

Theme: CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH

- I. By Divine Revelation as her Christ
- II. Through His Christians
- III. With Eternal Life and Forgiveness

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

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

¹⁴ They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵ He said to them, “But you, who do you say that 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 flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower 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 commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Church of God,

We need to talk about “cancel culture.” Cancel culture is a movement that attempts to hold public figures to high moral standards. We can probably agree that’s a good goal, but we need to talk about *how* cancel culture achieves it: tearing down reputations. Celebrities are under attack for having the “wrong views” on social issues. Others are cancelled for words or actions from years before. Our nation has started toppling statues of historic figures who didn’t hold modern values! Something is missing. It builds a society constantly walking on eggshells, never saying a wrong word—even with public opinion constantly changing.

All the while, Christ is building his kingdom Christ—the Holy Christian Church, all believers of all time. As Jesus promised, CHRIST, and CHRIST alone, BUILDS HIS CHURCH. He equips us with the tools to keep building it.

Jesus tests his disciples with two questions. The first: **“Who do the people say the Son of Man is?”** Whether the purpose is “reinforcement” or to inform the teacher how well the students have mastered the material, teachers test students for a reason. Since Jesus is God, he knows what the disciples know. The first question sets up the second. What do the people of the world think about Jesus?

If someone calls you a George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, you feel flattered. People flattered Jesus, too: **“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”** Not much different from today, people thought Jesus was a legendary figure, a prophet, a preacher of love, a good man. The fact Jesus asks a second question indicates popular opinion of Jesus is not high enough.

Jesus' second question forms a contrast: people, and his disciples. "**But you,**" he asks, "**who do you say that I am?**" Again, Jesus knows the disciples' answer. The second question shows the purpose for both questions. Jesus is not gauging the group's grasp, but giving an opportunity to express their convictions.

Jesus asked all his disciples, but only Simon Peter answers. This is the first time Simon's two names, "Simon," the name he received at birth, and "Peter," a title Jesus gave him, are used as one.

Jesus throws the disciples a fastball right down the middle. Peter, representing all Jesus' disciples, knocks it out of the park. "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.**" "Christ," a title meaning "anointed one." The one God sent to earth to fulfill his promises. Peter knows Jesus *is* the Christ, "**the Son of the Living God.**" On one hand, "living God," is redundant—if he's not living, he's not God. But unlike all other so-called "gods," our God is living. By calling Jesus the "**Son of the Living God,**" Peter equates Jesus with God. Peter answers for the disciples with him and for all believers of all time. We believe, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.**"

That's something like insisting a circle has three sides. Any rational person knows God cannot be man. Peter coming to this conclusion is miraculous.

Jesus says so. Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are you, Peter. Keep living your truth." Nor did he say, "That's your interpretation, and it's just as valid as any other." Jesus doesn't cancel Simon. Instead, he builds him up. "**Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.**" Jesus calls Simon Peter "blessed," spiritually healthy, happy, and whole. Christ constructs a careful contrast. Peter called Jesus, "**the Son of the Living God.**" Jesus gently says Simon is the son of a sinner. Simon, the "**son of Jonah**" inherited a sinful nature at birth. Similarly, CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH up today. Jesus also says to you, Blessed are you, Nancy, daughter of Herman; blessed are you, Nathan son of Michael. Blessed are you, Jon son of David. Not because you inherited a sinful flesh from your parents, but because you didn't figure this out by yourself.

Jesus gently reminds "Simon son of Jonah," he has a sinful nature. Jesus gently reminds us we sin. For CHRIST to BUILD HIS CHURCH, he must first clear the construction site. He demolishes the idols we set up and breaks our hope in ourselves before he builds on our hope in him.

Peter confessed quickly, "You are the Christ." Peter distinguished himself as the disciples' spokesman. Jesus singled Peter out as blessed. Jesus didn't build Peter up so Peter would be proud of Peter: a lesson Simon son of Jonah learned all too painfully. Surrounded by fellow believers, Peter confessed Christ. Surrounded by enemies, Peter vehemently denied he even knew Jesus, much less believed in him.

Isn't it easy to say Jesus is Savior in Sunday service, but then hard to tell the unbelieving world throughout the week? We *want* to tell the unbelieving world we believe Jesus is the Christ. We *want* to BUILD CHRIST'S CHURCH. So why do I fail to acknowledge Jesus' existence in my daily life?

Like Peter, we need Jesus' divine wrecking crew to demolish any hope I have of being strong on my own. I am weak. Not Jesus. When it was hard for Jesus to confess who he was, Jesus didn't cave. As Peter insisted he didn't know Jesus, in language strikingly similar to the words of our text, the high priest demanded of Jesus on trial: "**I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of the God.**" Jesus does not flinch. He must BUILD HIS CHURCH. His response gives his accusers all they need. I fail to confess Christ, but I get off scot-free. Jesus claims he is the Christ, and he is condemned for my sin. Instead of cancelling me, as I deserve, God cancelled Jesus.

On the cross, Jesus removes our shame, cancels guilt. He replaces it with pardon and peace. And because he truly is the "**Son of the Living God,**" he rose. He lives again to BUILD HIS CHURCH. This is the foundation of the Church upon which Christ builds his kingdom: Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose.

Like Peter, we didn't figure that out on our own. Like Peter, we are blessed, **“for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but [the] Father who is in heaven.”** Jesus specifically calls God **“my Father.”** Peter was right. Jesus is the Son of God. It took an act of God for us to believe it. He called us to believe it in his Word.

Jesus picks up on something else Peter said. Peter confessed Jesus is the Christ. Jesus confesses Peter: **“You are Peter.”** Remember, Peter didn't get that name at birth; Jesus gave him the name “Peter,” meaning “rock” or “stone.” **“On this rock I will build my church.”** Wait a second! I thought you just said Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were the foundation for the church, not Peter. In this picture, though, Jesus is both architect and master builder. He chooses the foundation.

Christ's Church is not built on Peter. Not on the person of Peter. Jesus didn't say, “You are Peter, and on you I will build my church,” but he did promise to use Peter. After Jesus rises from the dead, Peter will take the lead in building up Christ's Church. But again, the Church is not founded on the person of Peter or of any mere man. What does Jesus mean when he says, **“on this rock I will build my church”**? Peter wasn't *less* sinful than you and I. Peter's faith, the belief he confessed, the object of his faith, drove Peter. The object of Peter's faith is the one all Christians worship and confess. Jesus. Jesus uses Peter, whose faith, once tested, will point others to the Savior who forgave him.

The word the Bible uses for “church” means “called out.” That is, God has “called you out” of the world to be his people, one of Jesus' disciples. The English “church” comes from a word meaning “the Lord's.” Possessive. Church, “the Lord's house.” We use this building as the Lord's house, but you, his people, are the Lord's house. CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH. He builds you up, and he gives you the tools to keep it building.

Those tools come with the builder's stamp of approval. **“The gates of hell will not overpower it.”** The word “hell” quite literally refers to the place all people go when they die—not hell, but “the grave.” Your casket will not prevail in the fight against you! The Son of the Living God fights our battle with sin, death and hell. You will not end life six feet under. You will live forever with the Living God.

Jesus gives the keys to the kingdom of heaven to Peter. Jesus is not saying Peter will stand by the pearly gates in paradise and decide who gets into heaven and who goes to hell. The keys Jesus promises to give to Peter he will give to all his disciples later. It's not just Peter, but the Church who have this responsibility. So what are the keys to the kingdom?

Jesus explains, **“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.”** The tool Jesus gives to the Church is to bind or tie sins, that is, to bind them to a person and leave those sins on them. But Pastor! I thought you said Jesus died for all sins! How can you say some sins stay on people? Answer: this key serves the other one. It reminds us we are still sinners. If we think we can turn away from Jesus or our sins don't matter, they mattered to Jesus! He died for them! The Church binds those sins to the sinner, announcing to remorseless sinners the door to heaven is shut. *We* don't decide who goes to heaven or hell. God has *given* us his authority to announce what he sees. When we tell people they are on the path to hell, it is a stern warning rooted in love for their souls, in hope they will turn around and trust Jesus' forgiveness.

“Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” With this key, God gives the Church the authority to announce release from sin because of Jesus. The Church's mission is to announce the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. In every worship service, we put it up front. When we say, “As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins,” God really forgives you. God gives the Church his authority to forgive sins. You are forgiven. The pastor announces what God has done. Your sins are forgiven before your Father in heaven. Because of Jesus, you are going to heaven. God cancelled your sin. Jesus paid for them. You are forgiven.

CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH with these tools. After Jesus said this, he spelled it out for his students: they were not supposed to tell anyone yet. His time had not yet come. He had to get to Calvary

at just the right time. Christ faced the cross. Now he's given us new marching orders: tell others about him. Build his Church on his forgiveness. Tell the world he Son of the Living God gives eternal life. Tell them their sins lock them out of heaven, but Jesus' forgiveness brings us back in.

What's cancel culture missing? It holds people to high standards, but none of us has met God's standards. It puts people on shaky ground, but CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH on a firm foundation. Cancel culture lacks forgiveness. The world desperately needs it. Jesus forgives us. Build up his Church. Tell the world Jesus forgives them, and so do you. Amen.

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4,5; NIV).