

# Jesus Will Build His Church

Matthew 16:18-20

9 February 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

**Big Question:** How will Jesus build his church?

**Big Idea:** Jesus will build his church through the people of God proclaiming who he is.

## Introduction

The mission is going to be difficult and dangerous.

Do not underestimate how hard it'll be.

The stakes are high and the pressure will be constant.

You're guaranteed to be tested beyond the limits of your ability.

It's dangerous and will require great sacrifice.

What you're about to embark on will take you to places that you've never been before.

There will be physical, intellectual and emotional pain and hardship that you didn't even think was possible.

It kind of sounds like a casting call for a reality TV show, doesn't it?

But this mission is much more important.

For a mission this tough, we'd only ask the best of the best to apply.

The elite, the gifted, the impressive people.

But that's not how the God of the Bible works.

He calls regular people like you and me to join his mission.

Our God uses ordinary people to carry on his mission because his power is made perfect in weakness.<sup>1</sup>

Our mission, should you choose to accept it (actually, you don't really have a choice), is to proclaim Jesus as Messiah.

Our mission is to participate in building Jesus' church by declaring that he's the saviour who conquered death so that our sins can be forgiven.

That's how Jesus will build his church.

## Outline

This quarter, we've returned to the Gospel of Matthew on Sunday mornings.

Last week, we began looking at this passage in chapter sixteen which is central to the whole book.

Jesus asked his disciples what people thought of him.

It's a great question.

In his own day, most people thought Jesus was a prophet (although they didn't know which one), but nothing more.

When Jesus asks his disciples who THEY think he is, Peter makes a great confession, verse sixteen:

*Matthew 16:16 (NIV11) <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

This's so profound because that's exactly who Jesus is.

Peter didn't work this out on his own, though.

It was revealed to him from God.

Peter's confession marks the point that Jesus starts heading towards the cross.

Right after this great confession come some really famous verses that we didn't have time to look at last week.

They're well-known because they're tricky, if not controversial.

These next verses actually show us just how important Peter's confession was.

Peter's great confession is the basis for a great mission.

### **Jesus will build his church through the people of God proclaiming who he is.**

There are two movements to these verses:

- Jesus will build his church
- The authority of the church

### **Jesus will build his church**

As with most tricky verses, these have a context.

We mustn't forget that these verses are connected to the ones that come before.

Peter's had his turn and rightly identified who Jesus is with a little bit of help from God.

Well, okay, it was completely from God.

Now, it's Jesus' turn.

Peter's said who Jesus is, now it's Jesus' turn to say who Peter is.

*Matthew 16:18 (NIV11) And I tell you that you are Peter*

You might be thinking, “Well, der, the bloke probably knows his own name.”

Except that Peter wasn’t the name on his birth certificate.

His mum called him Simon or Simeon.

And that’s what Jesus called him in verse seventeen.

There’s a long history important people’s names being changed in the Bible.

Abram became Abraham and Jacob was rebranded as Israel.

It wasn’t until the day that Jesus came along and met Simon and his brother Andrew fishing in Capernaum, that he got himself an additional name.

It was Jesus who gave ‘Simon’ the nickname ‘Peter’ although, interestingly, he almost never called him that.

Jesus typically called him Simon.

It was the other disciples who usually called him Peter.

Giving people nicknames is such an Aussie thing to do.

I like watching the TV program “Back Roads” and there was an episode recently about the Bulloo Shire in Western Queensland.

It seems like just about everyone in the town of Thargomindah has a nickname – Dogga, Tractor, Rusty, Bomber, Fridgie, Duck, Bones and Mistake.

When my now-wife first met my friends when we were dating, she hated that she had to learn TWO names for everyone.

There was Dubs, Nugget, Tucker, Gus, Strawberry – and they all made perfect sense to us.

Nicknames often tell you more about a person than their real name does.

When a baby’s born, the parents don’t know what the child’s going to be like.

They grow into their name.

But nicknames are the result of something that’s happened.

In John’s gospel we find out that he was called Cephas in the Aramaic language.<sup>2</sup>

Petros when they were speaking Greek.<sup>3</sup>

He’d be called ‘Rocky’ if they were speaking in English.

That's because the meaning of the name is what's important and that's what it means – rock – regardless of which language you're speaking.

Jesus is speaking to Peter and identifies – unusually for Jesus – that his name is Peter.

Going on in verse eighteen, Jesus says, “on this rock I will build my church”.

Jesus is clearly making a play on words – Peter and “this rock”.

And I tell you that you are ROCK, and on this ROCK I will build my church.

The all-important question for understanding this passage is, “Who or what is this rock?”

There are four main answers.

It could be that Jesus is talking about building the church on the rock of his own teaching.

Earlier in Matthew's gospel, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says:

*Matthew 7:24 (NIV11) <sup>24</sup> “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

‘This rock’ could be Jesus himself because Jesus is often described as being the cornerstone for the church.

However, in this section, Jesus is the builder rather than the foundation.

Or the “this” might be referring all the way back to Peter's confession in verse sixteen.

You've probably heard people say that Matthew uses two different Greek words for ‘rock’ here.

“You are **petros** and on this **petra** I will build my church.”

It's argued that *petros* is a small stone and *petra* means a huge body of rock.

The argument goes that Peter is just a small stone and his confession is a great, big rock.

While that could be the case, there are two reasons I don't find it convincing.

Firstly, *petros* can also mean a large boulder not just a small stone.

And secondly, while there is that distinction in earlier Greek, by the time of Jesus, these two words meant just about the same thing.<sup>4</sup>

It would make much more sense to use the word *lithos* which always means a small rock or stone.<sup>5</sup>

I think that the most obvious answer is that “this rock” is Peter.

“You are Peter and on this rock (Peter) I will build my church.”

Before you get too concerned, as far as I can tell, this is now the majority view amongst commentators.

The reason for the two Greek words is that you wouldn't call a bloke Petra because it's the feminine form of the name.

Jesus could've said, “On you I will build my church,” but that would lose the play on words.

Peter's not necessarily the guy that you'd pick first to take forward the gospel or build the church on.

People say that “this rock” couldn't be Peter because often he's more rogue than rock.

There are too many times when he isn't rock-solid and reliable.

It's not much later that Jesus says to him, “Get behind me Satan!”<sup>6</sup>

He's the one that denied Jesus three times.

Peter needed to be pulled up by Paul.<sup>7</sup>

But the reason that Jesus uses Peter isn't because of his ability.

The reason Jesus used Peter is because Peter recognised Jesus as Messiah.

His status depends on what he confesses.

It's not just Peter that Jesus will build his church on, but Peter as the one who confesses that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus isn't going to build his church on Peter and whatever personal message he comes up with, but Peter who relays what's been revealed to him.

And Peter is ultimately only the foundation, important but not everything.

It's Jesus who will build his church – “I will build MY church”.

JESUS is the one who'll build his church.

The church doesn't DEPEND on Peter, yet Jesus uses him.

Peter got the privilege of being a founding role in the church.

Jesus used Peter in important ways in the early days of the church.

In the Bible, we have the four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – which give accounts of Jesus' life.

Afterwards, you get the Acts of the Apostles which gives a history of what happened after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Peter keeps showing up at key points in that book.

Who was it that first preach the gospel to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost?<sup>8</sup> Peter.

The Samaritans were the half-breed neighbours that the Jews didn't like.

Who, along with John confirms that the Samaritans should be part of the church?<sup>9</sup> Peter.

And he had a key role in the conversion of the first gentiles.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus used the man Peter – and in particular his testimony about who Jesus is – at key points in establishing the church.

Peter clearly helped to lay down the foundation of the church, which tallies with what Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians:

*Ephesians 2:20 (NIV11) <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.*

The other reason that people are nervous of understanding “this rock” as Peter who confesses Jesus as Messiah is because the Roman Catholic Church took this idea and ran to town with it.

They claim that Peter was the first Pope and Bishop of Rome and only the church attached to Peter has true authority.

A cynic might say that it was for political reasons that they liked the idea that the Bishop in Rome is the head of the whole church.

The Roman Catholic Church's Catechism says:

*This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.<sup>11</sup>*

Their doctrine goes even further with the doctrine of apostolic succession which says that Peter passed his special authority down through the Popes all the way to Pope Francis.

You can't get that from this passage and the Roman Catholic Church doesn't claim that you can.

They teach that you should believe this doctrine because the Magisterium (the teaching office of the Church) says it's true rather than because it's in Scripture.

There's plenty of evidence in Matthew gospel that points in the very opposite direction though.

For instance, at the beginning of chapter 18, the disciples come to Jesus asking which of them is the greatest.

Why would they do that if they knew that Peter is?

And again in chapter 20, James and John's Mummy comes asking for the best seats in the house for her sons.

Why do that if Peter is clearly number one?

We don't need to understand Peter as the first Pope who started a line of succession to understand "this rock" as Peter who confesses who Jesus is.

Peter had a significant place in laying the foundation of the church.

Even a particular place amongst the apostles.

There was some kind of succession, but it wasn't the authority that the Roman Catholic Church proclaims.

Jesus' final command in Matthew's gospel – given to all believers – was to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."<sup>12</sup>

In the great commission, Jesus commissions all believers to go and make disciples of all nations by teaching all about him.

Peter was the first one to be appointed as a confessor of who Jesus is.

What a privilege all believers have to help build the church on the basis of our confession of Jesus!

That's our role, but Jesus will build his church.

This's the first time that the word "church" comes up in the gospels.

Actually, it's only one of three times it appears in any gospel and the other two are in chapter eighteen.

That makes many people think that Jesus couldn't have said it.

Really it shows that the church was Jesus' idea!

I don't think that Jesus has a local church in mind here – he's not talking about a local body of believers.

This is the universal church who assemble and gather around Jesus

The Gates of Hades won't overcome the church Jesus builds.

That's a strange term and you might've heard it used to say that Satan and his minions won't be able to attack and defeat us.

However, gates are used to defend, not attack.

So others have said that we can pick up the sword of the Spirit and get slaying some demons.

Hades in Greek or Sheol in Hebrew is the place of the dead, the underworld.

“The Gates of Hades” is a technical term used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe death.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus is saying that death won't stop him building his church.

Jesus is just about to go on and predict his own death in verse twenty-one.

Far from being a sign of losing, death is going to be the way that Jesus wins his victory.

Even Jesus' own death won't stop him from building his church.

It'll actually be the way that he achieves it.

Gates keep people out, but they also hold people in.

We know death is the end of the line, but the grave couldn't hold Jesus.

He's the Messiah who came to deal with death.

His resurrection proves that Jesus is victorious over death.

As Peter preached in Acts 2:31:

*Acts 2:31 (NIV11) <sup>31</sup> Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.*

In Jesus, death can't overpower us either, if we're in him.

The good news we proclaim is that Jesus is the son of God.

He came as God's Messiah, God's agent and secret weapon, to conquer death.

He did that by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for sin racked up by us.

If we trust in Jesus then we don't need to fear death but can have the sure and certain hope of eternal life.

Death doesn't get the last say.

This had particular relevance in Caesarea Philippi.

People believed that there were stone portals that connected with the underworld.

There was a tunnel with the god Pan (who was half human/half goat) in it at Caesarea Philippi.

They believed that each autumn, Pan would go to the underworld to spend winter, presumably in the warmth.

Then in the Spring, they'd make sacrifices to try and coax him out.

Pan and any other false god won't win.

That's a guarantee.

Jesus WILL succeed.

The church will be on the right side of history... the winning side, King Jesus' side.

That doesn't mean churches won't close down.

Individual churches might close, but the gospel goes on.

Governments have tried to infiltrate the church and stop it.

That's what happened in 1940s Germany.

The church was affected, but it didn't die.

At this time and place in history, it can seem like the church is fighting an uphill battle.

But Geneva Push – the church planning network we're a part of – d has seen over 100 churches born in Australia in the last 10 years

There are lots of others in other church planting organisations making inroads too.

We can trust that Jesus will build his church even in the hard soil of Australia.

Sometimes it can feel like the world is against us and that Jesus isn't building his church.

My prayers are becoming more desperate that he might do that here.

Do you ask that Jesus would build his church through Grace Bible Church Corinda?

As we faithfully proclaim the gospel week after week?

As we go out into the world – our workplaces, at the school gate, wherever – proclaiming who Jesus is.

Jesus doesn't us perfect people.

He builds his church through people who struggle and fail.

The key thing is that you faithfully confess who Jesus is.

Jesus is the God's great saviour.

And that's the truth we confess which Jesus will build his church on.

## **The authority of the church**

Secondly, Jesus gives great authority to the church.

He passes on the authority to bring people into his kingdom.

On the basis of his confession, Jesus will give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

What are the keys?

It's not easy to know for sure because Jesus doesn't really explain in this passage.

Obviously, keys unlock doors.

Most of us carry a bundle of them around in our pocket or handbag, but you don't get a key when you become a Christian.

Keys admit or exclude.

If you're got a key, then you can get in.

If you don't then you can't.

These particular keys open the kingdom of heaven.

This's why we are used to the picture of Peter standing at the pearly gates, deciding on who should get into heaven.

I can't remember seeing it happen recently, but people used to be given the keys to a city.

Sportspeople would come back after the Olympics and they'd be given the keys as a great honour.

You'd be given a key to the family home when you became an adult at 21 years of age.

It was a great privilege and responsibility that doesn't happen anymore.

In the ancient world, being given the keys meant a great deal of trust and authority.

A king would only give keys to a very trusted steward.

In Isaiah 22, you can read about Eliakim son of Hilkiah:

*Isaiah 22:22 (NIV11) <sup>22</sup> I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*

Peter is given the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

He's been given the way into the kingdom.

The keys are proclamation of Christ as Messiah

Preaching that message will bring people into the kingdom or shut them out, depending on how they respond.

When Peter proclaims Christ as Messiah, his message opens the door to heaven for all who believe it.

The same message also closes the door to all who reject Jesus.

In chapter 23, Jesus rips into the Scribes and Pharisees for shutting the door of the kingdom in people's faces.

In the same way, in Luke 11:52 Jesus condemns the teachers of the law who take away key of knowledge.

In Barcadine is the famous tree of knowledge (although it's more like a stump of knowledge now).

Knowing who Jesus is isn't the tree of knowledge, but it is the key of knowledge which opens up the kingdom of heaven.

Using the keys can lead people through the escape hatch from death to life.

Evangelism happens with the authority of God and with his guidance.

And yet proclaiming who Jesus is, is a huge responsibility which shouldn't be taken lightly.

I remember being at the farm one Easter.

I was probably about fourteen at the time.

Friends of our had a brand new, top of the range LandCruiser.

I remember him giving me the keys and telling me that I could drive.

Farm bombs is one thing, but this was unbelievable.

Don't get me wrong, I had fun, but I was also aware of the huge responsibility.

Sharing the gospel has incredible power.

The words of the gospel are the words of eternal life.

And what we do here on earth matters and has eternal consequences.

What we do here on earth extends heaven's wishes.

When we preach the gospel, some people's eyes are opened and let into his kingdom.

But God has to do the revealing.

Other times, when we explain the gospel, people's hearts are hardened more towards God.

They'll find themselves further bound in their sin and locked out of heaven.

Can you believe that God would entrust such an important mission to an ordinary bloke like Peter or you or me?

You've almost got to pinch yourself to make sure you're awake.

We walk in the footsteps of Peter whenever we state what God has already stated.

Even Peter doesn't get this mission at this point in the gospel though.

Jesus says that he'll give him the keys in the future, but that wasn't the time.

Because he hadn't gone to the cross yet.

That's why he says for Peter not to say anything in verse 20.

Then Jesus mixes up the metaphor in the second half of verse 19.

Instead of talking about the keys, he goes on to talking about binding and loosing.

They're similar, but different metaphors.

Jesus says:

*Matthew 16:19b (NIV11) whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

I don't think this is directly about people because he says "whatever", not "whoever".

People have understood this to mean that Peter had the power to bind and loose demons, but that's not what's going on here.

It's the ability to make judgements about conduct.

Binding or loosing is permitting or forbidding behaviour, rather than salvation.

The Good News Translation uses the terms "prohibit" and "permit,"

In Jewish literature, binding and loosing was about how you acted.

Rabbis would interpret Torah and either bind or loose people's consciences.

The Rabbis allowed or disallowed stuff, on the basis of their conduct.

Depending on how they understood Torah.

Shammai was strict – he bound people.

Hillel loosed because he was much more flexible.

We get nervous about assessing conduct because we know we're saved by grace.

But righteous living has been important since chapter five.

Jesus says that your righteousness needs to be greater than Scribes or Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven.

We need a righteousness that only God can give.

Yet at the end of the book, teaching disciples to obey everything is part of Jesus' great commission.

You can't just do whatever you want as a kingdom citizen.

Our behaviour reflects our heart.

Jesus isn't just offering a swipe card into heaven.

What's the basis for right conduct?

It sounds like Peter is going to be able to force heaven to bend to his will.

Don't hear this passage saying that whatever he decides is going to be okay.

This is a grammatically construction called a future perfect.

It means that what happens in the future will already be decided before.

Peter will make decisions that have already been made in heaven.

His decisions will co-ordinate with what God has already decided.

Popes thought that they could say who gets into heaven and who doesn't.

But they don't get to make judgments on behalf of heaven.

Followers of Jesus get to implement what God has said.

We get to declare what God has said about what's okay and what's not.

In Acts 8, Simon the magician got baptised after Philip proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom.<sup>14</sup>

He then tries to buy the Holy Spirit.

Peter tells him that he needs to repent and ask the Lord for forgiveness.

That's binding and loosing.

And this isn't just Peter's role, it'll be passed onto the church in future.

Peter doesn't have a hotline to heaven that you don't have.

In chapter 18, the binding and loosing comes up again.

This time, it's clear that it's not just Peter, but the church that gets to bind and lose

When they church gathers, they speak with the authority of Christ.

The church is given authority to decide what is sin and what isn't.

Perhaps better, what is righteousness and unrighteousness.

When we say things about morality, we need to reflect what God has said.

It can feel like we're a bit of a lone voice when we, as Christians, speak about things like sexual ethics and the sanctity of life.

The world hears us and says, "What right do you have to say that?"

"We don't want your harmful and outdated views."

But if what we're saying lines up with God's Word, then we're far from alone.

What we're saying is underwritten by the boss of the whole world.

And what we do with these things has eternal consequences.

Jesus builds his church by giving his church authority to represent him on earth.

## Conclusion

These can be tricky verses to understand, but they pack a punch.

God has entrusted his mission to open his kingdom to his people.

He will build his church on the confession of his people.

The foundation was laid by Peter in particular and is carried on by other believers today.

By proclaiming who Jesus is, we have the ability to open the kingdom for others to come in.

What a privilege!

What a responsibility he's given to people like us.

Jesus will build his church through the people of God proclaiming who he is.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>2</sup> John 1:42

<sup>3</sup> There now seems to be evidence that both Cephas and Peter was names in use by the time of Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> According to John Nolland, *NIGTC*, *petros* stopped being used by the time of the New Testament. It also depends on whether the original conversation happened in Greek or Aramaic. If it was Aramaic, then the same distinction of Classical Greek isn't there.

<sup>5</sup> BDAG, *petra* 2. Also Carson.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 16:23

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 2:11-14

<sup>8</sup> Acts 2:14-41

<sup>9</sup> Acts 8:14-25

<sup>10</sup> Acts 10-11

<sup>11</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church

<sup>12</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>13</sup> Job 38:17 and Isaiah 38:10

<sup>14</sup> Acts 8:9-23

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Matthew 16:18-20

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**Big Question:** How will Jesus build his church?

**Big Idea:** Jesus will build his church through the people of God proclaiming who he is.

## Discussion Questions

1. How do you build a church?
2. Why is the name 'Peter' significant?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says he'll build his church on "this rock"?
4. How does the Roman Catholic Church get their doctrines of papal infallibility and apostolic succession from these verses?
5. What hope do Christians have because "the Gates of Hades will not prevail"?
6. What are some implications for us because of Jesus' promise to build his church?
7. What are the keys of the kingdom?
8. Is the second half of verse nineteen saying that God has to respond in heaven according to what happens here on earth?