

## **Matthew 16:13-18 - Where do you Build Your Life?**

How old is your house? Our house is about 25 yrs old. Which in grand scheme of things doesn't seem that old, but already we've noticed a number of things needing replacement, needing repair. And if you're a home owner you know that the more you fix, the more you find that needs fixing. Our homes are really quite short lived. The average house stands for about 40-70 years before it's demolished and a new one built. This weekend there are a lot of homes in Texas that are proof of what just a couple feet of water can do to a house. Our homes are really quite volatile.

And then you think about the country in which we live. She's held up for nearly 250 years. That's pretty good by world history standards! But you might wonder if she's starting to show her age. Politics are more polarized than ever. Our national debt stands at over \$18 trillion. We're on the brink of war with North Korea and many people won't even stand for our national anthem. Our nation is really quite volatile.

So what about our families? Are you as close as you used to be with those you love? Do you feel like you're farther apart from your parents or children or siblings than you once were? And how about your marriage? Divorce rates are at an all time high of 50%. Whether it's been a year or sixty, how has yours held up? Can you see the cracks? How about your financial stability, your job, your health, retirement. . . .

I could on and on and on here, but I think you get my point. We live in a volatile world. We have volatile lives. We buy the perfect house only to find out there is mold in the walls and the foundation is crumbling. We live in the perfect country of opportunity, a country that is about as far from united as you can get while it sits on the brink of war. We get married and have kids with the perfect life plan in mind, only to watch that demolished by a disease, a car accident, divorce, or death.

What lasts? What doesn't change? What stops the rollercoaster ride? Where do you build your life and how sturdy is it? Those are important questions. But there is one answer, one foundation, on which you can built which unlike everything else, doesn't change, doesn't crumble, doesn't leave you searching for something better. Listen to this morning's Gospel and ask yourself, Where are YOU building your life?

<sup>13</sup> **When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"**

<sup>14</sup> **They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."**

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

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

<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you that you are Peter,<sup>(b)</sup> and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades<sup>(c)</sup> will not overcome it.

*“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”* Can you imagine how badly he needed to hear those words? The last year had been a rollercoaster. You know the stories as we’ve studied them the last couple Sundays. Jesus fed the thousands and people loved him for it. He walked on water, he drove out a demon from a woman’s daughter, he filled hillsides with people. And all throughout Israel they started to whisper that maybe the promises were finally coming true – a Savior had come.

Then things started to change. It started when King Herod took John the Baptist – Jesus’ cousin – and put his head on a platter as a gift to his dancing daughter-in-law. Israel’s pastors and priests kept coming to Jesus, but it wasn’t to listen to his teachings – it was either to demand magic tricks or try to trap him in his words. Jesus preached a beautiful sermon that said that God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus to bring them to heaven... and the crowds walked away. And now in today’s Word, in the midst of such a seemingly volatile ministry, it was just Jesus and his disciples, in the far north, and one very important question:

***But what about you? Who do you say I am? You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.***

Can you imagine how badly he needed to hear those words at this point in his ministry? To know that for all of the failure and all of the disappointment and all the ups and downs, all the seeming volatility of people, all was not uncertain. There was still something to stand on. Of course, the he that needed to hear those words wasn’t Jesus. It was Peter. Jesus knew that he didn’t come to win a popularity contest; he came to die on the cross. But when the hard and uncertain times come, even though God’s still in control, sometimes God’s followers don’t understand why things in life seem so unstable. We’re the ones who need the reminder.

***You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*** As someone who followed Jesus, Peter needed to be reminded of that. It’s not that he didn’t know - But he needed to think about it again because of everything he saw around him.

Do you think that Jesus smiled when Peter gave his confession? I like to think he did. The knowing kind of smile that said, ***“Peter, don’t you see?” Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. What man says doesn’t really matter, does it Simon? Because even if no one else listens, you know the truth – and that knowledge is a gift from your Father in heaven.***

And so it is for you dear Christians. This confession is a treasure of stability in an unstable world. It’s a gift that God gave to you when you first followed the Son’s footprints tracing their way through the Gospels or felt the Father set you on his lap as his own dear child through waters of baptism and taught you to say this confession with your own lips, ***Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.***

This past week we had a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses come to our door. And I won't say I had all the right words for them. I won't say I completely held back my frustrations with their false teachings. But looking back at that conversation, I am very grateful that this section of Scripture came up as we were talking. These two women pointed to Jesus' next words ***"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church,"*** as a proof passage to explain that certainty of salvation is found in doing the will of God, in living like Peter. And I responded in both sadness and frustration, "What a sad and unstable kind of foundation to build upon, with absolutely no certainty of salvation to look forward to."

What a blessing it is to have God's Word in its original language. In the Greek Jesus said this: ***"You are Petros, and on this petra I will build my church."*** Petros means a loose rock, a stone, kind of like gravel, volatile, moveable. Jesus used that word speaking of Peter. Petra means a rocky shelf, a strong immovable rock on which the wise man built his house. Jesus used that word to describe Peter's confession. Jesus is not saying that he will build his church on the life of Peter. For you know how unstable such a life of denial, of doubt, of weakness, would be. No the truth Peter confessed is the solid rock on which Jesus builds his Church. And it's on that confession, ***"Jesus is the Christ (meaning Savior, meaning our all in all, meaning our only source of eternal, stable, certain salvation)."*** ***"You are the Christ, the son of the living God."*** On that we build our lives.

There's an old tradition about Peter's death that's been handed down – I can't remember where I first came across it. Maybe you know the one about Peter being crucified upside down. This one talks about the days before that. It's said that when the Romans first got their hands on Peter and his wife, they decided to bring hell to them. So they took his bride and they crucified her in front of him. For three days, they made him watch as she slipped out of his reach and into her Savior's arms. They said he told her one thing again and again, "Remember your Lord." ***And on this rock...***

Yes life is volatile. It is unstable. But knowing who your Savior is is the gift that God gives to you. The confession God your father has given you the blueprints to build your life upon. And on that rock, you are strong. You are stable. Because there is certainty. ***And even the gates of hades cannot shake you.***

Sometimes I wonder if we miss the picture in that last verse. When we talk about the gates of Hades, we picture as long as we stand on that confession, it's like we're in a fortress, and no matter what comes out of hell's gates, it won't get in and it will not destroy us. I'm not so sure that's what Christ intended. When the Bible talks about gates, it's almost never about what comes out – it's talking about doors built to stop conquerors from coming in. This isn't about the Church withstanding hell's attacks; it's Jesus' promise that not even hell itself can stand up to the march of the Gospel.

That means this strong, mighty Church built on the confession of Christ is always the Church on the march. It's not on the defense. The Living God has created a Living Church, and nothing can stop her. And he's given us the keys to his kingdom which means that you get to talk to someone whose broken down by guilt, the person who says, "But I'm so sinful," and you can tell

them, “But Jesus isn’t. And he gives that to you.” And when you do that you break into the devil’s kingdom & snatch another one back. You get to look at your wife or your husband or your daughter or son after they’ve sinned and say, “Jesus forgives you, and I do, too.” ***Not even the gates of hell.*** And on the really wonderful days, you get to hear them say it back to you.

Sometimes, people will absolutely love you for it. They’ll be so happy about Jesus’ words that they’ll praise the one who speaks them. Because when they hear what the Christ, the Son of the Living God has done for them and say, “Thank you, that’s just what I needed to hear,” you can walk out the door with a smile, and it’ll be a knowing smile as you think to yourself, “It’s just what I needed to hear, too. Thank you God for giving us this wonderful, certain, and stable foundation to build our lives upon.” Amen.