

Matthew 16:18a Upon this Rock I Will Build My Church

Alright, we have a very important study this morning. We are still in Matthew 16:13-20, our focus today will be on verse 18.

Now, you remember in verses 13 through 20 we are studying the public opinion about Jesus. And He asked the disciples, "Who do they say that the Son of Man is?" And so the disciples gave the public opinion, "Some say you are John the Baptist, some say you are Elijah, others Jeremiah, or even one of the prophets." So He says, "Okay, that's the public opinion. But whom do you yourselves say that I am?" And Peter answered in verse 16, he said, "You yourself are the Christ, the son of the living God." Interpreted it means, *You are the anointing of God in human form, the one who is in the position of inheriting all things that belong to the living God.*

In verse 17, that we finished with last week, The Confirmation. And when He answered, Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you Simon bar Jonah." In other words, He is confirming that Simon Peter answered correctly. And He says, "You are blessed." We have talked about the word *blessed* before, **μακάριος** (makarios), it has to do with *experiencing the fullness of something*. In this case, He is saying, "Peter, you have experienced the fullness of the presence of the Spirit of God and His revelation to you." So He is confirming to him.

"Because," and He is giving the reason now, this is a good way to see how we connect our definitions and meanings together. "Because flesh and blood did not reveal it to you." *Flesh and blood*, we have studied is a phrase meaning *human, the human abilities*. In this case: human opinion, human belief, human convictions. "This didn't come from human, Simon, but My Father who is in heaven. The Father in heaven revealed it to you, not human beings, not through education, but My Father who is in heaven."

We saw two things last week about revelation:

(1) We studied from I Corinthians 2:6-16 that a human being cannot understand the truths of the Spirit of God through human ability. It must be revealed to that person by God. You could have a Bible with words on the page where in the human you can understand as you read those words but spiritually it might not be what the words are trying to convey. It must come by a revelation from God from heaven.

(2) We also saw that salvation is also a revelation and an act of God from heaven. It is not human. In John 1:12-13 we saw that, **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become the children of God, even to the ones believing on His name: who were born, not of bloodline, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but who were born of God.** Have experienced a spiritual birth from God, from heaven. It is not human. It is not horizontal. And how many hundreds, if not thousands, maybe millions of people who function on the basis of some prayer that they prayed, or some agreement that they made with God, or some piece of paper that they signed, and somebody told them that you are saved because of the work that you did. And in reality, that is not true. Now, people might do a work, people might pray a prayer, or read a book

and agree with it; but it takes a spiritual birth from heaven by God for a person to be saved.

In Acts chapter 22, we saw last week, Paul's conversion, Acts 22:6-10. Saul of Tarsus, as he was known then, was on his way to the city of Damascus with an official document to round up Christians and have them put into prison. He was against this "cult," as they called it, called *Christians*. He was on his way to Damascus and then, right in the middle of the Damascus Road, as he was walking with a contingent of men, God intervened in his life. God appeared to him as a light and began to speak to him. God intervened and interrupted his whole life. That is what the spiritual birth does. The spiritual birth makes you a new person. II Corinthians 5:17 says that the person who has Christ has been made a new creation, old things are passed away and all things are become new. You are going in a different direction in life because of interruption. God says, "You are going down this road in your life, I am putting you on my road." A person is a new person because of the spiritual birth.

I read this week, off of the Internet, there is a column that somebody writes it is called Hebrew4Christians; it is taking Hebrew Scriptures and applying it devotionally to Christians. I do not recommend everything that they write, but it is interesting that they decided to break off from their Hebrew presentation and talk about salvation this week, which I thought was interesting. Here is what the column said:

Do you Believe?

Some people are scandalized by what they call "easy believism," or the idea that we only need to believe in Yeshua (that is the Hebrew name for Jesus) to be saved. Sometimes they malign this teaching as "cheap grace" or "sloppy agape," though in fairness it must be stressed there is nothing easy about truly believing. What is easy, however, is professing that you believe without undergoing a miraculous heart transformation. Anyone can say, "I believe in Jesus," but the test is whether He lives within you. Is He the source of your life? Do you draw life from Him? Anyone can claim they are saved, but it is a miracle greater than splitting the sea to undergo divine metamorphosis, to be given a heart that loves unconditionally, that dies to pride, and that lives as the servant of all. Yeshua asks, "Do you really believe? Many will say to me in that day," Jesus said, "'Lord, Lord,' but I will say to them, 'I never knew you.'" It is not just hard to believe; it is impossible apart from God's radical intervention. (Boy, that is a good statement: "It is impossible to believe apart from God's radical intervention.") It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is no help at all. (John 6:33)

Their translation. Interesting.

He used the word *radical intervention* and I thought, "Yep, those are the words we are using." Intervention and interruption. It takes us down a whole new path. His

path. There is a radical change that takes place. A person becomes a new creation in Christ.

And so, we now move on to verse 18 for today. This is one of the most debated verses in the Bible, which is why I am going to use a lot of technical information and a lot of detail. You might not be interested in detail, but what it does is it proves what the text is saying, and it gives you and shows you the importance of the original language. How many people out there that might have gone to Bible school, might have taken a Greek class, or a Hebrew class, but what have they done with it? Have they used it for research? Have they just thrown their hands up in the air over a text like this and given their personal opinion, which is what most people do because most pastors and most Bible teachers are too busy to do extensive research to find out what the text is saying. So, I apologize to you, and yet on the other hand I do not, because you know me, it is just the kind of person that I am.

So in verse 18 Jesus said, **I also say to you that you, that yourself are Peter** (notice the emphasis of the double pronouns: *you yourself*) **You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My church** (but notice the literal translation is not the word *church*, it's the word *assembly*) **and the gates of Hades will not overpower her** (meaning *the church* or *the assembly*). We are going to unpack this for you. I enjoy making it exact, this text. There is no debate about what this verse is saying if you do your homework, as they say.

First of all, Jesus says to Peter (actually Simon because now He is calling him Peter), **I also say to you that you yourself are Peter**. Peter is the Greek word **πέτρος** (petros). **And upon this rock I will build My church or My assembly**. He was named, his name is Simon son of John, or son of Jonah. But back before he was called to be a disciple of Jesus, back in John 1:42, Jesus named Simon **πέτρος** (petros), Peter. Andrew, Simon's brother, brought Simon to Jesus and when Jesus saw him, He said **You yourself are Simon the son of John. You yourself shall be called Cephas**, that is Aramaic as it says, **you yourself shall be called Cephas which is being interpreted** (in Greek) **a stone, πέτρος** (petros). That is what the text says. It is being interpreted as **πέτρος** (petros). Cephas and **πέτρος** (petros). One is Aramaic, one is Greek, both mean the same thing, it means a *stone*. So he was named by Jesus back in John 1:42 but here He is reiterating it and He is making a point, named by Jesus and now he is moving on. **πέτρος** (petros) means a *stone* or *small rock*. It can even be used for a *boulder*. **πέτρος** (petros) stone or small rock, or even a boulder.

There are three main words used in the New Testament for the word *stone*. And they are specific for reasons especially in our text we have today.

λίθος (lithos) is the smallest of stones in the Greek language.

πέτρος (petros), which is our word, is the next step up. It is a small rock or a small stone or a pebble, or even a boulder.

Then there is **πέτρα** (petra). Do not get it confused with **πέτρος** (petros), they are two different words. **πέτρα** (petra) is the biggest of rocks. In fact, it is used in the book of Revelation chapter 6 as a mountain ledge or even the mountain itself, **πέτρα** (petra).

And it is a foundation stone. It would be in our day we would call it a *cement slab*, so to speak. So it is not a boulder, it is not a little tiny rock, it is a foundation stone upon which you build things or put things.

So there are three words that have to do with understanding our text for today:

- (1) **λίθος** (lithos) - the smallest of rocks
- (2) **πέτρος** (petros) - which is Peter's name, a small rock, or stone, or pebble, or boulder
- (3) **πέτρα** (petra) - a foundation stone

It is important to realize that Jesus used **πέτρος** (petros) in expressing himself to Peter. "Peter you are a **πέτρος** (petros). You are a small rock, boulder, stone or pebble." **πέτρος** (petros) is used 162 times in the New Testament and it is only used for Peter's name. That is very important. You cannot apply **πέτρος** (petros) to anybody or anything else other than Peter, because the 162 times it is mentioned or used in the New Testament it is always in reference to Peter. It is his name. His name is **πέτρος** (petros). It has a meaning of a rock, but it is Peter's name.

Then Jesus says, "You are Peter (**πέτρος**, petros) and upon this rock I will build my church." You can see that, Oh, we have a problem here: "Upon this rock I will build my church." The word for *rock* now, the second point, "You are (1) **πέτρος** (petros) and upon this (2) rock," is the word **πέτρα** (petra), the biggest of rocks, the foundation stone.

So remember our three main words for stones: (1) **λίθος** (lithos) - the smallest; (2) **πέτρος** (petros) for the small rock, or boulder, or pebble, then (3) **πέτρα** (petra) a foundation stone. So Jesus says, "You are **πέτρος** (petros) and upon this **πέτρα** (petra) I will build My church." You say, "Well, I don't understand what the problem is." Here is where the debate begins.

Now the Catholic Church is built primarily on the belief that the **πέτρα** (petra) is also Peter. The **πέτρος** (petros) is the **πέτρα** (petra). And that "Upon this **πέτρα** (petra), *Peter*, I will build my church." So they believe that Peter was the first pope. There was apostolic succession, which means there were apostles that came after Peter and succeeded Peter that eventually became Pope. And of course we have papal succession like we have today, one pope after another, all originating with Peter because of this text right here. So the Catholic Church believes that **πέτρα** (petra) is **πέτρος** (petros). He is calling Peter the foundation stone, that is what they believe.

The second prominent belief here is that **πέτρα** (petra) makes reference to Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." And that **πέτρα** (petra) makes reference to everybody that makes that confession, "I will build my church upon them and that confession."

The third theory and belief is that the **πέτρα** (petra) is Christ Himself. That Peter is the **πέτρος** (petros) and "Upon this rock (**πέτρα**, petra - meaning Himself) I will build my church."

Is there a way to determine without getting into personal beliefs and opinions? And I say to you there is. Just as I told you a moment ago, **πέτρος** (petros) is used 162 times only for Peter, so that is a done deal right there.

Another interesting fact about the word **πέτρα** (petra) our word here, it is never used of Peter in the Bible. **πέτρα** (petra), never used of Peter. **πέτρος** (petros) is not the **πέτρα** (petra) according to the Bible.

When **πέτρα** (petra) is referred to a person in the Bible, it always refers to Jesus Christ in the Bible. So you have one word always making reference to Peter. You have one word when it is used to name a person, always refers to Jesus Christ in the Bible.

For instance in I Corinthians 10:4, about the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness. And Paul says, "They all drank the same spiritual drink, and they drank from that spiritual rock (**πέτρα**, petra) that followed them and that **πέτρα** (petra) was Christ." The rock from which the water came is called **πέτρα** (petra) and Paul says the **πέτρα** (petra) was Christ, naming Him.

What is doubly interesting is that Peter himself, in his own writing, called Jesus **πέτρα** (petra). He never called himself **πέτρα** (petra). In I Peter 2:1-8. And it is interesting because this text uses the word **λίθος** (lithos), the smallest of stones. Christians are called **λίθος** (lithos), living stones, and that is the word used for us here in I Peter 2:1-8.

But I Peter 2:1 he says, **Therefore after having laid aside all malice, and all deceit, and hypocrisy, and all envyings, and all evil speakings...**
After having put that aside, that is the old life.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word.

As is my custom, when I come across a phrase that means a lot to me, I have got to mention it though it does not have anything to do with **πέτρα** (petra). When Peter says, "as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word," the word *sincere* means *unadulterated*. So it means what it says and says what it means. And the word *word* does not mean *word* as in *word of God*; it is the word **λογικός** (logikos) that means *your reasoning processes*. So the milk that God gives us to feed off of, of course is His word, but it is for our reasoning processes, as we reason things out in life. So that is a very special phrase there.

So that you might grow in it: if so be that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen from God, and precious. You also, as living stones (that is λίθος, lithos) are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion (this is in Isaiah's prophecies). "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone (that would be λίθος (lithos)

speaking of Christ) **elect, precious: and he that believes upon Him shall not be ashamed. Unto you therefore who believe He is precious: but unto them which are disobedient, the stone (the λίθος, lithos) which the builders rejected, the same has been made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling (a λίθος (lithos) of stumbling) and a rock of offence (πέτρα, petra).**

Christ is called a λίθος (lithos), a stone that fits in with all the other living stones so that we form this spiritual house; but He is also a stone of stumbling, people get offended at Him. But the word that is used for stone there is the word πέτρα (petra). Peter says He's a πέτρα (petra) of stumbling, that people stumble over.

Even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

So Peter uses the word πέτρα (petra) to make reference to Christ as a foundation stone that people stumble over. He did not refer to himself.

Another good text is Matthew 7:24-27. You remember Jesus said, **Whosoever hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.** That is πέτρα (petra). So when you hear the words of Jesus and obey them, you are building your house upon the πέτρα (petra), upon the rock who is Christ. **And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and it beat upon that house; and it did not fall: for it had been founded upon the πέτρα (petra). And every one that hears these sayings of mine, and does them not, should be likened to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.** So Jesus says, "If you obey My words you will be laying your house upon the foundation, which is the πέτρα (petra)." His words and Himself.

And so it is interesting, like I said, the word πέτρα (petra) when in reference to a person always refers to Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, always. It never refers to anybody else. It is used for a mountain. It is used for a cliff. But when it is used in reference to a person, only to Jesus Christ.

Now there is another detail we want to point out to you before we close. And that is the word *this*. Would not you know it that I would pick a word *this* that people just skim over. **And upon this rock I will build My church.** In the Greek language there are two demonstrative pronouns: *this* and *that*. *This* is the near demonstrative, *that* is the far demonstrative. So when Jesus is using the word *this* He is using the near demonstrative. He is saying, "This rock," pointing to Himself; not, "That rock," pointing to Peter. Very detailed. You cannot opine yourself out around the details and the facts.

And so He says, "You are πέτρος (petros). You are Peter. And upon this rock, πέτρα (petra)," pointing to Himself and making reference to upon Him as the foundation of the church, which is just further established for us, notice what it says, "and upon this rock I will build My church." We will get to the word *church* next week. But notice what He says, "I will build." The Lord builds the church. He does not commission us to build the church for Him. **I will build My church.**

In the early church in Acts 2:47 after the first few thousand people were saved and they gather around for fellowship it says about the condition of the believers - Acts 2:47 - that they were all **Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding to the church daily the ones being saved.** The Lord added to the church, not people.

My mentor used to use to tell me, and it has just been recently, so it has been about 50 years before it finally sunk in, before I was willing to accept it. He says, "It is just as important who does not come to your church as who comes." You do not want to try to get everybody and their brother to come into your church because you are inviting all the problems. Maybe God does not have them there spiritually and they going to create tremendous amount of problems, just because you want to increase your numbers. No, the Lord adds to the church. You will be as big as God wants it to be if you just concentrate on worshiping Him, and praying, and fellowship, and in the Word of God. The Lord will add, and the Lord will take away according to His will.

In I Corinthians chapter 3:6-7 Paul says, **I myself planted, Apollos** (who was a teacher in Corinth) **watered; but God is the one who has given the growth.** It is God who gives the increase. **So then neither he that plants is anything, nor he that waters anything; but God who gives the increase.** So we are just vessels, we are just instruments. It is God who does the work.

In Psalm 127:1 it says, **Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain who build it.** That tells you, you can build it, but it will be in vain. **Except the Lord build it they labor in vain who are building it.**

Then lastly, first of all He says, **I will build My church.** Notice the personal pronoun *My*. It is not our church. Jesus Christ is still the head of the church. It is His church. It is His work. He does the work. We are only the instruments and vessels yielded to Him and drawing off of His Spirit.

Next week we will pick up and take up where we left off and talk about the word *church*. I can tell you that the Greek word for *church* is not found in the New Testament. It is the word *assembly*. It has nothing to do with, for instance, on the outside of our church it says the Sisquoc Community Church. It is the name of the building. It is the name of the organization. Spiritually there is no such thing. It is the assembly. It is wherever God's people assemble. We will get more into that next week as to why we came up with the word *church* and we are just using the word *church* the way the early church, not the not the beginning church, they didn't start using it until the late 300 A.D., the third or fourth century they started using it to name buildings and organizations. But the believers were always the assembly, always the assembly. We will get into that next week and we will finish out the Lord's promises. He says, **Upon this rock I will build my church.** We have got two more promises: **And the gates of Hades will not prevail against it and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom.** What does all that mean? We will hopefully get into it next week.

Let's close with prayer.