

The King and Kingdom Revealed

Good morning. If you have your Bible, would you turn with me to Matthew 16. It is on page 781 of the Bible in the chairs.

Recently in our Matthew series, we have witnessed Jesus doing ministry in Gentile territory, where we saw the great faith of a Canaanite woman. We saw Jesus perform another feeding of thousands but this time for the Gentiles. And we saw the shortcomings of his disciples who misunderstood his teaching as they were so fixated on their own physical needs.

Now we come to a pivotal moment in the Gospel of Matthew. It's at this point that the Gospel makes a huge shift. It marks a significant moment where Jesus is revealed to be the Messiah as Jesus journeys towards Jerusalem, leading to his crucifixion and resurrection.

Let me take a moment just to set the scene and help us understand where this is taking place before we read the passage. Jesus and his disciples are making their journey back from the Gentile region and into the Jewish territory. The area that this account takes place is Caesarea Philippi, an important Greco Roman city with a pagan population. This area was devoted to all kinds of false gods, like Baal and the Greek god Pan. But here in Matthew's account, the city had recently been renamed Casarea Philippi by Philip the Tetrarch in honor of Caesar Augustus and, of course, himself.

Caesar Augustus held the title “son of God” because his father “Julius Caesar...was declared a god by the Roman Senate in 42 BC, after his assassination.”¹ Why am I saying all this? Because it really helps paint the picture of what happens here in our text. As they are walking through this region, seeing the pagan worship and dedication to Julius Caesar, likely seeing the temple to Augustus, “the son of God,” we see this remarkable revelation of who Jesus is.

With that context in mind, would you follow along as I read Matthew 16:13-23?

READ Matthew 16:13-23

Would you pray with me?...

INTRODUCTION

[ILLUSTRATION]

Have you ever believed something to be true but then had your whole view of something shattered? Where you thought something was one thing until you found out the truth? My wife, Hannah, experienced something like that early in our marriage. No, I’m not talking about marrying me.

Hannah’s mom is a wonderful cook. She has made all kinds of delicious dinners from scratch that Hannah grew up loving. One meal in particular that she loved was “red beans and rice.” Hannah would always tell me how much she loved that meal. How it was one of her favorites. She would go on and on about how good it was. Well, when we got married, Hannah decided she wanted to try her hand at that meal.

We went to the grocery store and Hannah called her mom and said, “Hey, we’re here at the store. Do you mind sharing with me what all I need to get for the red beans and rice meal?” Hannah’s mom replied, “Sure! It’s just the Zatarain’s Red Beans & Rice box.”

¹ Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary*, (Lexham Academic: Bellingham, WA, 2022), 412.

Hannah's view of her entire childhood shattered in that moment. This meal that she loved so much, and thought was made from scratch (as many of the other meals were), was just a box from the store. Her assumptions about the meal were wrong. So many times, we let our assumptions control our understanding of things. Rather than understanding the true nature of something, we just want it to fit our assumptions.

That's what we see happen here in our text. The disciples wanted the Messiah and the kingdom of God to fit their assumptions. However, what we learn from the text and our main idea today is that: **We must receive the King and His Kingdom as God has revealed them, not as we assume them.**

In our text today, we see God reveal three things: 1) The King of the Kingdom, 2) The Foundation of the Kingdom, and 3) The Mission of the King.

THE KING OF THE KINGDOM

We have been in the Gospel of Matthew for over a year now, and the main theme that has been over this whole sermon series is "The King and His Kingdom." And now we see God finally revealing **the King of the Kingdom** to the disciples.

As they are walking through this pagan region, Jesus takes this opportunity to ask the disciples some questions. This is something Jesus does remarkably well, right? He is a master at asking questions that get right to the heart of the issue. He starts by asking his disciples a broad question. Look at verses 13-14:

Matthew 16:13-14

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."

Notice how Jesus starts this conversation with a disarming question. It's not personal. It's a broad, general question about what everyone else thinks. You've probably seen that in a small group or conversation with others before. Everyone is quick to jump in to give their thoughts about what others think or some broad, general question. You know, the icebreakers. This is no different. The disciples jump right in on that question. They mention all kinds of things that they have heard from people: John the Baptist (like we saw Herod believe), Elijah, Jeremiah, another prophet.

These were some of the common assumptions of the Jewish people at this time. There were beliefs that Elijah was going to return since he was taken up to heaven. Jesus already addressed this earlier in Matthew when he said that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Elijah's return. There was also the expectation from Deuteronomy, that God will raise up a prophet like Moses.

But here's the thing, Jesus is not as concerned about what others say about the Son of Man. Who they think he is. He's more interested in what his disciples believe. And this leads to his second question. The one that drives right at the heart. Look at verse 15:

Matthew 16:15

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

There is an emphasis here in the Greek text on the *you*. It essentially reads more like a double question with Jesus saying, "But what about *you*? What do *you* say?" This is far more important than the general thoughts of others. He makes it personal. He's asking his pupils, his disciples, the ones who have spent all this time with him, "Others believe that, but what do you believe?"

And it's at this moment, Peter (often the spokesman of the group) speaks up in verse 16:

Matthew 16:16

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

This is the first time in the narrative that Jesus has been called Christ, meaning the Messiah. The “anointed one.” Matthew told us from the very first verse of his Gospel that this whole book was about “the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” But no one has confessed this about Jesus until this point.

Jesus is the promised Messiah. The long-awaited fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. The long-awaited king from the line of David of 2 Samuel 7. The long-awaited Anointed One from Psalm 2. And so many more. We saw the disciples worship Jesus as the Son of God just a few chapters earlier after the walking on the water scene. I mentioned then that their designation was probably more an awareness that there was something unique about Jesus and his relationship to God, rather than an understanding of his messiahship. It’s here, that the true identity of Jesus as *the Christ* is declared.

But it doesn’t stop there. Peter adds even more clarity to this identity of Jesus; he says he is *the Son of the living God*. Remember what I said at the beginning about Caesarea Philippi? That Augustus was called “son of God,” because they believed Julius Caesar to be a god. Well, Julius Caesar was dead. If Augustus was the “son of God,” then he was the son of a dead god. But not Jesus. Peter emphatically states that Jesus is the Son of the One, True, Living God.

Where did this climactic confession come from? Did Peter just suddenly get smart? Did he crack the code to this mystery? Look again at verse 17:

Matthew 16:17

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.

Jesus calls Peter blessed. He is not pronouncing a blessing on Peter, rather he is recognizing that Peter has been blessed already. The fact that Peter was able to declare this true identity of Jesus was not some human invention or cleverness, but it was a revelation from God. Jesus calls Peter, Simon Bar-Jonah. We learned earlier in Matthew that Peter's name was Simon. Simon was an extremely popular name at this time. It's like the name Nathan in our church. You call any guy that name and you are bound to be right.

My brother's name is also Nathan. This causes a lot of confusion in our household, especially for my 2-year-old son, Noah. He will be trying to talk to us about my brother and say, "Pastor Nathan..." and I'll say, "No, Uncle Nathan..." And he looks at me like I'm the fool. But we have to add that extra identifier to clarify who we are talking about. Jesus does just that. He adds an identifier to Simon's name to ensure we know which Simon he is talking about. He calls him Simon Bar-Jonah. This is an Aramaic way of saying Simon, son of Jonah. We'll have to start using that in our house now, "Are you talking about Nathan Bar-Dallas or Nathan Bar-David."

Jesus is not just adding additional clarification here, he's doing something else as well. Jesus is pointing to Peter's father and saying, "You did not receive this revelation from your earthly father, it came from my Heavenly Father." This is so important. **The truth that Jesus is the Messiah is not something mankind has created, it is something mankind has received.** God has revealed this truth to us. It's one of the most central claims of Christianity. Just look around at all the religions throughout the world, and they will sound a lot like verse 14.

From the most optimistic views, they will say that Jesus was a good man, a good teacher, maybe even that he was another one of the prophets. But they will not claim that Jesus is *the Christ*. But here's the thing, Jesus isn't primarily concerned with what the world thinks about him. What Jesus really wanted to address is what the disciples believed. And now, you and I are faced with the very same question: "Who do you say that I am?"

It's not good enough to say Jesus was a good man. Or that Jesus was a great prophet. He is revealed to be the Christ, the King of the Kingdom. Who do you say that he is? What do you believe about him? It can be easy for us to want to fit Jesus into a perfect box that is simple for us to understand, that we can easily explain. But we must believe in Jesus as he has revealed himself in his Word, not how we want him to be.

Do you know Jesus? Or are you basing your whole understanding of him on what your parents have said, or what the culture says, or even things you have heard in church? Are there things you grew up hearing about Jesus, but you've never really studied for yourself? There are all kinds of popular sayings and assumptions that people make that are not actually in God's Word. Have we done this with the person of Jesus?

One way that we need to be very careful is that we don't base our understanding of Jesus on anything other than the Word of God. Not anyone's portrayal of him, whether it's Jim Caviezel in the Passion of the Christ or even the popular Chosen series or any actor. We shouldn't base it on any marketing campaign out there online or on TV. The only true reliable source to know who Jesus really is and what he is like is in the pages of Scripture. Which means if we want to know Jesus, we've got to be in the Word. We've got to study and understand for ourselves.

And if Jesus is the Messiah, if he is the Christ, then this has major implications for us. It means he is the King. It means he has all authority over our lives. It means we cannot just write him off as a good teacher and ignore some of the teachings we don't like. It means we are called to obey the King in everything. In all of his teachings. We must receive Jesus as he is revealed to us (the King of the Kingdom), not how we want him to be.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE KINGDOM

Not only do we need to receive the King as he is revealed, but we must receive the Kingdom as it is revealed. Here in the next few verses, Jesus reveals **The Foundation of the Kingdom.**

Look again at verses 18-19:

Matthew 16:18-19

¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹I 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.”

These two verses are some of the most heavily debated verses in all of Scripture. Specifically, verse 18. There are several views on what Jesus means when he says, “and on *this rock*, I will build my church.” Is “the rock” Jesus talking about Peter, or his confession, or Jesus’ teachings? There are strong positions using almost all of the same arguments to argue any one of those views.

Rather than spending all my time getting into the nitty gritty of the debate or of the Greek grammar and syntax, I will just tell you where I have landed on this. I think the most natural reading of this passage is that Jesus is talking about Peter. Jesus says, “You are Peter” (which means rock). He then continues by saying, “and on this rock I will build my church.” There is a play on words here. “You are the Rock and, on this rock, I will build my church.”

Now, I think I should clarify what this does not mean. Catholics would cling to this verse as a proof-text for Popes or papal authority. That because Jesus built his church on Peter, this is proof that he has supreme authority in the church and that anyone who succeeds him is awarded this same office. This is well beyond what this passage is saying. Jesus is not referring to any particular office. And he is not granting Peter infallibility (as we see in the very next paragraph).

That may be a little bit of a side tangent, but I felt it was worth mentioning so that you understand what I am not saying when I say Jesus is referring to Peter as the rock on which he will build his church. Yes, Peter is going to be foundational to the building of the church. It's Peter who stands up at Pentecost and proclaims the gospel where thousands then join the church. It's Peter who first preaches in Samaria and then to the Gentiles. He becomes a pivotal part of the initial building of the church.

However, it's not just Peter as a person. It's not an office or succession or any kind of infallibility. It's Peter as he declares this true confession. As he confesses the revealed truth about Jesus. Not everything Peter does and says, but in his role of confessing Jesus as Christ. Ultimately, this will extend to the rest of the apostles, even Paul. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2:19-21

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
²⁰ **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

The church has a firm foundation built on the inspired teachings of the prophets and the apostles. All of it grounded and rooted in Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone of the entire foundation.

Another important thing for us to understand is that it is *Jesus* who is going to build *his* church. This isn't Peter's church, it's Jesus'. And it's not a work that Peter can do. Yes, Jesus is going to use Peter as a foundation, but Jesus is the Kingdom builder, not Peter. The work of building the church is a miraculous work that only the Lord can do.

Jesus then declares that there is nothing that can stop this kingdom-building. Not even the gates of hell shall prevail. Hell (or more specifically here Hades) is the realm of the dead. The gates are not there to keep people out, but rather to keep the dead in.² Jesus is talking about those who are dead escaping the realm of the dead. He is talking about a resurrection. Followers of Christ will not be kept in the realm of the dead. As one commentator said, “They would smash the gates, escape Hades’ grip, and enjoy life again.”³ The idea here is that nothing is going to stop Jesus from building his church, not even death itself. Jesus is declaring victory from the start.

After Jesus tells Peter that he is going to build his church on him and the sure victory to come, he tells him how this going to happen. Jesus says that he is going to give Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Having keys in a royal palace was a sign of authority in these times. If you had the keys to the kingdom, you had the ability to open and close doors that no one else had access to.

These symbolic keys give Peter the authority to open and shut the door of the kingdom. The grammar here is again very weird. It literally reads, “whatever you bind on earth *shall have been* bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *shall have been* loosed in heaven.” Why is that important?

What is happening here is that Peter, as he confesses this revealed truth about Christ, uses these keys. The keys of the kingdom are the gospel message. And when the gospel is proclaimed, the keys are used to open the door for many. To those who respond in repentance and faith, the door is opened. To those who harden their hearts and reject the message, the door to the kingdom remains shut.

Again, I don’t believe Peter has all authority to dictate who is in the kingdom and who is not. Or even what conduct is allowed or not allowed in the kingdom because whatever is bound or loosed on earth has already been determined by

² Quarles, *Matthew*, 416.

³ Quarles, *Matthew*, 416.

God. It has already been bound or loosed in heaven. But just because this has already been determined by God does not mean that Peter should not use the keys. The opposite is true. He is to use the keys. He is to proclaim this truth about Jesus.

This is set in contrast to what Jesus will say later to the Pharisees in chapter 23:

Matthew 23:13

¹³“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

The Pharisees do not proclaim the truth about Jesus. They are not declaring him to be the Messiah. Therefore, they are not going to enter the kingdom of heaven, and more than that, they are leading those who follow them to be shut out of the kingdom as well. But here in our text, Jesus promises to give Peter these keys. He doesn’t have them yet, as his understanding of the gospel is limited at this point. But he will boldly proclaim the gospel beginning Acts 2 when Peter preaches and the door is opened for thousands who receive the word and are baptized.

What does this mean for us? For one, it means that the foundation of the church is not built upon tradition or papal authority, but it’s built up upon the foundation of the inspired Word of God. We don’t look to outside sources, additional revelations, or anything else to base our doctrine and theology. We look to the Bible, the inspired Word of God that was written by the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New.

We must be on guard. There are plenty of false teachers out there preaching a false gospel. Preaching a moralistic message: just try harder, just do better. As one author wrote a book called, “Girl, just wash your face.” The reason we have to be on guard is because these teachings can sound true. They can appeal to our humanity and our sinful heart, and yet they are not built on the solid foundation of the Word of God. What foundation have you built your faith, your beliefs on?

What kind of messages are you consuming, whether it's podcasts or social media or books or movies or shows. We are bombarded with all kinds of messages like: you should have total bodily autonomy. Whatever you think or feel you should do with your body, you should do it. Or we can hear things like "name it and claim it." Speak your truth into the universe. Or we can hear things like doctrine and theology don't really matter, just as long as you love everybody. Jesus loved everybody, you should love everybody. We must take everything we hear and filter it through the Word of God. The foundation of the church was not built upon the wisdom of men, but men inspired by God.

What this also means is that we don't get to determine our own path to heaven. There is **one** door, Jesus Christ, and the only way for that door to open is for the keys of the kingdom to be used. For the gospel message to be proclaimed. Those who respond in repentance and faith will see the door opened and be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. Those who reject Jesus will see the door to life remain shut before them.

As Christians, are we using the keys of the kingdom? Do we want to see people come through the door of the kingdom? May we not be like the Pharisees who shut the door on people. Who don't speak the truth about Jesus to others. Rather, may we speak up, share the truth of Christ, and open the door for God's people to enter in. We must receive the foundation of the Kingdom as it is revealed to us, not however we create it.

THE MISSION OF THE KING

We've seen how God has revealed the King of the Kingdom and the Foundation of the Kingdom, but lastly, I want us to see that God has revealed **The Mission of the King.**

After this incredible confession from Peter about Jesus and this amazing declaration from Jesus about the church, we read a rather surprising statement. Look again at verse 20:

Matthew 16:20

²⁰Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

What? It's finally revealed that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus declares he will build his church, and now, the disciples are to keep quiet? Why would Jesus say that? It's because they don't fully understand what it means for Jesus to be the Christ. As we have mentioned before, the Jews had all kinds of prophecies and assumptions about what the Messiah would do when he came. Jesus knows this. And he knows they don't yet understand what his mission as the Messiah is.

This is why it says in verse 21:

Matthew 16:21

²¹From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Jesus needed to teach his disciples the mission of the King. In order for Jesus to build his church, he has a mission he must first accomplish. Notice the emphasis given to this statement. It says that "he **must**." This was not optional. These things had to happen. He had to suffer at the hands of a joint effort from the leaders of Israel. He had to be killed, not just die naturally, but murdered. And he had to be brought back to life on the third day for his death to have mattered.

This is the first of several times that Jesus will explain this to the disciples through the rest of Matthew. And it took them by surprise. It certainly took Peter by surprise. He just declared Jesus to be the Messiah, the promised king! Now he's thinking, "What do you mean you have to die?" Look again at verse 22:

Matthew 16:22

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

Peter at least had enough respect to pull Jesus aside, rather than let loose around the whole group. It says that he *began* to rebuke him. Peter must have had a lot more to say to Jesus than he was able to get out. He is essentially saying very emphatically that this idea is absolutely ridiculous and should never happen. Doesn't Jesus know who he is?!

I feel like I experience this just about every day with my kids. You tell them something they must do or must happen, and they think this is the most preposterous thing that has ever been suggested. “You must put a coat on it's 20 degrees outside.” “You must wash your dirt covered hands before dinner.” And they freak out like we've lost our minds. They believe they know best. But they have forgotten their place. They are not submitting to our authority.

And it's in this moment that we see Peter go from a foundation rock to a stumbling block. Look at verse 23:

Matthew 16:23

²³ But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Jesus stops Peter before he gets too far in his speech and calls him a hindrance. Or more literally, a stumbling block. The idea is that by Peter encouraging Jesus not to go to the cross is as if he is setting a trap for Jesus. The very same trap Satan tried to set earlier in Matthew with the temptations in the wilderness. That if Jesus really was the Son of God as he claimed, then he should have his needs met, he should be protected by angels from harm, that he should have the kingdoms of the world, without any amount of suffering.

But this kind of thinking is completely contrary to Jesus' mission. It's actually the mission of Satan. Jesus calls out that at this moment Peter is acting as if he is Satan. But if Jesus did not die on the cross and rise again on the third day, then there would be no hope for sinners. There would be no church, no people of God. The gates of Hades would indeed prevail and keep us all locked in the grave. Jesus rebukes Peter and calls out his sinful thinking. Ironically, in the previous paragraph, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ from God, **not** from flesh and blood. And here, Peter confesses from flesh and blood, **not** from God.

Peter got the confession right. He identified Jesus as the True King. But he misidentified his mission. In fact, Peter thought he knew better than Jesus. He had the audacity to rebuke Jesus, to try and correct him about what he was saying. There is a real danger here. A danger of only partially believing in Jesus. If you confess Jesus as the King of the Kingdom but reject the mission of the King, are you really believing the Jesus of the Bible? Paul says in Romans 10:9,

Romans 10:9

⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

It's both. A confession that Jesus is the Christ **and** believing in your heart the mission he accomplished. That he lived a perfectly obedient life, he died on the cross for our sins, and he rose again on the third day. Do you believe in this Jesus?

I'm not asking if you believe Jesus was a real person, or a good teacher, or even if you believe Jesus is the Christ. I'm asking if you believe that Jesus is the Christ who had to suffer and die for your sins and rise again from the dead in order to give you eternal life? Have you responded in faith to this good news of Jesus? Have you confessed your sins to God and trusted in Christ's life, death, and resurrection? This is the only way to eternal life. The only way to enter the kingdom of heaven. If you have never done this or if you have more questions

about this, please come find me or one of the pastors after service. I would love the chance to talk with you about how you know Jesus as the King of the kingdom and believe the mission of the King.

For those of us who are Christians, we need to ask ourselves an honest question: in what ways might we try to oppose the work of God, maybe without even realizing it? Peter was not trying to deny Jesus. But what Jesus was purposing went against his expectations. It pushed against his comforts. How might you try to oppose what God says because it's uncomfortable?

Maybe you know God is calling you to forgive someone or restore a relationship that's been broken, but that's too uncomfortable. And so, you tell God that's not the way to go. Maybe it's stepping out in front of God, rather than following his lead. You don't stop to pray and seek his will. You think you know what's best for you or your family, so you step out in front. There are many ways that we can be tempted to be like Peter and set our minds on the things of man rather than the things of God. But we must receive the mission of the King as it is revealed, not how we want it to be.

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned earlier, Hannah discovered that her favorite meal wasn't what she thought it was. But her assumption that her mom made it from scratch didn't change reality, her assumption had to be corrected by it. Peter had an assumption about the Messiah. He thought he knew what the Christ should do. And when Jesus revealed the truth, it didn't fit. He tried to correct Jesus, but Jesus corrected him.

The same is true for us. We all come to Jesus with assumptions about who He is, what He should do, and how He should work in our lives. But our assumptions don't define Jesus. God has revealed who Jesus is in his Word. The question is not, "Will Jesus fit into what we think He should be?" But rather, "Will we receive Him

as He truly is? The Christ, the son of the living God. The King who came to suffer, to die, and to rise again.

Would you pray with me?...