

# —Matthew 16:13-23|| Expository Thoughts on Matthew by J.C. Ryle—

## Module 48 – “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”-Mat. 16:16

First, this scripture has created many divisions among Christians raising a few questions:

*‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...’* Why is this controversial?

Does the Lord mean to say that the Apostle Peter himself was to be the foundation on which Christ’s church was to be built? Such an interpretation seems improbable given the sinful nature of man. Also, if Jesus meant this then He would have more likely said, ‘I will build the church on *thee*’, instead of saying, “I will build my church upon *this rock*”.

What is the true meaning then of ‘the rock’? The meaning appears to be the truth of our Lord’s Messiahship and divinity, which Peter had just confessed. It is as though the Lord had said, ‘Thou art rightly called by the name Peter, or stone, for thou hast confessed that mighty *truth*, on which, as on a rock, I will build my church.’

Next, are we to understand that the right of admitting souls to heaven was to be placed in Peter’s hands?

*‘I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven...’*

What are we to understand when we read this promise? The office of admitting souls to heaven is the special prerogative of Christ himself (*Rev. 1:18*).

Do the words mean that Peter was to have any primacy or superiority over the rest of the apostles? There is not the slightest proof that Peter had any rank or dignity above the rest of the twelve.

The true meaning appears to be that Peter was to have the special privilege of first opening the door of salvation, both to the Jews and Gentiles. This is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost where he preaches to the Jews and visited the Gentile Cornelius at his own house (*Acts 15:7*).

Finally, what should we understand from the words, ‘*Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*’?

Does this mean that the Apostle Peter was to have any power of forgiving sins, and absolving sinners? Such an idea is derogatory to Christ’s special office as our great High Priest.

Peter and the other apostles were to be specially commissioned to teach with authority the way of salvation. The apostles were appointed to ‘*declare and pronounce*’ authoritatively whose sins were forgiven. They were also to be specially inspired to lay down rules and regulations for the guidance of the church on disputed questions. Some things they were to ‘*bind*’ or forbid; others they were to ‘*loose*’ or allow. The decision of the Council at Jerusalem, that the Gentiles need not be circumcised, was one example of the exercise of this power (*Acts 21:25*).

Do you agree with this analysis? How has this scripture been distorted since it was first written?

Points that we can make from the scripture (verses 13-20):

First, do not carelessly read past the remarkable and strong commendation from our Lord towards Peter. Peter confesses Christ at a time when professing Christians dwelled in the midst of hardened and unbelieving Jews. He made it when the rulers of his own nation, the scribes, and priests, and Pharisees, were all opposed to his Christ; he made it when Christ was in the *'form of a servant'*, without wealth, without royal dignity, without any visible mark of a king. He made his confession prior to the resurrection of Jesus.

We would do well to copy the hearty zeal and affection which Peter displays. With all of his faults, Peter was a true-hearted, fervent, single-minded servant of Christ. He has given us a pattern that many Christians would do wisely to follow.

Second, we should take care that we understand what our Lord means when he speaks of his church. The church that Jesus promises to build upon a rock is the *'blessed company of all faithful people'*. It is not the visible church of any one nation, or country, or place. It is the whole body of believers of every age, and tongue, and people. It is a church which has only one Head. That Head is Jesus Christ himself (*Col. 1:18*).

We should beware of the mistakes made on this subject. The word *'church'* is often and has been greatly misunderstood and distorted. Consider the current news cycle and condition of the "church" in America. Men have argued and contended about Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Independent churches. We often lose sight of the one true church, outside of which there is no salvation at all. It will matter nothing at the last day where we have worshipped.

Third, pay attention and make note of the glorious promises which our Lord makes to his church. He says, *'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it'*. The power of Satan shall never destroy the people of Christ. Every member shall be brought safe to glory. No member of the true church will ever be cast away (*John 10:28*).

—Matthew 16:13-23|| Expository Thoughts on Matthew by J.C. Ryle—  
*Module 49 – Jesus must suffer many things, and be killed, and be raised on the third day.*

Background:

We find Jesus first revealing to the disciples that He will die upon the cross. This is the first time he places before their minds the astounding announcement that *‘he must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed’*. He did not come to earth to take a kingdom but to die.

It is impossible for us to conceive how strange and incomprehensible these tidings must have seemed to his disciples. Like most Jews they could not conceive of a Messiah that suffers. They did not understand that *Isaiah 53* must be literally fulfilled. They did not see that the sacrifices of the law were meant to point the to the death of the true Lamb of God. They only thought of the second glorious coming of the Messiah.

What can we learn from the passage?

First, we can learn from this passage that there may be much spiritual ignorance even in a true disciple of Christ. There is no clearer proof than we see in the conduct of the Apostle Peter in the scripture. He tries to dissuade our Lord from suffering on the cross. *‘Be it far from thee,’* he says, *‘this shall not be unto thee’*. He did not see the full purpose of our Lord’s coming into the world. His eyes were blinded to the necessity of our Lord’s death. Yet, we know that Peter was a converted man. He really believed that Jesus was the Messiah. His heart was right in the sight of God.

These things are meant to teach us that we must neither regard good men as infallible, because they are good men, nor yet suppose they have no grace, because their grace is weak and small. One brother may possess singular gifts and be a bright and shining light in the church of Christ. However, let us not forget that he is a man and therefore liable to make great mistakes. On the other hand, another brother’s knowledge may be scanty. He may fail to judge rightly on many points of doctrine and may err in word and deed. But, if he has faith and love for Christ and holds Him as the Head, then deal patiently with him. Like Peter, he may now be in the dark, and yet, like Peter, enjoy one day the full light of the gospel.

Second, there is no doctrine of Scripture so deeply important as the doctrine of Christ’s atoning death. Our proof is the language used by our Lord in rebuking Peter. He addresses him by the awful name of *‘Satan’*, as if he was an adversary and doing the devil’s work in trying to prevent his death. The error that drew from such a loving Savior such a stern rebuke to such a true disciple, must have been a mighty error indeed.

Our Lord would have us regard the crucifixion as the central truth of Christianity. A right view of Christ’s death and the benefits resulting from it lie at the very foundation of Bible religion. We must never forget this. We may differ on other matters (church government, form of worship, etc.) and be saved. On the matter of Christ’s atoning death, as the way of peace, there is only one truth. The sum of all our hopes must be that, *‘Christ has died for us’* (1 Thess. 5:10). Give up this doctrine and we have no solid hope at all.