

Matthew 16:13–20

Who Do You Say I Am?

Introduction

Matthew 16:13–20 is a turning point in the Gospel. The disciples have watched Jesus teach, heal, feed crowds, calm storms, and show authority over evil. Now Jesus asks them to say plainly who they believe He is.

- The crowds offer respectful answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet.
- Peter goes further: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”
- Jesus tells Peter that this truth has been revealed by the Father.
- Peter’s confession is correct, but he still has much to learn about what kind of Messiah Jesus will be.

Setting

- Jesus and the disciples are near Caesarea Philippi, an area associated with pagan religion and Roman power.
- Against that background, Peter identifies Jesus as the true Messiah and Son of the living God.
- Immediately after this passage, Jesus begins teaching that He will suffer, die, and rise again.
- Peter knows who Jesus is before he fully understands what following Him will mean.

“Who Do You Say I Am?”

- Jesus first asks what other people are saying about Him.
- Then He makes the question personal: “Who do you say I am?”
- “Messiah” means God’s Anointed One.
- Peter recognizes that Jesus is more than a teacher or prophet.
- Christian faith requires more than knowing what others believe about Jesus. Each disciple must respond to Him personally.

Grace Comes First

Jesus tells Peter that the Father revealed this truth to him.

- God takes the initiative before Peter responds.
- This reflects prevenient grace: God reaches toward us before we fully understand or respond.
- Grace invites rather than forces our response.
- Peter’s later mistakes show sanctifying grace at work. Jesus keeps teaching, correcting, forgiving, and forming him.
- Discipleship is a lifelong work of grace.

“I Will Build My Church”

Jesus says, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.”

- Peter receives an important role in the life of the early Church.
- The Church ultimately belongs to Jesus.
- Jesus says, **“I will build my church.”**
- Christ is the builder, owner, Savior, and Lord.
- The Church’s future doesn’t depend entirely on our programs, resources, numbers, or abilities.

- Our responsibility is faithfulness. The results remain in Christ's hands.

The Gates of Hades

Jesus promises that “the gates of Hades will not overcome” His Church.

- Hades refers to the realm of the dead.
- Jesus is promising that death cannot defeat what He is building.
- This promise points toward His own death and resurrection.
- Congregations and institutions may change, but Christ's saving work continues.
- The risen Jesus gives the Church hope even in seasons of uncertainty and loss.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Jesus gives Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

- Keys represent authority and responsibility.
- Peter is a steward, not the owner of God's kingdom.
- Christian authority should reflect the character of Jesus.
- Leadership should serve, teach truth, practice mercy, and point people toward Christ.
- The Church is entrusted with the gospel, but we don't own grace.

Binding and Loosing

Jesus speaks of “binding” and “loosing,” language connected with interpreting and applying God's teaching.

- The Church has responsibility for spiritual discernment.
- Personal preferences and traditions aren't automatically God's will.
- Christian discernment should be grounded in Scripture, prayer, the Holy Spirit, Christian community, and the character of Jesus.
- Spiritual authority should produce humility rather than control.

Application

- Jesus still asks, “Who do you say I am?”
- If Jesus is Messiah and Lord, that confession should shape how we live.
- The Church belongs to Christ, so we can serve faithfully without carrying the burden of saving it ourselves.
- Christian authority is stewardship, not ownership.
- Peter reminds us that getting the answer right doesn't mean our growth is finished.
- Jesus continues correcting, forgiving, restoring, and forming His disciples through grace.

Discussion Questions

- Who do people today commonly say Jesus is?
- How would you answer Jesus' question, “Who do you say I am?”
- What does Peter's confession teach us about grace and faith?
- How does “I will build my church” affect the way we think about the Church's future?
- What does faithful Christian authority look like?
- Where is Christ still shaping your understanding and discipleship?

Main Truth

We confess Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and then spend our lives learning to live faithfully according to that confession.