

(continued from sermon 16)

“I AM sure that many of you had in your class growing up, like I had in my class, a nerd. This particular nerd I'm talking about always made A's. He studied all the time, was kind of himself, and just always made A's. Now, there's nothing wrong with always making A's. There is nothing wrong with studying all the time. But the problem with these nerds is that they always break the curve. A regular student like me would bank on everyone doing badly on the test so that the teacher would have to grade everyone on the curve. Everyone in the class would benefit from all of the students in the class doing poorly. So it would be OK if I failed. I'd always get a little help from the teacher.

“But there was this one guy in class that had to go make an A. This, of course, messed up the curve. The teacher could now argue that all of us students could have studied and done well. So we would get mad at the one person who made an A. Why? Because his success revealed our failure.

“The problem with Jesus is that whenever He showed up, He messed up the curve. As long as people could compare themselves with other people, everybody passed. When Jesus showed up, He shows up with all A's. When He came and revealed the standards of God, it made everybody else see how far they fell short of the Divine Standard; Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6.”<sup>1</sup>

To those who have come to believe in Jesus He has become "*precious*." Yet there is another choice people can make and that is to reject Him. This is the third of the ideas Peter introduced in verse 4 ("*rejected by men*"). You'll see that in the next verse.

1) Psalm 118:19-22 (NASB):

<sup>19</sup> *Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD.*

<sup>20</sup> *This is the gate of the LORD; The righteous will enter through it.*

<sup>21</sup> *I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation.*

<sup>22</sup> *The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.*

Peter quite likely learned the interpretation of this verse from Jesus because Jesus often referred to Himself in this manner during His ministry here on earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 171.

Jesus had told a parable about farmers who leased a field from the owner of a vineyard (Matthew 21:33-46). They were to care for the field and provide the owner with his share of the prophets. When the owner sent servants to collect his profit, the tenants beat, stoned, and killed them. Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking they would respect him. They killed him also. As Jesus was telling this parable to the priests and scribes, Jesus asked them this question, "*When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?*"

Matthew 21:41 (TLB):

*<sup>41</sup> The Jewish leaders replied, "He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will pay him promptly."*

That was the right answer but Jesus then applied the story to Himself by quoting these important verses from the psalm:

Matthew 21:42 (NASB):

*<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"*

Now let us read the same verse from the more contemporary translation in "*The Living Bible*" along with the verses through the end of the chapter.

Matthew 21:42-46 (TLB):

*<sup>42</sup> Then Jesus asked them, "Didn't you ever read in the Scriptures: 'The stone rejected by the builders has been made the **honored cornerstone**; how remarkable! what an amazing thing the Lord has done'?"*

*<sup>43</sup> "What I mean is that **the Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation that will give God his share of the crop.***

*<sup>44</sup> All who stumble on this rock of truth shall be broken, but those it falls on will be scattered as dust."*

*<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and other Jewish leaders realized that **Jesus was talking about them**—that they were the farmers in his story—*

*<sup>46</sup> they wanted to get rid of him but were afraid to try because of the crowds, for they accepted Jesus as a prophet.*

The meaning here is clear. God is the owner of the vineyard. The leaders of Israel are the tenant farmers. The servants are the prophets, and the Son who was killed was Jesus. Therefore, He is also the stone rejected by the builders who was to become the capstone of revealed religion (Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11).

Then Peter calls our attention to Isaiah again, using Isaiah 8:14 to add the thought of stumbling to the prior thought of rejecting Jesus.

Isaiah 8:14-15 (NLT):

*<sup>14</sup> He will keep you safe. But to Israel and Judah he will be a stone that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he*

*will be a trap and a snare.*

<sup>15</sup> *Many will stumble and fall, never to rise again. They will be snared and captured.”*

### **British vs. American Beliefs**

*Item—British—American*

#### **Believe in:**

God—70%—94%

Heaven—53%—78%

Hell—26%—60%

The Devil—26%—55%

#### **Believe Jesus Christ is:**

God or Son of God—46%—84%

Just a man—34%—9%

#### **Practices compared:**

Ever pray—59%—88%

**Went to church last week—14%—43%**

Think About It!

God will either be a **sanctuary** (a shelter) or a **stone that causes men to stumble** (trip over), a **trap** for His people. He lovingly reveals His will to them, but His response to them depends on the way they individually respond to Him. Those who trust Him will know Him as a shelter or protector, but those who deny Him will know Him as One who destroys them. In the end it is impossible to deny or ignore God. As Oswalt puts it,

“Those who will not make a place for him will keep colliding with him and tripping over him, for he is there, whether they acknowledge him or not.’ This passage, along with Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22, provides a backdrop for several New Testament texts which deal with Jesus and people’s response to him (cf. Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:6-8).”<sup>3</sup>

Those who reject Jesus make the biggest mistake any one can make during their life because they will end up in Hell rather than Heaven for making such a decision.

<sup>2</sup> Op Cit., *6,000 Plus Illustrations for Communicating Biblical Truths*, Under: "Faith

<sup>3</sup> Terry R. Briley, *The College Press NIV Commentary – Isaiah: Volume 1*, ed. Terry Briley and Paul Kissling (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 2000), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 134.

Clearly, Peter understood that the Church was to be built on Jesus and nowhere does he even suggest otherwise. Coming to know Peter as we do in the Bible it would be in character for him to suggest he was capable of being the foundation on which the Church universal and for all time could be built.

Here we see Jesus teaching His apostles and we learn from the mouth of Peter himself in verse 15 that He knows Jesus to be "*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Those who believed this were His disciples and they were expected to follow Him by taking up their own crosses daily and following His example and teaching. So we see that Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah, revealing that **Jesus was not just a man but God Himself** Who had come to save His people.<sup>4</sup>

In the Greek the definite article occurs four times: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the God, the living One.*" This was such an important revelation by Peter that Jesus made a point of emphasizing that this wasn't just another of Peter's impulsive responses that were too frequently in error. He told Peter, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven*" (verse 17). Peter's response was the result of a divine revelation from God. Jesus had to be God or His death could not have paid for our sins.

Forgiveness of sin and salvation required a perfect sinless sacrifice, and **only God could satisfy that requirement.**

When Jesus said to Peter, "*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church*" (Verse 18), you would get various interpretations. If you were to ask that question of a Catholic priest he would probably answer something like this: "*Jesus appointed Peter to be the rock (now known as the "pope") and that there would always be such a leader who was also authorized to govern over the Church as Peter's successors and who had authority to speak for Jesus.*" This conclusion arrived at by the Catholic Church was certainly not by the authority of Jesus and we'll soon see why. Men who wanted to gain power and wealth soon recognized that controlling people's religious beliefs would pave the way to that goal.

Now there have been a number of Protestant scholars who are willing to accept Peter as the "rock" but only in the sense that he was the first to make this confession and thus became, along with the other apostles, stones that one by one would begin and continue to build up the Church on the foundation of Christ. Paul described the Church as "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*" (Ephesians 2:20). D. A. Carson and William Hendriksen think this is the right interpretation, though they make clear that "the text says nothing about Peter's successors, infallibility (perfection), or exclusive [absolute]<sup>5</sup> authority."<sup>6</sup>

Others of the Protestant faith would say, "*It was Peter's faith that was the rock on which Christ intended to build the Church.*" That certainly can be considered a valid interpretation.

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<sup>4</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series – Matthew*, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 368-369.

<sup>5</sup> Brackets mine.

<sup>6</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series – Matthew*, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 368-369.

“Surprisingly, this was also the view of a large number of the early Catholic fathers. John A. Broadus is informative here. He quotes Chrysostom as saying, ‘**On this rock; that is, on the faith of his confession....** He did not say upon Peter, for it was not upon man, but upon his faith.’ Broadus also cites Gregory of Nyssa, Isidore of Pelusium, Hilary, Theodoret, Theophanes, Theophylact, and John of Damascus as having held this interpretation.”<sup>7</sup>

There is also the **evangelical**<sup>8</sup> viewpoint which holds that **Jesus is the rock**.

“Peter's name is *petros*, a masculine noun meaning "rock" or "stone." (Peter's Hebrew name, *Cephas*, also means "rock.") But when Jesus referred to "this rock," he used the feminine form of the same word, "*petra*," which this view says means 'bed rock' or 'foundation rock.' The idea is that Peter was only a 'little stone,' perhaps only a pebble, but that **Jesus is the foundation** (the large rock) **on which the Church is built.**"<sup>9</sup>

Jesus and His teaching have already been described as a foundation rock in Matthew at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus called **the man who builds his house on the rock** wise.

Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB):

<sup>24</sup> *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on **the rock** [Petra]."*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *"And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on **the rock**."*

<sup>26</sup> *"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand."*

<sup>27</sup> *"The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."*

Later Jesus also spoke of Himself as "*the stone the builders rejected*" but which "*has become the capstone*," quoting Psalm 118:22 (Matt. 21:42). Nowhere does Matthew suggest that Peter is the rock.

Throughout the Old Testament God is often described as the "*Rock of Israel*." Taking the Bible as a whole it would be a real stretch to suggest that Peter was the "rock." The true foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ and the work He accomplished to provide salvation and eternal life to all believers. We are to only glorify the name of Jesus!

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Relating to or belonging to any Protestant Christian church that emphasizes the authority of the Bible and salvation through the personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. *Encarta Dictionary*: English (North America).

<sup>9</sup> Op Cit, Keener.

<sup>10</sup> Brackets mine.

One of the reasons I believe that Jesus is the rock comes from Peter himself in his first epistle<sup>11</sup> (1 Peter). How did Peter understand Jesus' words? Peter answers that question in 1 Peter 2:4-7 (NLT).

Jesus describes His *Church*, as the true, faithful remnant of God's people linked with the Old Testament covenant community (Ridderbos 1975:328; F. Bruce 1963:84). What marked it as new, however, was Jesus' specific designation "My Church" (Ladd 1974b:110; France 1985:255).<sup>12</sup>

Biblical tradition had often spoken of "building up" the community of God (as in Ps 51:18; 69:35; Jer. 24:6; 31:4, 28). "*The gates of Hades*" is a familiar Semitic<sup>13</sup> expression for the threshold of the realm of death. The words used here suggest that death attacks Christ's Church, but death cannot be victorious (Ladd 1974b:116). The Church will survive until Christ's return, and no enemy, including the large scale martyrdom of Christians during the Tribulation by Antichrist can prevent the ultimate success of God's purposes in history.<sup>14</sup>

Now what about "*the gates of Hades*" not being able to overcome Christ's Church? One interpretation is that "*the gates of Hades*" refers to all the attacks that will be made against the Church by Satan and his demons resulting in ultimate defeat.

We might also consider the interpretation that these gates represent death. Passing through Hell's gates was a common Jewish expression for death and not even death would be able to destroy the Church Christ is building.

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<sup>11</sup> **EPISTLE** (Gk. *epistole*, a "written message"). The term employed to designate twenty-one out of twenty-seven of the writings of the NT, whereas Luke and the Acts are both prefaced by an epistle to Theophilus, a friend of the evangelist. They are known as *Paul's Epistles* and the *Catholic* or *General Epistles*.

**The Catholic or General Epistles.** The Catholic epistles are so called because they were not addressed to any particular church or individual but to Christians in general. Of these, three were written by John, two by Peter, and one each by James and Jude. This division is strictly accurate, for 1 Peter and 2 and 3 John, although addressed to particular persons, have little in them that is properly local and personal.

**Paul's Epistles.** Paul's epistles number fourteen (if we include Hebrews) and are arranged in the NT not in the order of time as to their composition but rather according to the rank of the places to which they were sent. It is not known by whom they were thus arranged. Paul's letters were, as a rule, written by an amanuensis under his dictation, after which he added a few words in his own hand at the close. The epistles to Timothy and Titus are called pastoral epistles, because they contain pastoral instructions from a pastor to a pastor.

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are known as prison epistles because they were written during Paul's Roman imprisonment. Merrill Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), s.v. "," WORDsearch CROSS e-book.

<sup>12</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series – Matthew*, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 271-272.

<sup>13</sup> **SEMITE:** Descendants of Shem, one of Noah's three sons. The term also refers to people who know languages belonging to the "Semitic Family" of languages. In ancient times the Semites included the Canaanites, Hebrews, Arabs, Assyrians, Babylonians, Arameans (Syrians) and Ethiopians. Henrietta C Mears, *What the Bible is All About*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "SEMITE".

<sup>14</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary – The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1: The King and His Kingdom (Matthew 1-17)*, , Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 302-309.

In spite of all the attacks against the Church by the forces of evil it will be invincible because it is built on the foundation of Christ (the very large rock) who will be victorious over Satan and his armies.

Peter was not the foundation, the rock, but he was given a major role in the early Church. He was given *"the keys of the kingdom of Heaven"* and the promise, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

The Roman Catholic Church interprets this to mean that Peter and his successors have been given authority to receive or exclude individual people from salvation. There is no salvation for anyone who is not part of the Church. Therefore any one dying in that state will go to Hell.

Ministers have authority **to announce** forgiveness of sins to those who repent of sin and trust Christ. This is the Protestant position, and it finds expression in the parts of Protestant services called the *confession of sin* and the *declaration of pardon*. The Heidelberg Catechism<sup>15</sup> contains a classic statement regarding this position. "How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the gospel?" Answer: *"By proclaiming and openly witnessing, according to the command of Christ, to believers, one and all, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, by proclaiming and witnessing to all unbelievers and such as do not sincerely repent that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation abide on them so long as they are not converted"* (answer to question 84).<sup>16</sup>

Peter used the keys to open the door of the Gospel to the Jews by preaching at Pentecost (Acts 2), and by also opening the door of the Gospel to Gentiles by preaching in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). **Peter was the apostle to the Jews**, so he preached to the Jews first. But although he was the apostle to the Jews, Peter was also the first to teach the Gospel to a strictly Gentile audience.<sup>17</sup>

This is a minority view among Protestants, but it is held by the distinguished evangelical scholar John Stott, among others. Writing on Acts 10, Stott says, *"We have already watched [Peter] use these keys effectively, opening the kingdom to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost and then to the Sanhedrin soon afterwards. Now he is to use them again to open the kingdom to Gentiles; by evangelizing and baptizing **Cornelius**, the first Gentile convert."*

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<sup>15</sup> In 1562, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) and Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587), two young German ministers, met in Heidelberg at the request of Elector Frederick III (1515-1576) to produce a catechism that could be used to teach children and provide doctrinal guidelines for pastors and teachers. With the help and advice of Heidelberg University faculty, the two men wrote the catechism that was approved by the Synod of Heidelberg. The catechism was first published in Germany on January 19, 1563, and included a preface by Prince Frederick. Three other German editions were produced in 1563, followed by a Dutch edition in 1566. The Synod of Dort slightly revised the catechism between 1618 and 1619. Since then it has been translated into multiple languages and is one of the standard Reformed catechisms. E. Michael Rusten and Sharon Rusten, *The Complete Book of When and Where: In the Bible and Throughout History*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1562 &€" GERMAN MINISTERS WRITE THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM".

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

In Matthew 16:20, Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone He was the Christ. He had good reason for doing so. The people had their own ideas about what the Messiah would do and He didn't want a lot of their foolish ideas and expectations interfering with His teaching.