

## Pentecost XIV: Matthew 16:13-20: You Are the Christ, the Son of the Living God

1. There is no direct connection between this pericope and that which precedes. Nor do the parallels (Mk. 8:27-30; Lk. 9:18-21) indicate a connection. But, from a study of the Gospels, we know that, at this point, we are less than a year from Jesus' suffering and death. It is not the same incident as Jn. 6:69, where Peter confessed Christ. That was just a year prior to Jesus' death. The last year of Jesus' life involved increasing rejection of Him by Israel. He spent much of His time during that last year alone with the disciples teaching them and preparing them for the ordeal of His suffering and death.
2. Vs. 13: Ἐλθὼν, out of the land of Israel, toward the north. εἰς τὰ μέρη variously rendered "into the district of, to the territory near, to the region of, to the neighborhood of." The city of Caesarea (not on the coast but north of Galilee) was rebuilt and beautified by Philip, Herod's son. He named it after himself "Caesarea Philippi". For a good description of this city see Fahling, page 373. Jesus and the disciples spent time alone, near the city. ἠρώτα, a descriptive imperfect, "He was asking His disciples," not for His own sake (for information) but for their own sake. οἱ ἄνθρωποι "the people". τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου "the Son of man" is in the predicate. This term is derived from Dan. 7:13 where it is used eschatologically. In the Gospels it is used both of the state of humiliation (e.g. Jn. 1:51) and of the state of exaltation (e.g. Lk. 21:27). It is also derived from Ps. 8:4 (cf. Hebr. 2:6) where it is applied primarily to the state of humiliation of Christ. The term is applied to the incarnate Christ with emphasis on His humanity. It is clear from Jesus' question to the disciples that they understood that Jesus meant Himself.
3. Vs. 14: Note οἱ δὲ meaning "they" not just Peter. Note οἱ μὲν--ἄλλοι δὲ--ἕτεροι δὲ, a variety of people with a variety of opinions. For the first opinion see Mt. 14:2. Some people followed Herod's opinion. For the second opinion see Mt. 17:10, a mere forerunner, not the Messiah. "Jeremiah or one of the prophets", probably legends among the Jews which said that Jeremiah or one of the prophets would come back to life and precede the Messiah. Bengel remarks: "They did not think that anything greater could come than they had already had." Stoeckhardt: "They considered Him a mere man, though equipped by God with exceptional gifts and powers." Ylvisaker: "The people find in Jesus only a precursor of the Messiah and not the Messiah Himself. He did not fulfill the political expectations of the people." Fahling: "The public opinion upon the whole was favorable, though crude. . . . A prophet, but not THE prophet. They thought well of Him, but not well enough." Lenski: "What he (Jesus) desires is to have the disciples state the wrong opinions of men in order to set over against them their own right conviction." Beginning with the confession of the Baptist (Jn. 1:29) the disciples had already made confessions of Jesus (Jn. 1:41,45,49; Mt. 14:33; Jn. 6:69). Peter had made the confession at Jn. 6:69, shortly before this, in the name of all the disciples. He was primus inter pares "first among equals" but not exclusively.
4. Vs. 15: Note αὐτοῖς, all the disciples. Note emphatic plural ὑμεῖς, you not just Peter. τίνα is the interrogative pronoun used as subject of infinitive, with με in the predicate. It is crystal clear from this question that Jesus equates Himself with "the Son of man" in vs. 13. The Unitarians and rationalists claim that Jesus never called Himself "the Son of man". That is patently wrong. Peter's answer in the next vs. clearly shows that they and Jesus identified Jesus with "the Son of man".
5. Vs. 16: From the previous vs. it is clear that Peter speaks for all, as he did at Jn. 6:69. His confession is also that of the other disciples. Σὺ is emphatic as was ὑμεῖς in vs. 15. "The Christ, the Son of the Living God" is articular. Therefore, Peter is saying: "You exclusively, no one else etc." "The Christ" is God-incarnate, anointed with the Holy Spirit. Cf. Jn. 1:41; 4:25, and in the OT Dan.

9:25.26. On "Son of God" cf. Dan. 3:25; Mt. 14:33; 26:63. "The Son of God" is the incarnate Christ with emphasis on His divinity. "Of the Living God" is genitive of relation. He is not only "living" but "life-giving". Cf. Jn. 1:4; 6:54.68. By the way, Jn. 6:68 clearly shows that the disciples came to this conviction through the means, the Gospel. Lenski: "As 'the living' who has life and power in himself, God is the opposite of all other gods who are dead, lifeless, powerless idols." He is living, gives life, and associates Himself with the living, not the dead. Cf. Lk. 20:38.

6. Vs. 17: ἀποκριθεὶς means "in response". Μακάριος always denotes the blessedness of the repentant and believing child of God. Its specific meaning is governed by the context. Cf. the beatitudes at Mt. 5:3-11. The blessedness is always a gift of God. Three translations are rejected: TEV "good for you"; JB "you are a happy man"; NEB "you are favoured indeed". Jesus calls Peter "Simon, son of Jonah". Bengel remarks: "This express naming signifies that the Lord knoweth them that are his." Cf. Is. 43:1 and Lk. 10:20. And Lenski: "The name 'Simon, son of John' significantly points to what Peter was by nature. Over against his natural powers and abilities Jesus intends to place his new spiritual gifts." ὅτι introduces a causal clause going back to the word μακάριος. Cf. Gal. 1:11-17 where Paul tells the Galatians that he received the Gospel not by conferring with "flesh and blood" (vs. 16) but by revelation from God. The apostleship of Peter and Paul was identical, not of sinful, human origin but by revelation. In Mt. 16:14 we have the products of "flesh and blood", mere opinions which fall far short of truth, helping no one. Ylvisaker: "The conception which the people had formed of the Messiah was a carnal caricature (Jn. 6:14.15)." And Lenski: "What is true of the inability of Peter's flesh and blood is equally true of the inability of the flesh and blood or the natural powers of all men. . . . The revelation here referred to goes beyond mere intellectual knowledge and extends to spiritual conviction and apprehension. . . . The Father revealed Jesus to Peter through Jesus himself. . . . This word of Jesus is proof for our own confession: 'I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him etc.'" Cf. Mt. 11:27. The preaching and teaching of the Gospel brings the revelation which sinful flesh and blood can never bring. By the way, note Jesus' great humility. He had revealed the Father to His disciples by His Word and miracles, but He gives all glory to the Father as the Revealer.
7. Vs. 18: In vs. 16 Peter, owing to the Father's revelation, confessed Christ. In vs. 17 Jesus, Himself the very revelation of Truth, confessed Peter. Read Mt. 10:32. In vs. 18 the confession is extended: "And I also say to you that you are Peter etc." Peter had confessed Christ. Now Christ confesses Peter. He pays Peter high honor but, except for the fact that Peter was an Apostle, Christ pays Peter no higher honor than He pays any confessor of Christ. Thus far Christ is acknowledging Peter as His very own. Then comes a καὶ "and furthermore". Note that Πέτρος is masculine but πέτρα is feminine. Jesus is making a clear distinction. The two are not identical. Even Bengel, who is usually trustworthy, errs here by saying that in the original Aramaic (which Jesus spoke) no such distinction of gender can be made. Jesus did make a distinction in Aramaic because we have the words recorded in Greek, which makes a distinction. Ylvisaker rightly says: "We are not concerned with the Aramaic terms which we have before us. Beyond these even an angel has no right to venture, and according to them we must admit that Simon is not Πέτρα. He is merely Πέτρος, a character as of the rock; and such a character he has become, because he, in faith, which was expressed so gloriously in his confession, is built upon Him who is the true rock, Jesus Christ. He is in Scripture often called a rock, while in no other passage do we find even an intimation to the effect that human beings should be so designated (Mt. 7:24.25; Rom. 9:33; I Cor. 10:4; I Pet. 2:7). Christ is admittedly the rock in this passage also, upon which the Church shall be built; He is likewise the foundation (I Cor. 3:11) and the chief corner-stone (Eph. 2:20)." Fahling: "Jesus does not say that His Church is to be built on the person of Peter, but upon 'this rock'." Then he quotes Bruce: "Peterlike faith admits into the kingdom of heaven." Lenski: "The feminine term (πέτρα) indicates what made Peter a rock. That

was, of course, not his confession but the divine revelation from which that confession sprang and to which Jesus refers to significantly in vs. 17. But this revelation was not intended for Peter alone; all the disciples shared it, and, due to this revelation, all of them confessed Peter's confession." Isidore of Seville, a bishop of the Church of Rome, 602-636 A.D., in a writing called *Etymologies* (Book VII, IX, par. 2) wrote (in Latin): "Petrus got his name from petra, that is from Christ, upon Whom the Church is founded. For petra is not derived from Petrus, but Petrus from petra, just as Christ is not derived from Christian, but vice versa, and in keeping with this the Lord said: 'You are Petrus, and upon this petra I will build my church' because Petrus had said: 'You are Christ, the Son of the living God.' Then the Lord said to him 'Upon this petra', which you have confessed 'I will build my church.' For petra was Christ, upon which foundation also Peter himself was built" This quote clearly shows that in 600 A.D. the Church of Rome did not yet call Peter Christ's vicar on earth. That came later. To sum up all of this: πέτρα here involves us immediately with Christ, the foundation, the revelation of God through Christ, the Apostolic Word (Eph. 2:20), and the resultant confession of the believer. The word πέτρα does not point to "flesh and blood" but to the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now follow two future verbs in the first person singular, one in this vs. and one in the next. Both refer to Christ. "I will build", not Peter, but Christ. "MY Church." Not Peter's, but Christ's. Here "church" is the Una Sancta, the sum total of all believers. This word occurs in the Gospels only once more, at Mt. 18:17, where it denotes the local congregation. Jesus is speaking of the NT Church which was born on Pentecost Day. καὶ means "and therefore" (because CHRIST builds the Church). "The gates of hell" denotes the formidable powers and forces of Satan, his angels and all his followers among men. They will not overpower or conquer it. The antecedent of αὐτῆς must be "the Church". Only three translations are recommended: AV "the gates of hell"; LB "the powers of hell"; AAT "the forces of hell". For obvious reasons the following are rejected: RSV and NEB "the powers of death"; TEV "not even death"; NIV, NKJV, NASB "the gates of Hades"; JB "the gates of the underworld". Plainly, in Mt. 16:18 ἄδης means far more than death or the realm of the dead. "The gates of hell" pictures the citadel of Satan, a formidable power indeed, but unable to overcome or overpower the true church.

8. Vs. 19: "I will give to you." A gift of Christ. σοι should not be limited to Peter for, if that were the case, what did Jesus give (or not give) to the other disciples? In view of Mt. 18:18 and Jn. 20:23 Jesus gave the keys to all Christians after Pentecost. Jesus is speaking of the NT Church. τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν is adjectival, telling us what kind of keys. The expression means "the kingdom of grace which leads to the kingdom of glory." καὶ is resultative. The giving of Christ results in binding and loosing. Two translations are rejected: TEV "prohibit-permit"; NEB "forbid-allow". It is far more than that. We recommend NASB "whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." The expression "whatever" (ὃ ἔσται) is found in both parts, covering all aspects of the life of the members of the church. But notice the contrasts: "bind"- "loose", "shall have been bound"- "shall have been loosed", "on earth-in heaven". All of this denotes the proper use of Law and Gospel by individuals and congregations in the NT Church. The pastor ought read again the fifth chief part of Luther's Small Catechism "The Office of the Keys and Confession", so lucid, so simple, so Scriptural. Only when individuals and congregations, by revelation through Scripture, properly confess Christ, Who then confesses them, can they be sure that He is building the church among them, and then can properly handle the Office of the Keys, not according to the standards of flesh and blood. The perfect participles indicate that the Keys are applied on the basis of what is already true. The sins of impenitent sinners "have been bound", are already unforgiven before God. The sins of penitent sinners "have been loosed" because such forgiveness is based on the universal atonement. The use of the Keys applies to every aspect of the work of the church: preaching, teaching, absolution, baptism, the Lord's Supper, individual calls, etc. It is the very life of the church.

9. Vs. 20: This vs. involves us in a strict prohibition.  $\text{Iv}\alpha$  introduces an object clause. We know from other passages that the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ lifted this restriction. Bengel comments: "Had they done so (told people that Jesus was the Messiah), those who believed in any way that Jesus was the Christ might have sought for an earthly kingdom with seditious uproar; whilst the rest, and by far the greater number, might have rejected such a Messiah at that time more vehemently, and have been guilty of greater sin in crucifying Him, so as to have had the door of repentance less open to them for the future." Ylvisaker: "Only after the carnal Christ illusion had been forever nailed to the cross could the apostolic preaching without jeopardy join the Christ name to the name of Jesus (Godet). Nor were the disciples yet fitted to proclaim Him as the Messiah. The carnal conceptions of the populace still adhered to them. . . . When they were sent upon their first missionary journey, Jesus did not ask them to proclaim Him as the Messiah, but they should preach the advent completed on earth, the world was to ring with the confession that this Jesus was 'the Christ', Acts 3:13-26; 4:10-12; 5:30-32 etc."
10. The *Book of Concord* quotes vs. 15 once, vs. 18 ten times, and vs. 19 five times, in other words, sixteen references to this pericope. This is indicative of the fact that the Reformers restored the proper understanding of the Office of the Keys, so vital to the life of the church, so beclouded by the Papacy and the hierarchy of the Church of Rome. In the *Treatise on the Primacy of the Pope*, Tappert 324.23 we read: "These words (vs. 15) show that the keys were given equally to all the apostles and that all the apostles were sent out as equals." On the same page in Tappert, paragraph 25, we find this: "As to the statement 'On this rock I will build my church' (Mt. 16:18) it is certain that the church is not built on the authority of a man but on the ministry of the confession which Peter made when he declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. Therefore Christ addresses Peter as a minister and says 'On this rock' that is, on this ministry." The *Apology* quotes vs. 18 no less than four times, with reference to Justification twice (Tappert 119.85 and 145.26), with reference to Repentance (Tappert 191.63) once, and with reference to the Mass once (Tappert 251.11.12). What these references have in common is this that the declaration of the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake, by faith, cannot be overthrown by the forces of hell. The *Solid Declaration* and the *Epitome* quote Mt. 16:18 (along with Jn. 10:28 and other passages) three times with reference to the article on Election. The references are found at Tappert 495.5; 617.8 and 624.50. One sentence from these references summarizes all: "Our salvation is so firmly established upon it (election) that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it (Jn. 10:28; Mt. 16:18)." In these days of so much false ecumenicity we must proclaim these truths clearly and courageously for thus we confess Christ before men, as did Peter.
11. In vs. 18 Jesus said: "Thou art Petros." It has often been noted by exegetes that Christ is speaking of the rocklike character of Peter on this occasion. True. But Peter is not the exception, but rather the rule, among Christians so long as this God-given confession of Christ is truly believed. That becomes clearer in the vss. which follow our text. In vs. 22 Peter became an offense, a stumbling-block, to Christ. Though meaning well, Peter was practically saying that Christ should not suffer, die and be raised again on the third day. That was plainest unbelief. Was Peter the exception or does he represent the rule, in this case? That will be taken up in the next pericope.