

Matthew 16:13–20

Big Idea

Respectful opinions about Jesus are not enough. Jesus calls us to confess him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and he builds his church on that confession.

Respect is not the same as confession.

1. Respectful Opinions About Jesus Are Not Enough

Matthew 16:13–14

Jesus asks his disciples:

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

The answers are respectful.

Some say John the Baptist.

Some say Elijah.

Some say Jeremiah.

Some say one of the prophets.

These are not insults. They are high opinions.

But they still fall short.

Jesus is not merely one more prophet, religious teacher, moral example, or inspiring voice.

He is the Christ.

The Son of the living God.

Key line: It is possible to honor Jesus as important while still refusing to confess him as Lord.

2. Jesus Will Not Let Us Hide Behind “People Say”

Matthew 16:15–17

Jesus presses the question closer:

“But who do you say that I am?”

Discipleship cannot live forever on borrowed answers about Jesus.

Peter answers:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Christ means Messiah, the Anointed One, the promised King.

Peter’s confession is not merely human opinion or religious preference. Jesus says this was revealed by the Father.

Key line: At some point, “people say” has to become “I say” or “we say.”

Key line: A Jesus who never confronts me may just be a reflection of me.

3. Jesus Builds His Church on This Confession

Matthew 16:18

Jesus says:

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

Peter is given a significant role as the confessing apostolic witness.

The church is built by Jesus on the revealed confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Jesus says:

“I will build my church.”

Jesus is the builder.

The church is his project.

The church belongs to him.

The church is the people gathered by and belonging to Jesus.

Key line: The church is not a religious club that uses Jesus as branding.

Key line: The church is the people Jesus gathers, builds, owns, and sends.

Key line: The most important thing about the church is not what people say about us. It is what we confess about Jesus.

4. Death Cannot Defeat What Jesus Builds

Matthew 16:18

Jesus says:

“The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

The word here is Hades, which refers to the realm of the dead, the grave, or death’s domain.

So Jesus is most likely saying that the power of death will not overcome the church he builds.

This does not mean individual Christians will never die.

This does not mean every local church will stay open forever.

The promise is deeper than that.

The church Jesus builds cannot finally be defeated by death because Jesus himself goes through death and comes out the other side.

Key line: The church is not death-proof because Christians are powerful. The church is death-proof because Jesus is risen.

Key line: The church’s hope is resurrection.

5. Jesus Gives His Church Keys, Not Control

Matthew 16:19

Jesus says:

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...”

Keys represent authority, but not authority as ownership.

They represent stewardship under the King.

Peter becomes a key-bearer and door-opener in the early church as the gospel goes to Jerusalem, Samaria, and the Gentiles.

Jesus also speaks of binding and loosing. This does not mean the church has magic words to make heaven obey our preferences.

The church is called to declare and enact on earth what is true under heaven’s rule.

Key line: Keys are not ownership. Keys are stewardship under the King.

Key line: Our task is not to get heaven to endorse our will. Our task is to learn the will of heaven and live it on earth.

6. The Right Title Must Be Learned in the Way of the Cross

Matthew 16:20

After Peter's confession, Jesus tells the disciples not to tell anyone that he is the Christ.

That seems strange, but the next passage shows why.

They know the title, but they do not yet understand the way.

Peter confesses Jesus as Christ, but then resists the idea that Jesus must suffer, be killed, and be raised.

Jesus will not allow the title "Christ" to be separated from the cross.

Key line: Peter knows the title, but he does not yet understand the way.

Key line: A true title filled with false expectations becomes dangerous.

Closing Summary

Jesus still asks:

"But who do you say that I am?"

That question is for us.

Not only when Jesus fits our expectations, but when Jesus corrects them.

Respect is not enough.

Jesus is asking to be confessed as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And on that confession, Jesus builds his church.

And death will not defeat what Jesus builds.

May we learn the way. The way of the crucified King. The way of the risen Son.

The way of Jesus.