

## ***Victory in Jesus for the Church (1)*** (Matthew 16:16–18a)

Matthew 16:13–15 reports the questioning of Jesus concerning His identity, first what people said, and then what the disciples said. In response to Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ (v. 16), Jesus makes four claims that promise ultimate victory for the church (vv. 17–19). Here are the first two.

### **I. *The claim by Jesus of blessing for Peter (16:17)***

To be blessed is to have the privilege of God’s favor.

1. *Jesus claimed blessing for Peter because of his confession, which declared Jesus to be the Christ and the Son of the living God.*

The Christ was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament as God’s anointed prophet, king, and eternal high priest. The New Testament understands Old Testament references to Sonship as pointing to the Messiah’s deity (e.g., Hebrews 1:8 citing Psalm 45:6–7).

2. *Jesus claimed blessing for Peter because of the Father’s revelation.*

It was not by his own or others’ ability that Peter reached his conclusion, but by divine revelation. This was an act of divine blessing. Peter apparently spoke for the other disciples (cf. John 6:68–69), so the blessing extended to them and to all who make the same true confession.

This promises ultimate victory for the church because persuasion is not ultimately dependent upon our ability. God the Father opens hearts and minds to the identity of Christ as believers bear testimony to Him.

### **II. *The claim by Jesus to build His church upon the rock (16:18a)***

1. *Jesus claimed a special foundation for His church: “this rock”.*

- a. Three views are commonly held among protestant evangelicals: the “rock” is Peter, the “rock” is the confession of Peter, and the “rock” is Jesus Christ himself. (Although Roman Catholicism has used this verse to support papal supremacy and succession, there is no basis for that in this text, even if Peter was the “rock” to which Jesus referred.)
- b. All three options have arguments for and against them. Here are some observations:
  - “Peter” and “rock” are masculine and feminine forms of the same word with (only) potential difference in meaning. No strong conclusion can be made from this.
  - The emphasis in the context (vv. 13–27) is on Jesus, even though Peter seems to be in the forefront in verses 16–19.
  - In the Old Testament “rock” figuratively portrayed something reliably solid and immovable. It was primarily in reference to God and seldom if ever of man. The “rock” from which water came in the wilderness wanderings is explained in 1 Corinthians 10:4 as Christ.
  - Two distinctive words are used in the New Testament, stone and rock, the latter out of which a tomb was hewn, the former being that which was rolled over the opening. Both words are used of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:6–8; Acts 4:11 with Psalm 18:22).
  - References to foundations, e.g., Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:11, are not exactly parallel, since those foundations are part of the building, stones which are laid. The rock upon which a building is built is not part of the building (cf. Luke 6:48).
- c. It seems best to conclude that the “rock” is the One whom Peter confessed and not Peter.
  - Only Christ had the Old Testament character of a rock.
  - The church would be built by Christ as others made the same confession.
  - Just as the covenant which God made with Israel at Sinai began with a confession of the identity of their God (Exodus 20:2), so also the church is built upon a similar declaration. Jesus is the Christ, the One who by His blood has bought us out of slavery to sin.

2. *“Upon this rock” Jesus claimed that the building of the church was His task.*

- a. Jesus is the One who builds His church; by His blood forgiving, with His voice calling, by His Spirit uniting His Body, by His Word sanctifying and cleansing His bride.
- b. Believers plant and water, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7). The apostles (and prophets) were laid as a foundation, revealing the mysteries of God (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5). By the gospel preached people come to faith and are added as living stones (1 Peter 2:5). We are called to proclaim Christ, people are called to believe, but Christ builds the church.

The true church rests upon a sure foundation whatever circumstances come. Jesus calls those who are His own, and they will come. Nothing will not stop Christ from building His church.

Do not despair for the sake of the church. Even amidst persecution, people come to faith in Christ because God opens their eyes and draws them. Christ Jesus is building His church. Be faithful; trust and obey Jesus. Ultimate victory is in His hands.

#### *Questions for further thought and discussion:*

- God revealed the identity of Jesus to Peter, but it was not done without evidence. What evidences had Peter experienced? What does this imply our task to be? What Scriptures confirm this?
- What difference might exist between the “rock” being Peter’s confession and the “rock” being the One whom Peter confessed? How can a profession of faith be an inadequate “rock”?
- Why is a correct (biblical) understanding of the church important for correctly understanding this claim of Jesus to be building His church?
- How can you better rely upon Christ for the growth of His church?