

**Mark 8: 27-30 and Matthew 16: 13-20; “Peter’s Confession of Christ” (Part 2),
Sermon # 49 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered
by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 21st, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have been looking at the 5 Elements which made up Peter’s Confession of Jesus Christ. And I have been showing you that we can apply these same elements to what a true Confession of Jesus Christ will look like, in our lives as well. Last Sunday we looked at the Elements of Recognition, Revelation, and Response. We saw that it is absolutely necessary to the salvation of any thinking and reasoning person, that they come to see the uniqueness of Christ; that there is no one like Him in all of human History. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit in His incarnation, our Lord is fully God and fully man; two natures in His one blessed Person. He alone is the only Mediator between God and men. There is no other way to come to know God except by Him. As we begin our time this morning I would like you to ask yourself this question: “Have I come to the place in my life where I have begun to make my confession of Christ, or am I only close to the kingdom? Being close will not do it; you must be in His blessed kingdom, or perish forever. Oh, may the Lord Himself convince you of your need of Him, so that you can make this blessed Confession of Christ’s having saved you. This confession brings a two-fold Response. There is the Response from Christ Himself saying that He will build upon your confession of Him. And then there is your Response in beginning to take the steps of obedience which are commanded in God’s word. You lay aside malice, and deceit and you abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against your soul. And you begin to deliberately learn to love other people around you who have need of your witness to them in order to be saved from their sins as well.

As you begin to confess Christ in this way, He will begin to build upon what you give to Him. He will build upon what you say about Him to others, and what you are doing to promote His kingdom and His cause. That is where you need to begin as a new believer. You give to Him yourself, and you seek to obey His word. And what you give to Him He will build upon. What you hold back from Him will hinder that building, but it will not thwart His purpose in regard to your life. His purpose is to conform you to the image of Christ. He will work with you, to accomplish His purpose, if you have placed your trust in Him. And He will reward you according to your works; according to the progress that you make. Let it be for you, that you will follow Christ with a sincere and true heart. Now the 4th and 5th Elements of a True Confession of Christ are Resistance and Responsibility. There will be resistance coming from Satan, and also from unbelieving people around you, to your making your Confession of Christ, but it will not prevail. And further, there will be this responsibility attendant upon your Confession of Christ; to become involved with His Church and submit to Apostolic teaching. Let us pray, as we listen now, that Christ will give us a teachable heart.

The 4th Element of a True Confession of Christ is Resistance.

Verse 18 of Matthew 16 says, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell (or Hades) shall not prevail against it.” The gates of hell, here, is a phrase which indicates resistance to the true Confession of Jesus Christ. The Church is built on the rock of the confession of Christ, but the gates of hell would pull it down, or destroy that confession. The true Confession was been made by Peter, and included in his confession was the agreement of the other Apostles with him that Jesus was the Christ. And further yet, it included every other person who would ever believe in Christ Jesus, as Lord, in every generation. Peter is the spokesman for all of us who believe. We who believe are in total agreement with his confession. Every generation of true Christians since Peter who has uttered

these words, “Jesus is the Christ”, has experienced this resistance to their confession of Him. But the “gates of hell” have not prevailed; they have not been victorious. The word translated “Hades” here is one that many have stumbled over. It can be translated “Hell”, or “the grave” as well, depending upon the context in which it is used. The word does have reference to the unseen world of the spirits of men who have died and have perished in their sins. And, it should also be understood as the place where the fallen angels have their conscious existence. The Rich Man of Luke 16 died, and he “found himself in Hades”, it says in verse 23, and in that place he was in torments. “And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” Abraham’s bosom is the word picture of the place where all Old Testament believers went after they died. But the word “Hades” should not be taken to mean “the nether world”, as though things are in a great fog in the spiritual realm, or that you cannot tell where you are when you die; and everyone is supposedly in this same foggy place. That is simply not true spiritually.

Paradise and Abraham’s bosom are not in Hades. They are not a compartment in Hades. They are the separate place of blessing which God has prepared for those who believe in Him and love Him. Hades is the unseen world of devils and the damned in all generations since the beginning of the World. When Christ returns and the last Judgment takes place; after that, it says in Revelation 20, verse 14, “Death and Hades will be cast into the lake of fire.” The way that the word Hades or Hell is being used in our verse, here in Matthew, is that it refers to the activity and strategies of the Devil and all his hosts to keep the confession of Christ from taking place. The “gates of Hell” or “Hades” shall not prevail against the Church’s confession of Christ. It shall not overcome it; it shall not so overwhelm it in any generation that it will cease to exist or fail to be declared by that generation of Christians. This is a promise given, not only to Peter and the Church in those days, it is a promise given to us now in our generation. The “gates”, in the sense that our Lord was using it, indicate the place where decisions were made, where leaders made their plans and set their policies, and where men concentrated their strongest forces and power in battle.

I want to show you a couple of verses to prove to you that this is so. Turn to Genesis 22, verse 15. This is a promise of victory to Abraham’s descendants over all the schemes of their enemies to destroy them; not only his physical descendants, but also all those who have the same faith as Abraham had. Abraham had offered up his son. And now God promises that He would offer His. “Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: ‘By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants (your seed) shall possess the gate of their enemies.’” This is a promise that all who are in Christ (who is the promised Seed) shall gain the victory over sin and death and all the trials and testings that they will undergo. The blessings purchased by Christ on the cross shall enable Christ’s people, both Old Testament and New, to have the ultimate victory over all their enemies.

Look also at Genesis 24, verse 60. Rebekah has been asked whether she will go with Isaac to be his wife; to leave the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia and dwell with him in the land of promise. After she agrees to this, her relatives give her this blessing: “Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them.” They meant by this – may you have dominion over all your enemies, over all their schemes; over all their strength and plans against you. In applying this to the verses that we are studying in Matthew 16, we should understand that Peter’s confession of Christ, as the Son of the Living God, was, and it is still today, the Rock that would be assailed by all the power and policy, all the craft and rage and cunning of Satan, and all the forces of

darkness. But because of Christ's word and power, they will not prevail against the successful building of His Church. I hope that you are seeing from this study that Christ uses simple men like Peter, ordinary men who are pastors and teachers, and even all the rest of us who believe in Jesus Christ. He builds His Church upon their confession of Him.

I want to further explain this resistance to the gospel of Christ, and the Church's Confession of our Lord, by giving you a brief overview of how Satan has opposed the progress of the gospel since the days of the Apostles. Turn with me to Hebrews Chapter 2, and verse 14. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and release all those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." We see here, that in Christ's coming into this world, in His taking upon Himself a true human nature and a body, and in His going to the cross, He was able to successfully destroy, for all of God's elect people, the awful power of the Devil. That is, through His death, He destroyed the power which the Devil had always had from the beginning of the world; to deceive people, and to hold them captive to do his will. All of our life, before we trusted in Christ, we were subject to the fear of death. We were subject to the awful prospect of God's righteous judgment coming against us because we had broken His holy Law.

What the Devil did, back there in the garden of Eden, was to set before Adam and Eve the whole idea of the supposed wisdom of sinning against God. He would attempt to deceive Eve and show her the supposed profitability of disobeying the one good commandment which God had given to them: "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." "In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." This is what God had said to them. Satan had the power of death in that he promoted the power of falsehood, to deceive Eve and bring about her spiritual death in the moment that she ate of it. He persuaded Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit; and then she gave some to Adam, and they both died spiritually that very day. Satan's power was that, through their disobedience, death would spread to all men, and that all people would then die eternally; and thus God's creation would be ruined. It was only the promise of what Christ would do by His righteous life, the promise which God gave them, and which they believed, that became the basis of their salvation. It was only the fulfillment of that promise, the promise which related to what Christ would accomplish by His death, that He "crushed the Serpent's head". Christ did not destroy the being of the Devil at the cross. But He did destroy his power over all of God's Elect; over everyone who would believe in Him, in relation to His work at the cross. Christ was raised from the dead to show forth His victory over Satan, who had the power of death. But now, because of what Jesus did at the cross, the prey was snatched from his hands. We who were once captives of sin and all our lifetime before conversion, subject to death, have been set free forever.

We must understand, however, that ever since Christ's ascension to glory there has been, and there still is, an immense spiritual battle going on between Satan and Christ. God the Father said to God the Son, as it is recorded in Psalm 110, "Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Christ's enemies are those fallen men and fallen angels who together form schemes of opposition to the advancement of Christ's kingdom. We who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, are the ones who want to see His cause of truth, and meekness, and righteousness conquer in the hearts of fallen men everywhere, so that the nations will be brought to the feet of Jesus. Our battle is not against flesh and blood; it is not found in fighting against people per-se. Our battle is "wrestling against the principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Truly, it has been a great spiritual battle, between Satan and Christ's Church all through history, since Christ ascended to glory. But the gates of hell have not prevailed. In the days of

the early church, when Christ and His Apostles were still on the scene, it was Satan who was at work in the minds of some of the leaders of the Jewish people. They blasphemed and persecuted the Lord of Glory, and they put Him to death on the cross. They paid the guards at the tomb who witnessed our Lord's resurrection, to say that thieves had come and had stolen the body. When the Apostles began to preach and teach salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus, they brought them before their courts and ordered them not to speak at all in the Name of Jesus. They persecuted and hounded the Apostles and put many of them to death as well. They propounded a false doctrine of works-righteousness where if a person did believe in Jesus, they had to be circumcised and to keep the Law in order to be saved. But the gates of hell did not prevail. The Lord Jesus spoke to John in the book of the Revelation, Chapter 2, verse 9, and He said to the church at Smyrna – "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the blasphemy of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer." "Indeed the Devil is about to throw some of you in prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation 10 days." "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life."

We can also be certain that it was Satan's power and rage at work in the lives of 10 successive Roman Emperors who put to death, tortured, and persecuted Christians who confessed Christ instead of the Caesar. Jesus says of this, in Revelation 2: 13 – "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, and you hold fast My Name (the Confession of Christ) and did not deny My faith, even in the day of Antipas, My Witness, My Faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." How many multiplied thousands upon thousands of Christians made the good Confession before the eyes of their cruel and tyrannical rulers; we shall meet them in glory and hear them tell it in their own words. No doubt it was also the gates of hell which crafted the false religion of Islam which has taken over the minds and hearts of about one-third of mankind; Satan wanting to bring them to the bottomless pit. But even with such great numbers being deceived, this false system with so many murderous adherents, shall not prevail against the Church of Jesus Christ ultimately. Christ will sit at God's right hand until all of His enemies are put under His feet.

But by far the greatest scheme which Satan has come forward with, to prevail against the true Confessing Church was to take this very promise that was made to Peter, in this text that we are studying, and to warp it and twist it, and give to it a meaning which is blasphemous in the highest degree. In the Roman Catholic Church, which was the only visible church in the Western World from about 400 A.D. to the time of the Reformation, men began to consider the Bishop of Rome to be the primary Bishop, the primary leader amongst the Bishops and Priests, and all questions of major doctrinal concern were referred to this particular Bishop of Rome who came to be known as the Pope. The Scriptural foundation of their doing this was this verse that we are studying. "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church". It was falsely said by a few, and then believed by many, that Christ conferred upon Peter not only the headship amongst the Apostles, but also the headship over the whole Church, in the place of Christ when He ascended to heaven. They believed and taught that Christ, in his statement to Peter, was actually delegating the power to Peter, to take His place as the earthly visible Head of the Church, and then that this office and authority would be passed on through successive generations of popes. The pope would speak infallibly concerning the interpretation of Scripture, and his pronouncements would dictate the policies of the Church's worship, and practice, and doctrine.

What was set up over the succeeding centuries, in the Church of Jesus Christ, was an Antichristian authority where ritual religion and the traditions of men brought multitudes to darkness, and ignorance and error, in regard to true Christianity. The true Confession of Christ became submerged under this false representation of Christ. And the Scriptures and the true

Church was in the wilderness in those days, as Revelation 12: 6 pictorially describes. It is the doctrine of Papal authority and apostolic succession that currently road-blocks, in a very large way, the progress of the gospel among the nations today. The nations, as they look at Christianity and consider it, do not see Christ, they see a Pope. They see a man who is being called “Your Holiness”, taking the place of King Jesus, who is the only man who was ever perfectly holy. But let us take courage, my Christian friends. This is where our Confession of Christ works wonders. Ours is to faithfully confess Christ as the only true Head of His Church. He is alive, and He is presently ruling over His true Church. No other man can be His vicar. No other man can take His place. This scheme of the gates of hell shall not prevail either. The end of it is prophesied in the book of Daniel, Chapter 7, verse 25 and following. “He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law.” “Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.” “But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever.” “Then the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.” “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”

What is our part, in these things of which we speak, this morning? Our part is to understand that this passage does not teach Apostolic succession or a Papal authority. It is teaching faithfulness in confessing Christ, even when others are twisting the truth. Our duty is to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church – to confess Him faithfully and not allow men to deceive us with smooth words. We must not adopt concepts of primacy in leadership, but rather a servant attitude. Luke 22: 25 – “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are called benefactors.” “But it shall not be so among you...” “On the contrary,” Jesus says, “He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.”

And now finally, we want to look at the 5th Element of a True Confession of Christ; that of Responsibility.

Matthew 16, verse 19 says, “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Here we have laid before us the authority given to the Apostles. They, by their doctrine and the holy example of their words and their actions, would define how the Christian life should be lived and how local churches should conduct themselves. Their instructions to the churches would infallibly guide them. The apostles would teach all pastors and churches what they should instruct their members. They would define doctrine and discipline. They would have the authority, and give the authority, to pastors and churches to enact discipline against all disobedient, unrepentant believers in their midst, if this became necessary. Having the keys of the kingdom, theirs was the responsibility to state the way of salvation. Theirs was the power to define what evangelical obedience was; the obedience of a true Christian, who was not under Law but under grace.

They were the ones who unlocked the mysteries of God. And they were the ones who opened the door of faith to us Gentiles. We have the results of their binding and loosing in the Scriptures. We are not infallible, but they were infallible in what they wrote down in the Scriptures. Our responsibility, flowing out of our Confession of Christ, is to be faithful to Apostolic teaching. We are acting responsibly if we are abiding in Christ’s word; if we continue steadfastly in prayer. We are abiding in Christ when we cultivate fellowship with other Christians, and when we become members of the local church, and participate in the breaking of bread and partake of the Lord’s supper with Christ’s gathered church. Let the purity and simplicity of your devotion to Christ be seen in your faithfulness to His Church. A Confession of Christ is a confession before the Church in the giving in of your testimony and being baptized.

But your Confession of Christ continues on, in your becoming a member of a local church of Christ's people. It is not God's will that any Christian be an independent, free-wheeling Christian who cannot become a part of a local church, or love and serve other Christians. That is not the way that Christ and the Apostles taught that the Christian life should be lived. Acts Chapter 2, verse 41 says, "Then those who gladly received Peter's word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." Who is the "them"? It was the church at Jerusalem. Those three thousand who believed Peter's gospel message all confessed Christ and they were all baptized, and they were all added to the Church. Then what did they do, after they became members of the church in Jerusalem? Verse 42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." It does not say that they continued to live their lives as they had done before; not going to any church, not submitting to any church authority, and living their lives to God as they pleased. No they continued steadfastly in their church attendance and became more involved with a church as time went on.

That is how you glorify God. It is by becoming a part of a local church; receiving and thinking upon the word of God, learning to pray, learning to seek out other Christians in your local church to have fellowship with them, and serving Christ by promoting His truth. Each Christian has this blessed responsibility to Confess Christ by joining a local church, and then continuing steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine. Will you not remember this truth; it is a wonderful privilege and blessing, both to yourself and others, to be a member of a local church. Remember the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 87. "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know Me; Behold O Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia: 'this one was born there.'" "And of Zion (that is the Church of Jesus Christ) it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her.'" "The Lord will record, when He registers the people; this one was born there." "Both the singers and the players on instruments say, 'All my springs are in you.'" Let us confess Christ by fulfilling our spiritual responsibilities to Him; not only to continue steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers. But in finding all of your springs of joy in following Christ by loving to be with His gathered church.