



Jesus didn't die to make us safe. He died to make us dangerous! Faithfulness isn't holding the fort. It's storming the gates of hell with the light and love of Jesus Christ. [Mark Batterson](#)

June 29th **The Shofar** **Matthew 16:13**

Caesarea Philippi

The gospel in **Matthew 16:13** provides the most detail of Jesus' important teaching in this setting, rife with references to pagan symbols.

Jesus proposed two questions to his disciples. The first, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" could be easily answered by their observations as they travelled with Jesus. Herod promoted a rumour that Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist. Some people believe Jesus to be Elijah, whose return was anticipated as he would announce the coming Messiah. Some thought Jesus was Jeremiah because of their similar warnings.

Jesus' second question is one we should all answer, and Peter's response was perfect: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter wasn't the first to declare this revelation. The Gospel of John tells us the disciples knew Jesus was the Son of Man, the Messiah or Christ, and the Son of God when they began to follow him. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus wanted each disciple to fully understand *His* identity, not only God the Father's. For three years, the disciples had heard his teachings and witnessed his healing ministry, but Jesus wasn't just a miracle worker and healer. He wanted to be certain these disciples understood his complete, divine nature and to know the sovereignty of his Father's kingdom was available for everyone to experience for all time.

Why the Geography helps us

Now, imagine Jesus standing at a distance, looking at this cliff with the pagan statues in the niches. Since this was a pagan "red light zone," it is unlikely Jesus and the disciples were standing close to this heathen area of worship. He then said to Peter and his disciples, "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."

This day in Caesarea Philippi is when Jesus founded his church. His church would symbolically be built on the "rock" of Caesarea Philippi, one then filled with niches for pagan idols and where ungodly beliefs and values dominated. This huge rock's destiny was like so many ancient tells in Israel: to be crushed and destroyed as rubble, and where God's kingdom would be built on its ruins.

Anyone familiar with this part of the ancient world knows earthquakes, wars, and other forms of destruction will surely decimate not only man-made buildings but also massive outcrops like in Caesarea Philippi.

Jesus wasn't suggesting a church building would be constructed on top of these pagan sites, but that his church was to be built stone by stone using people like Peter, the disciples, and you, and me. Jesus had given Simon Peter a new name, "Petros," meaning a single stone. "Petra," the term Jesus used for his future church, means a massive rock or formation; fixed, immovable, enduring.

In the ancient world, gates were defensive structures to keep the enemy out, but Jesus doesn't want us cowering behind them. When he stated, "and the Gates of Hell will not prevail," Jesus was suggesting those gates should be attacked.

His followers were challenged to not hide from evil and would be commanded to storm the Gates of Hell, which would not

hold up under the triumphant forces of Jesus' church.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Then, Jesus said, "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." Catholic theologians have historically believed this passage proves Peter was intended to be the head of the Christian church. But, if we look at the early church, it was both Peter and James, the brother of Jesus, who would lead the church then centred in Jerusalem.

Who exactly holds the keys to Heaven is a topic that is widely debated. Some people believe that Peter was given the keys, and that point of view can be supported as Jesus intended to use him in unique and miraculous ways. Peter was the first to use the keys of the kingdom when he delivered the first sermon after Pentecost that would electrify and grow this new church. Peter would break down the Kingdom's barriers between Jews and Gentiles when he met with Cornelius. Jesus Christ's church's gate was now unlocked and would remain wide open for all who enter through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Others believe the keys were given to the disciples. This is supported by Matthew 18:18, when Jesus repeated his instructions, where he was clearly speaking to all of them. "...whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In our individualist culture, we often interpret "you" in scripture as singular. Often, a more correct way is to view "you" as plural.

Peter leads the attack against evil

Many theologians point out there was more than one key as Jesus used the plural, "keys." They emphasize that all believers hold the keys to the kingdom of Heaven as we believe, forgive, serve, trust, and pray. Perhaps the

keys to the Kingdom of Heaven were meant to set us free from bondage to grow Jesus' church and bring glory to God.

The disciples must have felt overwhelmed by Jesus' challenge and teachings. He was now commissioning them to an enormous task: to attack evil and to build his church on the places that were filled with moral corruption. His kingdom would grow and expand to glorify God.

Imagine you are amongst the disciples on that day in Caesarea Philippi listening to Jesus' message. Jesus isn't talking to just those in church buildings and Christian schools; He is talking to each of us in our daily lives. Are we on defence or offense in the Kingdom of God?

Taking the fight up to Satan

In a small rural community in which I once served, there were those who could both profess that Jesus Christ is Lord while at the same time work on undermining the rock on which it was built. Like a black widow spider, their leader gathered them into her web with lies, poisoning their minds against others and rejoicing when the parish staggered and faltered. In the end, the parish stands empty. The once open at all times door is locked and the rectory empty of people. And yet she would be cross if she (and her merry band of dissenters) was accused of denying that Christ is The Messiah and our only Lord.

Peter was wrong time and time again when it came to living under the reign of Jesus. In the end his faith was so lively, so strong that he endured martyrdom with a living faith and hope.

That little church I mentioned above was the victim of a failure to live the faith. Like the worshippers of Pan, they preferred the ways of the pagan cults to the narrow road of the Gospel. They gave their keys away.