

SUNDAY MORNING 26 SEPTEMBER 2021

The Birth of the Church - Peter

Jesus had many conversations with ordinary people like you and me.

- Sometimes He spoke to Jewish believers, who considered the laws they placed on people more important than God's law of love and grace.
- Sometimes He met sinners and, according to the Pharisees and Scribes, evil people.
- Sometimes He spoke to people who were sick, have been blind, deaf, or possessed by the devil.
- Many times He spoke with his followers and then many times with His disciples alone.

Jesus has spoken more to Peter than to the rest of the disciples. So today we are going to eavesdrop on one of Jesus' conversations with Peter and listen further next week when Jesus speaks to Peter for the last time.

Because Jesus speaks to ordinary people and because the Bible is His Word, He also speaks to us through these conversations.

Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ

This passage we read about the birth of the church. This is the first time anyone, has called the people who believe in Jesus, the church.

The word **Ekklesia** is a word frequently used in everyday Greek, meaning *a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into a public place, an assembly of the people convened at the public place for the purpose of reflecting.*

When Jesus refers to the church here it is a prophetic word of what people who are children of God will look like.

- The church is the people called out of sin and death and hell to gather with Him as God's children.
- The church is all believers who believe in Christ.
- Who are full of the spirit,
- Who are everywhere in the world and
- Lived throughout history.
- Later the church is referred to in various ways, such as the church being the body of Christ and the church is the family of God and the bride of Christ.

When Jesus here for the first time refers to the believers as the church, He also says what will become of the church. He says that the powers of Hades — Satan — will not be able to overcome it. And today, 2,000 years later, we are witnessing that what Jesus said about the church came true.

The story of the birth of the church begins with a conversation Jesus had with Peter and His disciples. We read in Matthew 15 that Jesus first crossed the sea of Galilee from Capernaum and from there went to Caesarea Philippi, where this conversation took place.

Caesarea Philippi

Now nothing in the Bible especially regarding Jesus is for nothing in the Bible. The place where this conversation took place is very important for understanding this conversation. Jesus and His disciples walked about 50km plus from the other side of the sea of Galilee, to a place in the Golan Heights. This is probably the only time Jesus has gone so far north.



Caesarea Philippi was a place populated mainly by pagans. And the place was important to both Jews and Gentiles. There was a large cave, and out of that cave's mouth flowed a stream of water that is the origin of the Jordan River. This river is the lifeline of Israel, this enables them to have constant water in a very dry land. The river flows down, forms the Sea of Galilee, which is actually just a lake, and then flows down and ends in the Dead Sea. All of the land of Israel is located along the Jordan River.

In 14 A.D, the city's name was changed from Paneas to Caesarea in honour of Emperor Augustus. There are two cities called Caesarea in Israel. One on the Mediterranean Sea, Caesarea Maritima and this one, Caesarea Philippi, named after the son of King Herod the Great, Philip. As I said, the city's name used to be Paneas because the Greeks believed it was the home of the god Pan. Pan in mythology was half goat, half man and known for playing the flute. That's where the word "pan flute" comes from.



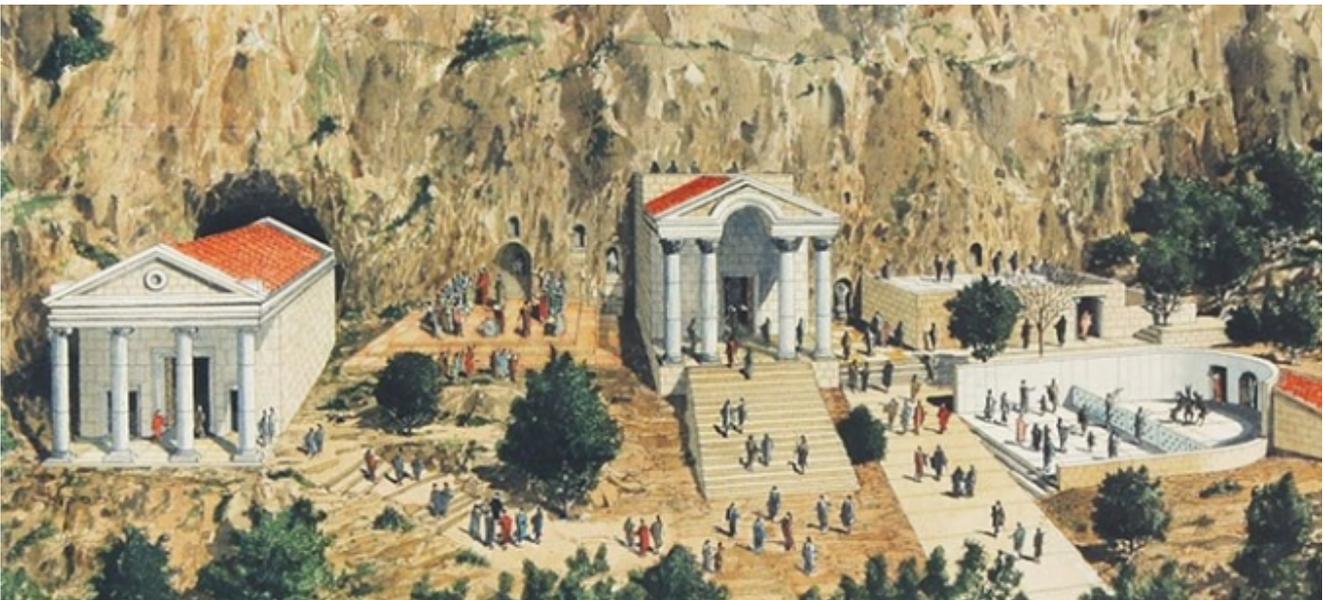
Pan was also seen in Greek mythology as the god of nature, the fields, the forests, the mountains, and the shepherds. The god Pan was born in the cave according to mythology, and the mouth of the cave was referred to as Hades, which Jesus referred to in His conversation with Peter. So from all over, people came to worship this god Pan.

Other gods were also worshiped at this site. There was marble temple built by Herod the Great to honour the deity of Caesar Augustus. Baal-Gad, the god of luck, one of the idols of the Old Testament, was worshiped here. After an earthquake in 363 AD the city was likely destroyed and the cave collapsed. Water is still seeping out of the mountain.

That's what it looks like there.



But in Jesus ' day, it might looked like this.



Now that's the place Jesus chooses to ask two of the most important questions one can answer to His disciples. It's as if He's suggesting, *"Here many idols are worshipped, but who says the people I am."*

Matthew 16:13

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

Perhaps He faced Mount Hermon and saw all the people who had come to worship at this mountain their idol, the gods of Hades, which was also called hell, because Pan was not a

good god, he was cruel, moody, hard to please, part of the world of satanic darkness. Then Jesus says.

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

It's as if Jesus is pointing at the people and saying, "Who do people say I am," thereby implying that people have so many choices. And hear how Jesus refers to himself.

The Son of Man

Jesus is referred to 88 times in the New Testament as the "Son of Man." It is also the title that Jesus uses most when referring to Himself. It refers to the focus of Jesus, the Son of God, on mankind and on humans. He left His heavenly position to live among people. It's a title of humility. The Son of Man displays God's grace and love. There were so many prophecies in the Old Testament that came true with regards to the coming of Jesus, God Himself, as a human being. Listen to what Daniel wrote.

Daniel 7:13-14

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,[a] coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Jesus' disciples would have known exactly what Jesus meant by Son of Man. And then Jesus' disciples answer.

Matthew 16:14

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

I want to ask, "Where on earth do they come from?" This maybe due to the fact that after Herod murdered John the Baptist, he began a rumour that Jesus was the reincarnation of

John the Baptist. According to the Old Testament, Elijah would return before the Messiah came. When the Jews celebrated Easter, even today, there is an empty chair in the house, in case Elijah returns. So, the people see that Jesus is someone special, but don't think He is the Messiah. Others say they might be Jeremiah or one of the other prophets, who has returned. There is a story that goes that when the Babylonian Empire invaded Israel, Jeremiah fled to Mount Nebo and took the ark of the covenant and altar of incense with him. And the Jews believe before the Messiah returns, Jeremiah will bring back the ark and the altar of incense.

I have just said that Emperor Augustus was honoured by Herod. Emperor Augustus was already the most powerful man on earth, but that wasn't enough. He wanted the people to see him as the supreme leader, the chief spiritual leader. When Haley's comet came by, Emperor Augustus believed it was Julius Caesar's spirit entering heaven, which is why Julius Caesar according to was now a god. And then, he who was the adopted son of Julius Caesar, is therefore the son of a god.

Now, in all likelihood, Jesus is standing here before temple erected for Caesar Augustus, the son of a god. And ask one of the most important questions that every human being will have to answer now and one day.

Matthew 16:15

15 *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

It's as if Jesus says; *"Out of all idols and who the people say I am, who do you choose?"* And then Peter answers.

Matthew 16:16

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Listen to what Peter replied. *"You are the Christ."*

The Christ

Jesus' last name was not Christ. It was not Joseph and Mary Christ. Christ is the translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah," which literally means *the anointed one*. Usually,

a new king was anointed to take over from the previous king. The Messiah, the anointed King, the one who must come from God and come to deliver them from earthly bondage. That's who Peter says Jesus is. And Peter declares that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

Son of the Living God

Contrary to what Caesar Augustus says, Peter says Jesus is the Son of the living God. Everyone knows Julius Caesar is dead, but Jesus is from God, they know, you could see it, that's why He is the Son of the Living God.

Jesus is the one whom God sent to reconcile people to God, so that those who believe in Him may have an intimate relationship with God. Jesus the Son of the Living God came to show them and the world, God's love, grace, and mercy. This is in contrast to the idol god Pan who was cruel and merciless.

It is evident to Jesus and to everyone around them that the words that have now come out of Peter's mouth did not come from Peter himself, but that God had to reveal them to him, for it was and still is blasphemy to say a man is God. It was necessary for Peter to say and experience it here before the idol worship that took place at Caesarea-Philippi.

Matthew 16:17

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

"Blessed are you Simon the son of Jonah," said Jesus, the Son of God. What Peter said here does not come from himself, but was revealed to Peter by Jesus' Father in heaven, to make known to His disciples and to us.

And then Jesus announces the birth of His church.

The Birth of Jesus' Church

Matthew 16:18

And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church, and the powers of Hades shall not prevail against it.

As I said at the beginning for the very first time, those called into the Kingdom of God from the world and sin, the gathering of people who believe in Jesus, are referred to as the church.

There has been so much talk and difference about this verse over centuries. Did Jesus here appoint Peter as the first pope or not? What does Jesus mean when He says? *"On this rock will I build my church?"* It is very clear from history that it cannot be true that Jesus built His church on Peter. As if Peter is the only hope for the church. In the verses just after this, Jesus tells them that He has to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die there, and then Peter says, *"No way, I won't allow it."*

Matthew 16:22

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

And who was speaking to Peter now, not Jesus' Father, but the father of the lie.

Matthew 16:23

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

So if Jesus were to build His church on Peter, it had failed before it began, for here Peter allows the father of the lie to lead him and is instead of the rock on which some churches build their theology, a stumbling block, a stone over which people fall. And Satan has managed to confuse a big part of the church over the centuries.

What does Jesus mean when He says?

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.

This is actually an incredible verse in the Bible, and to understand it we need to understand Jesus' playing with word and also Matthew's use of the two Greek words:

Petros vs Petra

When Jesus first saw Peter, his name was Simon, and then Jesus said that he was not Simon but Peter.

John 1:42a

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter.)

And now Jesus says to him first: *"Simon the son of Jonah (John), it is God who has revealed to you that I am the Son of God,"* and then Jesus tells him all too true; *"Simon, you are Petros, and in Petra I will build the church."*

The Petros means

Stone or pebble

Petra means

Rock or a large stone or bedrock

Jesus refers, in all probability, to the great rock here before Him at Caesarea-Philippi, on which many people have built their hope and faith, saying, *"Simon, you are a little stone (Petros), but on the Rock (Petra), as sure as this rock, the confession you made that I am the Christ the Son of the Living God, on that solid foundation, the unchanging truth that I am the Son of Living God, upon it I will build the church."*

We know that the church is not built on Peter, because later we read that James, the half brother of Jesus, was the head of the church, not Peter.

So the solid rock on which Jesus builds His church is this:

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

If we just look at that verse again, there's a "dead-giveaway" who is the head of the church.

Matthew 16:18

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

See if you can spot it. Who's church is this? Jesus said, *"On this rock I will build My church."* There are actually two "giveaways."

MY Church

Jesus said it's not Peter's church. And who will build the church?

I'll BUILD my church.

So that day at the birth of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, before the rock where idols were worshipped, Jesus says He not only gives birth to the church, but the church, including this congregation, is His church, and He builds it. Isn't it wonderful to see it.

And there in view of the big mouth of the cave known as Hades meaning death or hell, Jesus says.

The gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Amazing to see it 2,000 years later and also to know that in 2,000 years, nothing has been managed to stop the church of Jesus, nothing will stop it over the next 2,000 years. Few other religions are lasting. All idol worship has been discontinued or are not even noteworthy today. Greek and Roman gods are myths. But Jesus' church stands strong and continues to grow by far the fastest of all other religions. The powers of satan have tried to stop Jesus' church, people have been killed and are still being killed, and Jesus' church has remained standing.

Jesus says an important thing.

Matthew 16:19

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Do you know who is in control? Jesus! He's the one who hands over the keys. And the key carrier is not necessarily the owner. The key carrier is a steward, the manager. And a steward manages the owner's stuff to the best of his or her abilities. And we know many of the things Peter unlocked are still open.

He got up full of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and began preaching, and 3,000 people repented. He unlocked the door of the gospel to the Gentiles (Non-Jews), when the Lord sent him to Cornelius a Roman with the gospel.

So Jesus' church is alive and well during this time and you I have the wonderful privilege of being a part of this time slot we live in. We share this privilege with Peter, the first member of the church, and with all the members thereafter and those who are yet to come.

So what is important for us to understand and believe is that the church is Jesus' church and that it is built on the solid foundation, the unchanging truth, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Saviour, the Son of the Living God. And if you believe that, you become His child and you are part of His church. Therefore, it is important that you know what you believe about Jesus.

Who do you say is Jesus?

Either Jesus was the greatest deceiver of all time, or He was telling the truth. The New Testament talking about Jesus was the greatest scam or all the stuff that stands in it is the truth!!

There is so many testimony from other people about what Jesus did.

- Why would the disciples die a martyr's death for this HOAX?
- What would Jesus have benefited by deceiving people. He never took any money. He never even had his own home. He was a lodger in Peter's house. He didn't even have his own donkey. When He came to Jerusalem, He had to borrow a donkey.

The opposite is actually true. Jesus died for His church. He loved his church. He is the head of the church.

Colossians 1:18a

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning

Jesus built His church and the gates of death/Hades could not have overcome it. So many people's lives have been radically changed over the centuries by the message of Jesus. So many hospitals, schools, care homes, have been erected in the name of Jesus, and millions of people's lives have been touched to this day.

At one point Quadratus the pastor of the church in Athens, about 100 years after Jesus' crucifixion, wrote:

But the works of our Saviour were always present, for they were genuine:— those that were healed, and those that were raised from the dead, who were seen not only when they were healed and when they were raised, but were also always present; and not merely while the Saviour was on earth, but also after his death, they were alive for quite a while, so that some of them lived even to our day.

Can you imagine sitting in the church in Jerusalem in the late first century, years after Jesus went to heaven and here an old man of eighties walked in and you heard the noise? "There is Lazarus." Can you imagine the pastor preaching and telling more about Jesus and what He did and this old man raises his hand and says;

- *"My name is Lazarus, I can testify about Jesus. I was dead for four days when He raised me from the dead."*
- *And then another old man got up and say; "I was a blind man begging at Jericho, this Jesus healed me."*
- *And an elderly woman stood up and say: "I've been suffering from a blood disease for years and when I just touched the tosses of his robe, I got well."*
- *And another woman say: "Yes, I was a prostitute, and the people wanted to kill me, but Jesus saved me from my sin, and now I have served as ministry leader for the women's ministry for many years."*
- *And so one after the other stands up.*

Can you imagine what it would be like in our congregation?

And that's what Quadratus says. During his time as a pastor, he experienced this personally. Jesus was not a deceiver. There is and has been too much evidence to prove the contrary. That's why the church entered the world so quickly in the first century. There were so many people touched by Jesus who couldn't stop talking. We should not think it was only the disciples who went about preaching the gospel. People who were part of the 5,000 who got food were definitely going to tell. I think of Legion, Jesus

couldn't get him quiet. Men such as Lazarus and Zacchaeus and women such as Mary and Mary Magdalene and thousands of others who were touched by Jesus could not and would not have remained silent.

If there were no one who would have testified about Jesus and could tell what had happened, the church would not have survived the first century, let alone continued to grow for more 2,000 years.

That's the most important question every person has to answer.

Who do you say Jesus is to you?

Is He your Saviour, your Lord, your King? If Jesus is not your Lord, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, it is you who are your lords and your king, or the world, the devil and death.

Jesus wants to further build you and me, His church, and wants us to learn from Him. You have the keys to the door of your heart. Perhaps over years you have slowly locked the lock to the door of your heart. You can reopen it, because as believers we have the keys of the Kingdom and can open or shut up God's work in us. And that's what Jesus says as He wrote to the church in Laodicea.

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.