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The Gospel According to Matthew

Is the Pope the Foundation of Christ's Church?

July 7, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 16:13-20

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 2

Mat 16:13-20 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (14) And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (15) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (16) Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (17) And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. (18) And I tell you, you are

Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (19) I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (20) Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Most of you probably know that this is one plank of Rome's insistence that the Pope is Christ's vicar on earth because they claim the lineage of Popes can be traced back to Peter, the first Pope supposedly appointed by Christ. Much has been written on this passage, but frankly I think you will see that it is not at all difficult to see that Peter was not the Rock upon whom the church is built. That is preposterous and I will show you from Scripture that it is.

Who is Jesus?

Let's make some initial observations before we turn to the subject of the Rock.

Notice first of all the rumor mill. Jesus had already been announced as the Messiah, the Christ, and He had confirmed that claim by performing many miracles. He is the King and His Kingdom has come among men.

- His miraculous birth and the testimony of the shepherds and wise men
- His divine wisdom as a boy
- The many fulfilled OT prophecies
- Healings
- Feeding the thousands

The whole point of these things is to effect a partial divine invasions by the King into the enemy's world in order to call His people out of darkness into light.

But who did the people say that He was in light of all these things?

- John the Baptist
- Elijah
- Jeremiah
- One of the OT prophets

You see the first suggestion in Herod after he had put John to death:

Mat 14:1-2 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, (2) and he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him."

And then there was this Elijah expectation (which was fulfilled by John the Baptist) based on the OT –

Mal 4:5-6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (6) And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

I am not certain why some held that Jesus was Jeremiah. There is a legend in 2 Maccabees that Jeremiah would return and bring back the tabernacle, the ark, and the altar of incense and of course that would have great appeal to the Jews.

Yes, Jesus was a prophet – yet He was more than a prophet. He was the Word that the prophets spoke! He was the King who was the object of their entire prophetic calling.

Which brings us to an obvious question – *why does this list of*

suggestions not include, “He is the Christ”?

Faith is a Gift from God

Look again at Peter’s confession:

(15) He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” (16) Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (17) And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Peter nailed it. But why? Not because he or any other human being figured it out. No. He got it right because God the Father had revealed it to him. No matter how much evidence is presented to man the sinner, he will never conclude and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah and Savior. Sin blinds. And a hard, unconverted heart hates God and His Word.

You see this in many other Scriptures:

Rom 1:19-21 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without

excuse. (21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This of course is why men cling so tenaciously to bizarre theories like evolution.

And let’s all be reminded then how important it is for us who know Christ, who confess Him, and who have been given saving faith by Him, *to walk constantly in that faith*. As we are about to see, Peter failed to do so very quickly!

Walking and living by faith in Christ means believing His Word and obeying it. Where that faith and obedience is lacking, we have a right to doubt the genuineness of that person’s claim to know Christ. We have His Word. We are indwelt by His Spirit. We have been given faith. Now we must walk in it:

Heb 11:1-3 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (2) For by it the

people of old received their commendation. (3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Every aspect of the Christian's life is one of faith. We know what we know and we do what we do, by faith. This is why the world considers the Christian to be a fool, as we saw in our Scripture reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 2.

2Co 5:6-7 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, (7) for we walk by faith, not by sight.

It is this faith that is the shield against the enemy's flaming, lying missiles. Don't drop your shield!

The Foundation Upon Which we Stand

Alright then let's turn to this matter of our foundation. Is the rock upon which the body of Christ stands really Peter as Rome claims?

Rome maintains that Primacy (first place) of the Pope began with Peter and has continued unbroken through the centuries by what Rome calls "apostolic succession." Here it is

directly from the Roman Catholic Catechism:

I. The Apostolic Tradition

75 "Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up, commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel, they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline."³²

In the apostolic preaching. . .

76 In keeping with the Lord's command, the Gospel was handed on in two ways:

- **orally** "by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received - whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit";³³

- **in writing** "by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same

Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing".³⁴

... continued in apostolic succession

77 "In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority."³⁵ Indeed, "the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time."³⁶

78 This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called **Tradition**, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, "the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes."³⁷ "The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer."³⁸

79 The Father's self-communication made through his Word in the Holy Spirit, remains present and active in the Church: "God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the Spouse of his beloved Son. and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living

voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church - and through her in the world - leads believers to the full truth, and makes the Word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness."³⁹

In other words, while the Bible is God's Word, it is not complete in itself. In order to have God's full revelation we must go to Rome, the only place where we can find this unwritten Scripture called "tradition." In this way, Rome has been able to add anything she wants to the Christian faith and demand that everyone believe what she says to be God's Word.

And it is in the person of the Pope that this "apostolic succession" is maintained. Peter was the first Pope they say, based upon Matthew 16, and every Pope since has been Peter's apostolic successor. As the prime apostle, the Pope speaks for Christ. He is the Vicar of Christ on earth.

The abuses and false gospel that have proceeded from this evil teaching are vast. This is why Luther and the other Reformers said that the Pope is the antichrist, and he certainly IS of the spirit of the antichrist. He is against Christ. He is a false Christ. His church is a false church, its priesthood is a false priesthood, and its sacraments are a false means of grace. No one who believes Rome's gospel can be saved. Rome is Satan's masterpiece of

deception. And in our day we see supposed Protestants “returning home to mother church” as Rome likes to put it. They are apostate. They have rejected Christ.

Was Peter the first Pope? Did Christ appoint him as the foundation stone of the true church? Well, listen to these Scriptures and come to the answer for yourself. Let’s start with Peter!!

1Pe 2:1-9 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. (2) Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— (3) if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. (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. (9) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Who is the Cornerstone, chosen and precious in whom we believe? Peter? I think not. Peter himself says it is Christ, and he says it more than once:

Act 4:8-12 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, (9) if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, (10) let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. (11) This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. (12) And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

The Apostle Paul agrees:

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no

longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone**, (21) in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

And Paul again:

1Co 3:9-11 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. (10) According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. (11) For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ**.

Nowhere in the Bible do we ever read that Peter is the rock upon which Christ builds His church. Yet Rome claims, as William Hendriksen states their doctrine:

“The Catholic Church teaches that our Lord conferred on St. Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of His whole church, and that the same spiritual authority has always resided in the popes, or bishops

of Rome, as being the successors of St. Peter. Consequently, to be true followers of Christ, all Christians, both among the clergy and laity, must be in communion with the See of Rome where Peter rules in the person of his successor.” [New Testament Commentary, Gospel of Matthew, William Hendriksen]

What then did Jesus mean when He spoke of this Rock upon which He would build His church? [Note that Jesus used two Greek words for rock in this passage. “Petros” for Peter and “Petra” for the rock upon which He would build His church].

The meaning is this: Peter, though a man very weak at times, was a man to whom God the Father had revealed that Jesus Is His Son, the Christ. Peter had been given faith and in that sense he had become a strong rock. This faith which saves, this new birth if you will which is effected by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, is the means by which the new Temple is being built, composed of living stones – US!

Hendriksen correctly says:

“...in a secondary sense it is entirely legitimate to speak of the apostles, including Peter, as the church’s foundation, for these men were always pointing away from themselves to

Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior. In that secondary sense Scripture itself refers to the apostles as the church's foundation." [or more correctly, as part of the church's foundation because of the Gospel they preached, Jesus Christ being the primary and chief cornerstone].

But none of this teaches what Rome does about Peter and apostolic succession. Very soon we see Peter the rock not being a very solid base at times:

Mat 16:21-23 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (22) And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." (23) But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

No, Peter is not our foundation. Christ is, and we can be certain that we are secure in Him.