

BIBLE STORY: THE CONFESSION OF PETER

Matthew 16:13-20

Central Thoughts

- The “rock” upon which the Church is built is the truth of the confession of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.
- The church’s confession is God’s Word and is a miracle of God’s Word.
- The gates of hell cannot prevail against the truth of the Gospel.
- The authority of the Office of the Keys to bind and loose sins is Christ’s promise.

Discussion Questions

Where was Caesarea Philippi located?

Far north of the Sea of Galilee.

Why did Jesus take the disciples to this area?

It was a remote place away from the crowds.

At what point was it in Jesus’ ministry?

It was approximately halfway through the third year of His ministry before He would soon set His face toward Jerusalem to suffer and die.

What had the disciples witnessed by this time in Jesus’ ministry?

Jesus preached in all the synagogues of the Jews from the Old Testament Scriptures; He called sinners to repentance and faith in God’s mercy; He received repentant tax collectors and sinners and ate with them; He performed many miracles—water into wine, the cleansing of lepers, the restoration of sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, making cripples walk, cleansing lepers, the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000, Jesus’ walking on the water, forgiving sin, and raising the dead.

What was the first question that Jesus asked His disciples?

Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?

What is the significance of Him being called “the Son of Man” and where did it come from?

The title “Son of Man” occurs many times in the Old Testament, but most often by Ezekiel where it occurs some 93 times. Ezekiel’s name means “God strengthens” which is what God did for Ezekiel throughout His ministry and what the Father was constantly doing for His Son, that Jesus might be faithful unto death. The title “Son of Man” underscores His humanity, that Jesus, the Son of God, is both true God and true man. It further emphasizes His humility that He humbled Himself to the point of death for our sins.

What is the significance of what people were saying about Jesus?

John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah were all prophets who preached a message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins as a gift of God’s grace to sinners. Jesus’ message was consistent with what the Old Testament prophets and John, the forerunner, had preached.

What was the second question that Jesus asked His disciples?

But who do you say that I am?

How did Simon Peter answer Jesus?

He confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

What does this confession mean?

“Christ” means “anointed One” and is a title for that King, from the House of David, who would fulfill every Old Testament prophecy and designation for the Redeemer and Savior of the world, and the Seed of Abraham through whom the blessing of salvation would come to all the families of the earth. “Son of the living God” not only designates Jesus as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the only begotten Son of God the Father, but by using the adjective “living” Peter is confessing that there is no other God.

How did Simon Peter come to confess this faith in Jesus?

Simon Peter was blessed by God through the miracle of faith. God the Father revealed this to Simon Peter by the Holy Spirit through the Word of the Gospel (see the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed).

What does “Bar-Jonah” mean?

“Son of Jonah” Note: In the Gospel of John, Peter is referred to by Jesus as the “Son of John” (John 21:15-17).

What is the significance of Jesus’ play on words in changing the name “John” to “Jonah”?

He wants us to understand that the sign of Jonah, Jesus’ death and resurrection (Matthew 16:1-4), is at the heart of the Church’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Why does Jesus give Simon the name “Peter”?

“Peter” means rock and it is in the masculine case. The “rock” upon which Jesus will build His Church is the confession of the truth of the Gospel that Peter made. This is why “upon this rock I will build My church” is in the feminine case. The church is not built upon Peter, but upon Peter’s confession of the Gospel that was revealed to him by the Father in heaven.

Why is it impossible for the gates of hell to prevail against the church?

Hell cannot prevail against the Church that holds fast to the confession of the truth.

What are “the keys” that Jesus’ is referring to?

The “binding key” refers to withholding of forgiveness from the unrepentant; the “loosing key” refers to forgiving the sins of the repentant.

What section of the Catechism receives its name from Jesus’ giving the keys to Peter?

The Office of the Keys and Confession

According to Jesus, what comfort do we receive from the promise that “whatever is bound on earth is bound in heaven and whatever is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven”?

When the ministers of Christ act according to the confession of the Gospel that is the church’s foundation, it is “as valid and certain in heaven as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.”

Why would Jesus tell His disciples that “they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ?”

Though Peter made the good confession, the disciples were still not ready to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments faithfully until they witnessed His death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit would “bring to their remembrance everything that Jesus had said to them” (John 15:26).

Meditation on the Bible Story

Peter’s confession of faith was a miracle. “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Christ is often referred to as the “Rock of our salvation” or the “Chief Cornerstone” of the Church. The content of our confession is Christ. The preservation of the church against the powers of hell, and the comfort that each of us has as Christians rests upon the sure and certain confession of faith in Christ that God’s Word reveals to us. The church is not built upon Peter, but upon Christ alone who comes to us through the rock-solid confession of the Gospel in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. Satan and all the host of hell cannot prevail against the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. This is of great comfort to us. The welfare of the church and that of every individual Christiann is not in any human being, institution, or organization, but in the Word of God—the TRUTH of the Gospel—that is outside ourselves. It is this truth that creates faith. It is this truth that we believe. It is this truth that gives us comfort. It is this truth that we confess. And it is this truth upon which the true Church of Jesus Christ is built.

Prayer on the Story

Heavenly Father, thank You for revealing Jesus to us as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Keep us steadfast and immovable in this faith and confession, so that the gates of hell may not prevail against us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



The Confession of Peter
Matthew 16:13-20