



Study Series

Follow Me: Week Six AM

The community of Jesus: Marc Rader

Bible

Matthew 16:13-20 (NIV)

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. **18** And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome 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 ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Sermon Summary

The passage we are looking at now (Matthew 16:13-20) represents a turning point in the gospel. It is at this point that Jesus begins to shift his disciples understanding of what it meant for Him to be the Messiah. This paradigm shift revolves around His suffering and death as we'll see, but it begins in this passage with Peter's confession and Jesus' teaching on the community formed on this confession.

Jesus and his disciples have gone about 40 kilometres north of Galilee to the region of Caesarea Philippi which was Gentile (non-Jewish) territory. On the way Jesus asks them who the people are comparing Him to. The list is impressive: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another of the prophets of Israel. Each of these individuals had powerful ministries among the people of God and put Jesus in unique company. However, as we have read the gospel account we already suspect that Jesus demands a new category. John the Baptist may have been a big deal, even leading some to think he might be the Messiah (Luke 3:15; John 1:19-20) but Jesus is presented as a much bigger deal. Elijah was a mighty miracle worker, but as we have seen Jesus' miraculous power is unprecedented. Jeremiah spoke powerfully in a critical time for the people of God, but Jesus has been presented as one more like Moses than any one else. It doesn't surprise us then that Jesus asks the disciples who they think He is, nor are we surprised that Peter speaks on their behalf (as Peter is presented as the leader of the apostles), "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This confession of faith leads to a shift in Jesus' teaching about His ministry as we'll see. What is more noteworthy perhaps is that Jesus speaks about the community founded on this confession.

The founding of a community would have been expected of any prophet and has been foreshadowed in Jesus' selection of twelve apostles paralleling the twelve tribes of Israel. This is, however, the first time that Jesus has taught about this community. There are three things that are noteworthy.

First, that this community is founded on divine revelation about Jesus. This comes with the important implication that the church is still founded on the same divine revelation. Unlike human organisations and movements whose leaders inevitably die, leaving the followers to interpret and implement the original vision, the church is still the domain of the living God who helps us interpret and implement the vision.

Second, the vision of the community is that it is an extension of life to the world. The community founded on this confession of Jesus is set against the gates of Hades; against the realm of the dead. This is not a community set against Rome or the political powers,

nor is it a religious group set against the religious establishment, but a group set to extend life in the face of death. And in this task it will not fail because it has the backing of Jesus.

Third, the church is invited to participate in the extension of forgiveness. This seems to be the essence of the binding and loosing language (see Matthew 18:15-18). While the ultimate authority to forgive resides with God, we are invited to participate with Him in this task. This is a mystery, but it is also a paradigm shift of a kingdom that requires a different kind of Messiah. The kind of Messiah this kind of kingdom requires will be explored in the rest of the gospel.

It also represents a paradigm shift for us about what the church is. We are not just a religious group, but are set to offer forgiveness in Jesus' name to a dying world; to offer life in the face of death; and to do so in the name of Jesus, the Son of the living God. This vision and mission is given to the church to fulfil wherever the church is gathered and is for us to engage in.

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation, their depth comes from a willingness to engage with the implications of our reflections for how we live our lives. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: What groups, organisations or movements have you seen or read about, that sought to bring change to society? Examples might include the civil rights movement, led by Rev Martin Luther King Junior, or the 'Me Too' or 'Times Up' movements, led by figures from the entertainment industry, that have sought to bring an end to abusive power. How did they go about trying to bring change? How effective was that? What limitations have stood in the way of that change lasting? Share your reflections with the group.
2. Read Matthew 16:13-20 aloud. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that seemed to stand out. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** they stood out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to a word or phrase, take time, and share what you've been led to.

3. Jesus has established the Church, His community of faith, to extend life in the face of death. Where do you see 'death' at work in our world? How might the Church as a movement be involved in bringing change in these areas?
4. What do you think it means for us to bind or loose on earth? What do you think is the relationship between binding and loosing, and forgiveness?
5. The confession of faith that Jesus is the Son of God, is central to the Church, yet we so often stand divided, arguing about many other things. How can we as a local expression of the wider Church, as well as individuals, pursue unity around this confession in the face of disagreement?
6. What are some of the actions and activities of the church, that hinder our mission to extend life in the face of death? How could we begin to think and act differently?

Prayer

In the light of your reflections on question 6, take some time to pray prayers of confession on behalf of the Church, and perhaps even your church or group. Ask God for forgiveness for where we have failed to engage in His mission to bring life in the face of death, and for guidance and courage to carry that mission out in the future, both corporately and individually.