it to burden consciences.

This is something the Greek doesn't allow. *Petros* means a small rock, a loose piece of gravel and *petra* means a large rock cliff or shelf—the kind of rock on which someone builds a house. The confession of Peter is the rock on which the Church stands and falls. Jesus didn't say, "You are Peter and on you I build my Church." But on this rock, this rock solid truth of your confession, my Church is built. All who share Peter's confession are living stones, like Peter, that make up the Church of God. Notice the similar language that Peter himself uses in his first letter, **You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** So those who believe that Jesus is the Christ who shares the Word of Truth, who suffered and died for our sins, who defeated death, who is God's Son and God himself; and who is the only Savior of the world make up the Church of God. For he is the Church's one foundation. The Church is built on these facts of Christ—not on obedience or submission to a man who sits on some throne.

And so the Church will not fall. Again verse 18, **I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.** How? Not because some man is the leader of the Church; but because Christ is the Church's foundation. Many believe that the gates of Hades is a figure or speech for the devil

and his demons. Who attack us by trying to create doubt in our minds, lead the world to abuse us, and so on. But Christ defeated Satan and crushed his head; so he can't overcome us. But Hades could also be a reference to the grave— or death. A Christian dies; his body is buried in the ground. But his soul goes to heaven. And it won't be long before his body is raised from the dead and joins his soul in heaven on the Last Day. Death can't hold him down. It has no power over him. How? Once again, because of Christ. He lived a perfect life, suffered and died, and rose from the dead. He alone paid for our sins—not anyone else. It is because of him that death has no power over the Church. As the Writer to the Hebrews points out when talking about Christ, **he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.**

The Church knows and believes this. It holds the keys of the kingdom of God in its hands. We have God's Word. We have the law to bind hearts. But we have the gospel that forgives and opens up the kingdom of heaven. So we spread the gospel. For through it the Holy Spirit works faith which receives the blessings Christ won for us. The Church goes on the offensive, confident of victory. She boldly confesses the name on which she has been built. She proclaims Christ crucified and risen to all who have been captured by the prospect of eternal death. And the gates of Hades will not withstand her.

Is the Church in trouble? Nope. Because Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He alone is our Savior, on which he builds his Church. Because he defeated sin, death, and the devil the gates of Hades cannot overcome him or his Church. Christ's Church stands forever. Amen.