

“Upon This Rock”
Mark 8:27-29; Matthew 16:13-20
(Preached at Trinity, August 31, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to this passage we reach the midway point in Mark’s Gospel and a passage that is of great importance. Jesus is now alone with His disciples and He takes the opportunity to ask questions regarding His identity, “who do people say that I am?”
 - A. The disciples begin to share some of the popular opinions:
Mark 8:28 – “They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.”
 - B. Then Jesus asks them ultimate question. He asks them emphatically. Literally it reads, “But you, who do you say that I am?” It is a very personal question demanding a very personal answer.
Peter’s answer is the most important answer that a man can give.
“You are the Christ.”
2. By calling Jesus Christ Peter knew that He was the long-awaited Anointed One – The Messiah promised by God, prophesied by the prophets, and expected by the people.
3. To this Jesus commands the Disciples to maintain secrecy concerning His identity. This ends the account in the Gospel of Mark, but as I pointed out last time there was much more to this account. For some unknown reason Mark’s account is extremely brief.
4. This is one of the times I think it will be essential for us to look beyond our current Book of study in order to glean the full force of the passage. I want to direct your attention to **Matthew 16:13-20**.
5. In Matthew’s Gospel Peter adds the phrase, “The Son of the Living God”
To this Jesus pronounced His blessing:
Matthew 16:17 “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”
 1. Peter did not simply come to this realization on his own.
Neither was it taught to him by another man.
“flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you”
 2. God disclosed this knowledge to him – Saving knowledge and saving faith is a gift from God
6. At this point in **Verses 18-19** Jesus makes a declaration that has presented a problem to the church for centuries.
Matthew 16:18-19 – “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

7. These verses have received various interpretations throughout history. It is upon these very verses that the Roman Catholic church bases its claim to Peter as the first pope, claiming that Peter is the rock upon which the church has been built and that the keys to the kingdom has been given to Peter and that this power still resides in the popes as the successors of Peter.
 8. First I want us to see that this interpretation must be rejected and then I want us to examine how it should be interpreted.
- I. Reasons for rejecting the Roman Catholic view
- A. The fallibility of man
 1. That the man Peter should be considered the rock upon which the church was built is at best sinking sand.
 - a. Remember, Peter would soon deny Christ three times.
 - b. Does the invincibility of the church rest upon a human being?
 - c. Look at **Verses 22-23**
 - d. Look at **Matthew 17:1-4**
Peter seems confused at the transfiguration. At this glorious miracle Peter could only think to build a temporary shelter (σκηνή) for them – as if they needed protection from earthly elements.
To attempt to prolong the glory of the scene also proves that he still had not grasped the coming death of Christ.
 - e. **Matthew 18:21** – Peter demonstrated his lack of understanding regarding forgiveness thinking that forgiveness can be measured or counted to a defined limit.
 2. The point is, if Peter was not infallible how could his successors be infallible?
 - a. The RC Church teaches that the pope occupies the “chair of Peter” and when they speak ex-cathedra they speak infallibly and their pronouncements are binding upon the church
 - b. First Vatican Council – “We teach and define that it is a dogma Divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed. . .”
So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema.
 - B. The N.T. rejects the idea of one Christian having absolute power over the rest

II. Possible interpretations

A. The Church is built upon Peter

1. Not the Catholic view of Peter and his successors and not in the sense of the infallibility of Peter but Peter with regards to him being the first among many to make this confession
William Hendriksen – “Not on Cephas as he was by nature, not on Cephas considered all by himself, but on Cephas as the first among equals.
R.B. Kuiper – “The Rock of which He spoke was neither Peter as an individual nor merely his confession, but the confessing Peter as representative of the apostles.”
2. The Bible declares the church to be built upon the foundation of the Apostles (not Peter by himself). Expressed so beautifully in Ephesians **Ephesians 2:20-22** – “having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

B. The Church is founded upon Peter’s faith –

1. The church is not founded upon the person of Peter as an individual but upon Peter standing upon this confession of faith with the eleven and ultimately, with every believer that makes up the church
2. In this sense was Abraham also called the rock
Isaiah 51:1-2 – “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, Who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, And to the quarry from which you were dug.² “Look to Abraham your father, And to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain; When *he* was one I called him, Then I blessed him and multiplied him.”
 - a. Abraham himself is not the rock but the rock is used as a metaphor to describe the idea of descent. There are multitudes who share in the blessings of his faith.
 - b. In this way he is called the “father of our faith”
Romans 4:16 – “For this reason *it is* by faith, that *it might be* in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,”
Galatians 3:9 – “So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.”
3. It would be no more proper to say the church is built upon Peter as a man than it is to say it is built upon Abraham

C. The Church is founded upon the Rock – Jesus Christ

1. Some holding to this view put an emphasis upon the words—that Jesus is using a play on words
“Thou art Peter” - Πέτρος – a stone or rock – a masculine noun
“and upon this rock” - πέτρα – a rock, cliff, or ledge – a feminine noun
The problem is Jesus was speaking in Aramaic

2. It is true, however, that πέτρα is used 16 times in the N.T.
 - a. Referring to Christ

1 Corinthians 10:4 – “And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”

1 Peter 2:8 – “And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.”

Romans 9:33 – “As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”
 - b. Referring to a great rock

Revelation 6:16 – “And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:”
 - c. Throughout the OT God is often referred to as the Rock of Israel

2 Samuel 22:2 – “And he said, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;”

The Septuagint BTW uses the word πέτρα
3. The idea of the Church as a great building built upon Christ is taught throughout the NT
 - a. One of the great arguments for Christ as the Rock is from the words of Peter himself. This is how Peter understood our Lord’s words. He in no way pretends that he is the Rock:

1 Peter 2:4-8 – “And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture: “Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner *stone*, And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.” ⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner *stone*,” ⁸ and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock (πέτρα) of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed.”
 - b. In **Verse 7** Peter quotes from Psalm 118 which Jesus also quoted as referring to Himself.
 - d. Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone
 - e. We are built upon Christ. Any other corner stone will create a building destined to ruin
4. We are the various stones which make up the building
 - a. It is a work in progress – God is continually adding to it
 - b. God has ordained the entire building – He knows each stone

5. Coming to Christ demands that we receive Him in His entirety. We must embrace all of Christ – “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” His person, His law, His rule in every aspect of life
Matthew 7:24-25 – “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. ²⁵ “And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock.”
 - a. Here Christ refers to this rock as His sayings, His commands
 - b. To know Christ is to embrace His commands
John 15:13-14 “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ “You are My friends, if you do what I command you.
6. This is the true foundation upon which the church is built and it is the true foundation that wise men build upon

Conclusion:

1. To declare that the church is founded upon Peter is to rob Christ of that which is His alone. This passage stands at the very heart of the doctrine of Christ.
2. Either one of our interpretations fit the theological doctrine of Christ and both exalt Him as the Head of the Church.
 - A. The Church is built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ.
 - B. The Church is built upon the profession that Jesus is the Rock. This profession was held by the Apostles and taught to the church, thus by this the church was founded upon their doctrine.
Ephesians 2:19-22 – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”
3. May we continue to stand upon this Rock, trust this Rock as our fortress, build upon this Rock in our evangelism, and submit to this Rock as our King.