

“What Rock?” (Matthew 16:13–17:9)(3.8.20)

LET US PRAY.

Scripture Intro:

Geography is important to understanding the fullness of today’s text.

The length of today’s scripture is determined by Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” And, God the Father’s answer, “This is my beloved son.” The question and answer frame the context of all that lies between them.

Matthew 16:13–17:9 (NIV84)

13 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.

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

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

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 things of God, but the things of men.”

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. 28 I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

17 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led

them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: "What Rock?"

INTRODUCTION:

What Rock has been one of the most controversial metaphors in church history. Today, I want you to weigh the evidence. You may not come to a conclusion and you may not agree with my conclusion. Wrestling with this scripture will be a healthy spiritual exercise.

BODY:

Why isn't the Bible always crystal clear? Because there are barriers to understanding.

- Chapter and verse references were added in the middle 1500's. Often times this creates artificial and sometimes confusing breaks.
- Submitting the scripture to our theology instead of our theology to the scriptures.
- Allowing adjacent verses to overshadow their neighbors.
- Not using scripture to interpret scripture.
- Ignoring scriptures that make you uncomfortable.
- Failure to preach & teach the whole counsel of God's word.

Peter is the Rock that Jesus refers to is a predominantly Catholic interpretation. Teresa Stark Riordan says: Scripture uses three different "rock" metaphors. God is the "rock" of our salvation (Deut 32:15; Ps 62:2). Abraham is the "rock" from which the Jewish people were hewn (Isaiah 51:1-2).

Peter is the "rock" on which the Church is built (Matt 16:18). To argue that "Peter can't be the rock because God is the rock" makes no more sense than to argue "God can't be the rock because Abraham is the rock."

Let me push back against this argument. The Isaiah passage calls Abraham the rock and quarry from which all Jewish people were born. This is a straight forward metaphor that

acknowledges Abraham as the “father” of the Jewish nation. The comparison to building Jesus’ holy church on Peter is an entirely different realm.

This is not to deny Peter’s place, along with the other Apostles, in being a pillar of the church. It would be dangerous ground to use any human being for so significant a foundation. In verse 23, we just read that Jesus calls Peter Satan for having the “mind of man.” After Jesus is arrested, Peter denies Him three times. Even after Pentecost, and all the great things Peter did, Paul had to reprimand him for acting as a hypocrite and leading others astray. During the early Church, it was Jesus’ brother James that was the acknowledged leader.

Finally, in today’s text, Jesus call Peter Petroc and then says, on this petra, I will build my Church. Petroc is masculine and petra is feminine. Certainly, there is a play on words being made; but, we shouldn’t read more into it than Jesus intended.

Peter slide

Petra slide

Peter’s confession of Christ is thought by Many protestants to be the Rock to which Jesus refers: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” They even expound that this is a statement of faith, and it may very well be. After all, Jesus says that it comes from His Father in Heaven. So, the Church of Jesus is made up of those who are Believers; those that believe in their hearts and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior with their mouth.

But is this an oversimplification? Does this understanding find its origination in simply being against the Catholic position?

Jesus says His word is the Rock in Matthew 7:24–25 (NIV84)

24 “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. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

In Ephesians chapter 5, we are told that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In other words, Jesus death was for those that will confess him and Jesus’ word glorifies and purifies the church.

There can be no confusion about the claim that God is THE Rock. Over and over again scripture testifies to this truth; especially in the Psalms. Three samples should be sufficient to prove the point.

Psalm 18:2 (ESV)

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Psalm 89:26 (ESV)

He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'

Isaiah 44:8 (NIV84)

Do not tremble, do not be afraid.

Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?

No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

If God the Father is the Rock, then we know the Son is the exact representation of the Father. It takes no leap of logic to assign the Rock characterization to Jesus.

Paul recounts the Israelites in the wilderness in 1 Corinthians 10:3–4 (NIV84) 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Peter himself speaks about the church, Jesus as the cornerstone, belief in Jesus, and obedience to Jesus' word:

1 Peter 2:4–8 (ESV)

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,"

8 and

"A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Many of you are likely familiar with one or more of the explanations I have already given. Identifying Mount Hermon as the Rock comes from the book Unseen Realm by Dr. Michael Heiser. Over the last several weeks we have looked at his theme of the Cosmic Clash, and

how Jesus has come to reestablish the kingdom of God here on earth.

Mount Hermon is over 9,000 feet high and is snow covered most of the year. The snow melt-off is a headwater for the Jordan River. It is a large convex block that juts up above its surroundings.

Mount Hermon serves as a boundary on the northern portion of Israel. More than that, it serves as a boundary to the underworld. Here is the map again:

You can see that Caesarea Philippi is also called Panias. This is named after the pagan god Pan. Hittite and biblical records indicate Mount Hermon was a dwelling place of little "g" gods. The area to the south of Mount Hermon was the region of Bashan, which is called "the place of the Serpent." More than 20 temples have been surveyed on Mount Hermon and its environs. This is a very high concentration of Canaanite and Phoenician cult centers to the celestial gods.

God the Father deliberately chose Mount Hermon to be the Mount of Transfiguration to coronate Jesus, the beloved Son, as the king of the kingdom of God. Jesus' glorification happens in front of the apostles Peter, James, and John. Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets.

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus makes the first mention of His Church. Then at the very gates of Hades, Hell, Jesus holds a cosmic press conference. God is announcing the establishment of a new force on earth. It will be HIS Church. Right here on this battleground, to confront the forces of sin, death, and the Devil, Jesus is planting the flag of the Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus has planted his flag on Mount Hermon and the glory of the Lord shone all about Him. Jesus has established the beachhead of the kingdom at the Gates of Hell.

Victory is assured but it won't come easy. The kingdom has come to earth as it is in heaven; but, it has not come to completion. We, the Church, are God's plan for sharing the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. When Jesus' ministry began, that was what He preached, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

The Lord Jesus has overcome sin and death on another hill, one called Calvary. We too must take up our crosses and then follow Jesus. We must follow Jesus to wherever the Holy Spirit directs us. To save souls, we must go to where there are sinners. That my brothers and sisters is the gates of hell. Death and destruction are never satisfied. You and I must stand in the gap with the good news of the gospel, the Lord Jesus the Christ.

Samuel Chadwick preached, "The work of the Church is at the gates of Hell." "For the sake of the perishing millions and for the sake of Christ who died for our salvation, may God revive His Church, and hasten the coming of His Kingdom."

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

