

Text: Matthew 16:13-20

Title: Jesus is the Christ

Truth: God the Father convinces people that Jesus is the Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday April 3, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

According to multiple passages in the Bible, a key point of gospel preaching is that Jesus is the Christ. The following texts use this pattern: John 20:31, Acts 9:22, 17:3, 18:5, 18:28, 1 John 2:22, 1 John 5:1. The approach that Paul used was to show what the Old Testament said about Messiah (Christ). Then he explained the identity of and events surrounding the life of Jesus. Then, he put an equals sign between the two, saying Jesus = Christ. This exact identity is critical to correctly understand the plan of God. Denying it is the same as denying the gospel, for to deny Christ's person and/or work *is* to deny the gospel.

I. Question and Confusion over the Identity of the Son of

Man, v. 13-14

- A. Jesus quizzed his disciples—the 12—about His identity. He first asked about the opinions of the masses. In a human sense, He depended on the disciples to be “in touch” with the opinions of the masses among whom they ministered.
- B. Notice that Jesus identifies Himself as “the Son of Man.” We have recently run into this phrase in thinking through evangelism to those who deny the deity of Christ.

Expand

- C. The disciples ran through the gamut of public opinion:
 - 1. John the Baptist (resurrected). Herod thought that, Matt. 14:2. This was of course unrealistic because Jesus and John lived at the same time for about 30 years. Since this is listed first, it may be that a higher number of the populace thought this.
 - 2. Elijah. His translation to Heaven gives him a special human interest.

3. Jeremiah.

4. Another of the prophets. This was the catch-all category of the populace, and probably the least in terms of numbers.

It is interesting to note that in every case, the people identified Jesus not as a new prophet, but as an old one resurrected or brought back from Heaven. We have to remember that the populace was largely clueless. They were not nearly as well prepared as the disciples, and you know how they had problems along the way even as close to the Lord as they were.

II. Clarity from Heaven to Peter: You are the Christ, v. 15-17

A. Jesus asks a more pointed question: Who do YOU say that I am?

B. Who asks this kind of question, by the way? The question about Jesus's identity would be a little bit strange for a regular human to ask his friends. At least I think so. What I mean is that we are who we are, and we do not normally have a hidden identity that needs to come to the surface unless we are a spy or something—in which case we wouldn't be asking people to figure that out!

A person might ask the “who do you say I am” question if they are having an existential crisis, or a mid-life crisis, or similar depressive situation. They need to hear from others to help them re-establish clarity in their own minds as to who they are—what they are like, what they like to do, what they are gifted at, what family they belong to, etc.

John had something like this in chapter 11 where he was depressed in prison. He asked “Are you the Christ?” This may well have been related to a “Who am I” question because if he doubted the identity of Jesus, then he would have to be wondering who he himself was, because if he was announcing the coming one, and thought he knew who it was, but then thought he was mistaken because of harsh circumstances weighing on him, it could be a real mental struggle.

But Jesus was asking the question not only because it was important for the disciples to understand it, but because there was something unique about Jesus that had to be addressed. He was a

Person like no other, one come down from heaven who joined humanity in a way that no one else did or will do.

- C. Peter answers the question with clarity: You are the Christ = Messiah. He connected Jesus with the Old Testament prophecies just like Paul would later do in Acts, John in his 1 John, and the other apostles in their God-breathed letters hundreds of times when they refer to Christ.

Expand.

- D. This information was disclosed to Peter by God the Father, likely through the work of the Spirit of God in Peter's mind. He did not come up with this by the power of his own reason or by being told by other human beings ("flesh and blood has not revealed this to you").

III. Two Promises of Jesus

A. I will build my Church, v. 18.

1. Foundation of the church: Peter's name is derived from the word that means "rock." In a play on words, Jesus says, "On this *petra* I will build my church." It is not the same word as "Peter," but it is a closely related word. This indicates that Jesus is not building the church on Peter, but on the *petra*, which is the truth that He himself is the Christ, the truth professed by Peter moments earlier. So the foundation is not Peter, but the truth of Jesus as Messiah.
2. Power of the church: "The gates of Hell" is not a reference to a military force that comes out of Hell to fight the church. It is death itself. The most powerful fear-factor in humanity which holds most humans subject to its power their whole lifetime (Hebrews 2:15). Not even death can conquer the church, for the church's Head has the keys not only of the kingdom (next) but also of Hades and Death. He has authority over them. The church is impervious to the attack even of the worst of dread enemies. Lesser foes are no match for its work.

B. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, v. 19. See below for a lengthy article by Mark Snoeberger on this topic. I want you

to note this key fact: these are the keys to the *kingdom*, not the keys to the church. Evidently, these two things are somehow related, occurring as neighbors in this passage as they do. But what exactly is that relationship? Some theologians move much too quickly to equate the two entities, but that is not correct!

Expand greatly.

1. Keys speak of authority, like in Revelation 1:18.
2. Binding and loosing.
3. Matthew 18:18-20 passage that speaks of the same.

Conclusion, v. 20

Jesus concludes the section with a command that the disciples tell no one about his identity. This was unfortunate in one sense: people need to know who He is. But it was right in another sense: revealing this information too early and too widely did not fit the timeline that Jesus had to follow that He would be killed at just the right time, in Jerusalem, around Passover, etc.

If you have a brain-freeze when witnessing for Jesus, just do this: show that Jesus is the Christ. Remember that: **Jesus is the Christ**. Go to the Old Testament for a few verses, and then to the New Testament for a few, and tie the two together. That will prime the pump and get the conversation going.

Examples: Connect Isaiah 53 with the events of suffering of Christ in the gospels. Show Psalm 110:1 with its New Testament quotations such as Heb. 1:13, Matt. 22:44, Acts 2:34-35, Mark 12:36, Heb. 10:12, Eph. 1:20, Heb. 1:3, 8:1, 10:13.

MAP

The Church and the Keys to the Kingdom

(In this article, Mark Snoberger connects keys of the kingdom to church membership and the binding/loosing principle. Peter, then the apostles and the entire church, have this power. Until now, I have tied the keys more broadly to the gospel because of their “kingdom-ish” nature and our Lord’s explanation to Nicodemus of being born again [by the gospel] as a pre-requisite to entering the

kingdom. I will see if in re-study I can come closer to Mark's position. I have explained the binding and loosing idea to that of authority to declare the forgiveness of sins in the gospel in connection with John 20:23 due to the similarity of language. Membership in the church is inextricably connected with this forgiveness and binding, but it seems that to derive *formal membership* is a bit of a stretch.)

<https://dbts.edu/2021/12/20/the-church-and-the-keys-to-the-kingdom/>

20 Dec 2021

Posted By [Mark Snoeberger](#)

In 1964, George Eldon Ladd argued that the Church functions as “Custodian of the Kingdom” (*Presence of the Future*, 276). For many, this designation sounds either (1) too Catholic (salvation is found in the organized Church alone) or (2) too Reformed (the Church IS the Kingdom, effectively displacing ethnic Israel). But while both of these concerns loom in my mind as well, Ladd's observation has merits that, if lost, can debilitate the very Protestants and dispensationalists who object to Ladd's principal claim.

The first mention of the keys appears in **Matthew 16:19**, where Christ grants to Peter the “keys of the kingdom,” and with them authority to “bind and loose” on earth what has been bound and loosed in heaven. That Peter had something of a singular role in “unlocking” new venues for evangelism in the early church suggests that he may have taken the lead in as the first keyholder, but nearly all Protestants argue that the use of the keys did not belong to Peter alone (much less his papal successors). The keys also belonged to the other Apostles, and eventually the whole gathered church.

The basis for this conclusion is the second NT allusion to the keys in **Matthew 18:18**. On the heels of the classic pericope on church discipline (or better, the capstone of the pericope on church discipline), Christ echoes his earlier comments in chapter 16, intimating that the last step of church discipline (exclusion from the Assembly) is tantamount to “loosing on earth what is loosed in heaven.” That is to say, the Church excommunicates those whom they determine to be outliers of the kingdom based on the standards that God himself provides. The responsibility is

extraordinary and deeply sobering: local churches on earth are to follow the lead of the Apostles in policing their membership to align with membership in Christ’s coming Kingdom. While we should not assume from this verse that the Church is always correct in her assessment of the spiritual state of those she excommunicates, the absence of any exception clause makes the assessment extremely important: local churches truly are custodians of the Kingdom.

Lest there be any doubt of this extraordinary responsibility, the Scripture-writers reiterate this ecclesiastical responsibility at least four times in the Epistles:

(1) After completing the most severe NT passage on church discipline, calling on his readers to “judge those who are in the church” and “expel the wicked man” (1 Cor 5), Paul continues in the next chapter to chide the church for not making proper judgments about lesser matters in their membership. Rather than adjudicating disputes within the body by following Christ’s instructions about church discipline, members were suing each other in secular courts like the heathen, cheating and defrauding one other publicly (vv. 1–8). Paul reminds his readers that occasions like these were tailor-made for the use of the “keys” (vv. 9–10):

“Do you not know that the wicked **will not inherit the kingdom of God**? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers **will inherit the kingdom of God.**”

(2) In Galatians 5, after warning his readers that “a little leaven works through the whole batch of dough” and urging them to make the offenders “pay the penalty” (vv. 9–10), Paul explains the basis for his expectation in verse 21:

“Those who live like this (i.e., gratifying the flesh) **will not inherit the kingdom of God.**”

(3) In Ephesians 5, Paul warns the church not to permit within “God’s holy people,” to be in “partnership with,” or allow “among themselves” any who openly engage in sin, offering as his reason that

“No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—**has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God**” (v. 5).

To summarize, the Church must engage in church discipline (“loosing” those who do not belong), striving to maintain a membership of persons who demonstrably have an inheritance in the coming Kingdom.

(4) More positively, James 2 indicates that “binding” people (i.e., bringing them *into* church membership) operates on the same principle. We don’t base reception in the church on factors such as wealth or social status, because these are not factors that qualify one for the Kingdom—in fact, these are often barriers to participation in the Kingdom (cf. Matt 19:23–24). Instead, the church should extend acceptance (including, I would argue, formal membership) only to those whose “rich faith” is corroborated by good works. James’s reason?

Because “God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and **to inherit the kingdom** he promised those who love him” (v. 5).

For other texts that arguably further the themes of binding/loosing and kingdom inheritance, see also 1Cor 4:20; 1 Thess 1:4–5, 2:12. Note, then, the necessary conclusions that flow from these texts:

- While the Church itself is no kingdom, Paul’s “mystery” (viz., the Church) is not unrelated to Christ’s Kingdom. As Paul notes in Ephesians 1:10, church life is always conducted “**with a view to the administration of the fullness of the times.**”
- The passages above, collectively, inform the Church what is meant by being “**workers for the kingdom of God**” (Col 4:11). Our mission is both (1) to recruit a Kingdom constituency for a Kingdom that will be established supernaturally by our Lord Christ in the age to come and (2) to prepare Christ’s mediatorial queen, which will “have neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing” (Eph 5:27) when the King arrives.

- The Church has an extraordinary role in adjudicating “on earth” what is true “in heaven,” lending extreme import to the Baptist ideal of **regenerate church membership** and the church’s collective task of “guarding the door” of the assembly.
- In every case, however, the epistles cast the Kingdom as **wholly future**. These texts anticipate, often in the future tense, an inheritance not yet received. The Scriptures are clear that entry into the kingdom caps a lifetime of sanctification (cf. Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 4:1, 18; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Pet 1:11). If the Church **IS** the kingdom already, then the syntax is all wrong in these verses.