

I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

Matthew 16:13-20

If you've ever been lost in the woods, you know it can be a scary thing. As soon as you realize you are lost, the fear and panic start to set in especially if the sun begins to set. Before you know it, you can lose your sense of all direction. You quit thinking rationally and can make things worse by making decisions in a panic fright. So if you're lost survival guides typically recommend a S.T.O.P. protocol like that found on the U.S. Forest Service website or Boy Scouts.

- 1. Stop: or Stay Calm.** As soon as you realize you may be lost: stop, stay calm, stay put. Control your breathing. Eat or drink something. *Panic is your greatest enemy.*
- 2. Think:** Go over in your mind how you got to where you are. What landmarks should you be able to see? Do not move at all until you have a specific reason to take a step.
- 3. Observe:** Get out your compass and determine the directions based on where you are standing. Do not walk aimlessly.
- 4. Plan:** Based on your thinking and observations, come up with some possible plans, think them through then act on one of them with a clear head. Try to maintain positive thinking.

I'm going to make the point today that this S.T.O.P. protocol would have been really helpful to us the past few years—not in the sense of getting lost in the woods literally—but as we look around at things going on in the world with covid, the economy, and the culture, it's all been very disorienting and there is this frightful, lost feeling. Since covid, I feel like we're living in a different world, a different America. The polarity in worldview was always there, but now there is an absolute polarity in politically, morally, culturally. Foundational things are afoot in our country and in the world. The covid propaganda fearmongering the entire world into shutdown. States threatening churches should they open. The economy in the tanks. Inflation. High gas prices. Open borders. Schools pushing to indoctrinate our schools with Marxist-Communist Critical Race Theory or LGBTQ propaganda—just wicked stuff. For a Judeo-Christian to suggest a reality where absolute truth exists is hate speech. Men robbing women of their trophies in women's sports. Our government's lack of respect for the Constitution and their incessant push towards socialism with their freebie handouts and debt cancellation. In the words of Albert Mohler, it's social suicide! We are in a historic turning point battle in our generation for the next generation.

I don't want to sound like a doomsayer, and I know you came to hear something more positive this morning and we'll get to it, but that's the reason for the message this morning and the reason that as a church, our theme this year is to **trust God more and fear less**. Today the specific fear I want to address is that of us as Christians living in an increasingly dark culture hostile to truth. *What do we do? How do we act? What are our survival steps?* That's what we want to look at in Matthew 16:13-20 today as we turn this S.T.O.P. protocol into principles for the Christian life.

13: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do

you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 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. 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." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ."

So where we've picked it up in Matthew this morning, we're jumping right into the middle of the book so we need to climb a contextual tree and get some perspective. **Matthew's gospel. Why was it written? To prove to a Jewish audience that Jesus is the Messiah.** If you were to share Jesus with a Jew, the first question they would ask is, "*If Jesus is the Messiah, where is His kingdom?*" Because of OT prophecy, a Messiah without a kingdom was unthinkable. Obviously, many missed the prophecies about His first coming to suffer for sin but Matthew answers this question. Matthew reveals the Messiah came offering the kingdom but was rejected and reveals that at the end of the tribulation the kingdom will come. For now, you are to be restored to God's kingdom spiritually by faith in Jesus as we wait for the Son to come again (Acts 1:6-7; 3:18-20).

But where we've picked it up in Matthew, **Jesus has sufficiently proven his identity through his life and ministry of teaching and miracles.** He has finished His Galilean ministry in northern Israel and now He's about to head south to the cross waiting for Him in Jerusalem. But before He goes, He takes His disciples north to **Caesarea Philippi** for some alone time with the disciples and it's a major turning point in Matthew's gospel, as well as Mark's. It's here he asks them, "Who do people say that I am?" Basically, "*After hearing my teaching and seeing my works for the past couple of years, what's everyone's conclusion about My identity?*" And they reply that most people in general with a positive disposition towards Jesus recognized Him as a prophetic, spiritual authority of some kind like John, Elijah, or Jeremiah. Their conclusions reveals they don't understand who He really is.

Then Jesus **personalizes the question:** "But who do you say that I am?" I love this because this is a destiny determining question every soul must answer. *Who is Jesus?* Is He an ordinary man? A religious man? A good teacher? A liar? Or is He God Himself having come into this world as a man to die for man's sin? Many people had their opinions, but many were wrong. Who do *you* say that He is? Simon Peter's answer needs to be your answer: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" He understood Jesus correctly is the Messiah—his God and Savior. Christ is not Jesus' last name. It's the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah—God's predicted and long-awaited deliverer of Israel. Because of Peter's confession that Jesus is Messiah, Jesus responded with 3 statements about Peter being blessed, being a rock, and being given some keys.

Petrine Statement #1 – Peter is blessed by divine revelation. (v. 17)

Jesus called him blessed because the Father had revealed Jesus' true identity to Peter. Peter had not come to know Jesus' identity through his own spiritual insight or intellect or human effort—

that's what Jesus meant when He said it wasn't by flesh and blood that he came to that conclusion. Peter received it as a **divine revelation from God** who enabled him to see Jesus for who He really was. That's something we've got to remember when it comes to living in a crazy dark world and sharing Jesus: we have to depend on God to work in their hearts and show them who Jesus is. We can't *make* anyone believe in Jesus. God has to open their hearts as we share the gospel (Acts 16:14). We don't trust ourselves—our own flesh and blood—we have to trust the Lord to work.

S=Stop worrying. Trust God is in control.

When you look around and see the chaos and foolishness going on today, remember that God is in control. God looks at all the world rulers and elites in Silicon Valley running our country into the ground, and He laughs at them (Psalm 2). He's never in heaven wringing His hands, asking "What do I do?" He can use the evil for good (Gen. 50:20). Already, many people are coming Christ who were ignorant before. Many are realizing something is seriously wrong with this world and their looking for hope and we have the opportunity to point them to Jesus. Now will they believe? Some will. Some won't. But don't let the naysayers stop you from faithfully planting and watering the seed of the gospel. Trustfully rest in God who causes the growth in His timing (1 Cor. 3:6).

Back to the text: I should probably leave this alone but Peter's original name was Simon and his dad's name was **John** (John 1:42). **Jesus renamed him Peter**, right? So why does He call him **Barjona**? Bar means "son of" and the question is was he calling him Son of **John** (Yochanan) or **Jonah** (Yona)? They're very similar names. Some think John is tended to emphasize his humanity (flesh and blood).¹ But some, very interestingly, think Jesus is calling him the son of Jonah on purpose—as in Jonah the prophet. Rabbinic literature indicates calling someone the "son of" doesn't have to refer to physical descendants. You can be the son of someone by having similar characteristics or classification. It could mean "*displaying the characteristics of*" or "*being a follower or disciple of*".² Jesus called the Pharisees sons of the devil.

If this is what Jesus meant, *how is Peter similar to Jonah?* Well, Jonah receives a divine assignment from God to be a prophetic voice to Gentiles at Nineveh, at first says no, goes to Joppa and boards a ship to flee, but eventually goes to Nineveh where he preaches and Gentiles get saved. Peter too, as a prophetic voice for God, would receive an assignment from God through divine revelation (the sheet full of unclean animals meant go to the Gentiles), at Joppa, at first would say, "*By no means Lord!*" (Acts 10:14), and eventually would go and open a door of salvation to the Gentiles at Caesarea Maritima. The similarities are uncanny, and seem like a stretch, but it's also supported by the context that Peter is the one God uses to open the door of salvation to the Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. Remember, they're in predominantly Gentile territory. It's a lesson.

Petrine Statement #2 – Peter is given keys to open the door of salvation. (v. 19)

I think that's what is meant by Peter being given and using the **keys** of the kingdom. It doesn't mean he's standing at the pearly gates in heaven deciding who gets in and out. He already used the keys! God designated for him to be the one who would preach on Pentecost in Acts 2 and 3,000

Jews get saved and the Church is born. Philip preached in Samaria and many **Samaritans** started to believe but didn't receive the Spirit. Why? He didn't have the keys. Peter and John had to come and lay hands on them to receive the Spirit. By the way, that was unique moment not necessary today. When someone believes, they receive the Spirit without question (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13-14). The reason God did that with the Samaritans is because there was worship rivalry between Jews and the Samaritans who were half Jewish and half Gentile. God was saying in essence that they weren't to start their own Samaritan church denomination. They were to be united under the authority of the Jewish apostles. As for the **Gentiles**, Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles gets saved, but before he can go on mission, who opens the door to the Gentiles? Peter, in Acts 10, at Cornelius' household. Peter opens the door and it is never shut. In **Mathew 23:13** Jesus cries woe unto the Pharisees for shutting the doors to the kingdom of heaven for people enter in. Peter by contract was to open the way for all people to come in by grace through faith in Christ.³

The keys are also somewhat associated with **binding and loosening** because they go hand in hand with apostolic authority. Binding and loosening doesn't mean—like the Roman Catholic Church purports—Peter is the first pope and all the successors of Peter have some sort of infallibility and ability to forgive or not forgive sins. They have to do with authority but not in that sense (**Isaiah 22:20-22; Rev. 1:18**). **Peter, along with the other Spirit apostles** were going to exercise apostolic authority in their role of laying the foundation for the church. If you are a Christian, you operate under the authority of the apostles by the instruction they wrote. All I do is try to pass on what they have bound or loosened in their instruction for us. Think about this: this great responsibility and difficulty of being an apostle. They had to transition God's people from the Old Covenant of Moses to a New Covenant of Promise which meant a lot of change. They had to organize that transition and that's why they were given such miraculous abilities—to prove they were qualified to do it. If anybody and everybody had such ever-on-command apostolic miraculous powers, we'd start treating them like an apostle. Their teachings would have new weight. The abundance of miracles with the apostles confirmed their God-given ministry to bind and loosen (Mark 16:20). In rabbinic thinking, **binding and loosening conveyed forbidding or permitting, punishing or not.**⁴ They had to loosen the Law with all of its regulations and bind Jew and Gentile together in new covenant teaching and practice.

Petrine Statement #3 – Peter's testimony is the rock the church is built on. (v. 18)

Many commentators note that Jesus used two different words here for rock in verse 18. "*I also say to you that you are Peter [Petros; small pebble or stone rock], and upon this rock [petra-bedrock or massive rock], I will build My church.*" There's been a lot of ink spilled over the identification of "this rock". *What is the rock the church is built on? Is the rock Peter? Is the rock Christ? Is the rock Peter's confession?* The Roman Catholic Church, in its pursuit to be the self-proclaimed one true church, understands Peter to be the rock and the first pope that the church is built on. In reaction to the RC position is the position that only Peter's testimony that Jesus is the Christ is the rock. But based on God's use of Peter evident in Acts, I think we have to understand **Peter and his testimony go together as a rock**. I think Jesus is simply saying to Peter that his testimony is the big, foundational rock the Church is built on and it will be founded not on Peter, but *through*

Peter. Peter is clearly given a foundational role in the founding and expansion of the church through his use of the keys given to him. It begins with him but doesn't depend on him as some infallible pope.⁵ This interpretation is in line with the biblical history outlined in Acts and Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. But this is an encouragement. You know why? Because Peter wasn't some perfect, infallible person.

T=Think. God uses imperfect people.

Nothing personal, but the fact that Jesus used Peter for such an awesome task is mesmerizing. Peter was kind of a knucklehead who lived with his foot in his mouth. He denied Jesus three times. He fails to represent to the gospel well in Antioch and Paul has to rebuke him. In the next paragraph, Jesus has to tell Peter, "*Get behind me Satan!*" because he is aligning himself with the will of Satan trying to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. I mean, Peter's name means rock, but I don't think it's because Peter was a rock. Peter *thought* he was a rock *until* Jesus humbled him, but after that humbling experience, Jesus needed him to be a rock. He had to tell him three times to feed His sheep.

My point being, **Jesus doesn't use perfectly cut stones to build His church.** He uses humble, living stones (1 Pet. 2:5). When it comes to serving the Lord, we let fear and false humility creep in. We say, "*God could never use me. What will people think of me if I share Jesus? If I live for Jesus? What if I fail or screw up?*" I have good news! Peter, the one through whom Jesus founded the church, screwed up big time after God used him to found the church! Jesus doesn't require perfect individuals to build His church. He uses weaknesses we have to **build His church and make it clear it's Him doing it, not us.** Don't let your **fear of failure or fear of inadequacy** stop you from being part of God's building program. Ask Him to use your weaknesses.

Now, here's the fun stuff for me today. If you really want to feel the full force of what Jesus says, when He says **the gates of Hades won't overcome the Church**, you need an understanding where Jesus and the disciples are when He says it. There are few actual locations or places in Scripture like Caesarea Philippi that play such a significant role in understanding the biblical text.⁶

First, **Caesarea Philippi** is in the northern extremities of Jewish territory and **predominantly Gentile.** It's 120 mile north of Jerusalem, 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, at the base of Mount Hermon, the highest peak in the Promised Land. It's a place of natural beauty. Even when it's dry and brown by the Sea of Galilee, as you head north up this basin 1700 feet, it becomes very green and lush. Where they are visiting there is a **massive cliff face (*petra!*)** and a **deep cave** going into the earth that at the time had a **river** coming out of it, probably filled with river stones (***petros!***). Because of an earthquake about 100 years ago, the water now comes out from beneath the cave, to the right of it but back then water came out of the mouth of the cave. It's a major tributary of the Jordan River up where the Jordan river starts. Josephus described this cave as "*a horrible precipice, that descends abruptly to a vast depth; it contains a mighty quantity of water, which is immovable; and when anybody lets down anything to measure the depth of the earth beneath the water, no length of cord is sufficient to reach it.*"⁷

Because the area is so lush and because of the water source, it naturally became **a place of idol worship to fertility gods**. It has a long history of being a dark, wicked place. **Before the conquest** of the land by Israel, it was home to Canaanite **Baal** worship which involved child sacrifice (Joshua 11:16-17; Judges 3:3; 1 Chron. 5:23).⁸ **After the conquest**, the city of **Dan** settled here about 2 miles away from this cave and if you are familiar with Dan, they were the first tribe to openly and publicly introduced idol worship. After the kingdom split, Jeroboam set up 2 golden calf altars to keep people from going to Jerusalem to worship and defecting.



Then following the conquest by Alexander the Great, and Greek culture spreading (Hellenism), the large cave at the site became a shrine to the **Greek god Pan** from at least the **3rd century BC** to the **5th century AD**. The site was called **Paneas**.⁹ In 63 BC Rome conquered this area and eventually built a city called **Caesarea Paneas** (2 BC), but it eventually became **Caesarea Philippi**, in honor of the **Caesar Augustus** and **Philip the Tetrarch**.¹⁰ Only after Islamic conquests did the name morph from Paneas to **Banias**, named after the springs located there.

But during the time of Jesus there were temples to **Caesar Augustus** (emperor worship) and Greek god **Zeus**, but **Pan** worship seemed to dominate the site. You can see how there's little niches in the side of the rock with inscriptions to the idol statues of Pan. The massive cave which descended deep into the earth was called the **Grotto of Pan** and regarded by pagans as a **gateway to Hades and the underworld**. You've probably seen pictures of Pan. He's a dancing goat-man. He has the legs and horns of a goat but the torso and arms of a man and he dances and plays the flute or panpipes and chased women. He's associated with all things related to **wild times, party music, and fertility**.¹¹ People would come here and worship seeking the prosperity of their land, crops, businesses, or wombs. Some might take their children and throw them into the watery cave as a sacrifice. What went on here between worshipers and goats was unspeakably disgusting. But get this: he was also associated with **fear**. Our word "panic" comes from this god Pan "**who caused humans to flee his forest in unreasoning fear**".¹² Panic is a word that modifies the word fear, like *Panique* fear. Historian Josephus used it that way. What kind of spirit do you really think was really behind this unspeakably gross, wild party, child sacrificing, materialistic god who *for fun* made people flee with unreasoning fear? How ironic now to say "panic" is your greatest enemy. How ironic Satan's church has a goat for a symbol and unbelievers likened to goats (Matt. 25:33).

Now that you know what was really going on here, put yourselves in the disciples' shoes at this site. If you are Jew, you want nothing to do with this place. This is thoroughly pagan, Gentile, and Satanic territory. It's unbelievably wicked. And as you're standing by this massive rock face, Jesus says, I'm going to build My church on the rock and the Gates of Hades will not overpower it. It's powerful, isn't it? Nothing will stop it. Reminds us of the church at Pergamum, He built that church He said, "*where Satan's throne is*" (Rev. 2:13). So can build His church in our darkening culture?

I mean what do you think of when you think of gates? Gates are for fortresses. Some gates were big and powerful looking—wood overlaid with bronze. They were strong and no doubt the gates of Hades are strong to keep people in. But no one takes gates with them to war. They are **a defense mechanism**. The picture Jesus is showing us is Him and His **church, on the offensive**, banging down the gates of darkness and death that have organized themselves against the church. And **Jesus is going to be calling these Jewish apostles and us to penetrate the darkest of places with the light of the gospel—places were not comfortable going it's so dark—with the promise that He will build His church.**

O=Observe. The church is on the offensive.

We are not holed up somewhere. Not retreating. But engaged. We're involved in our culture. We're involved in politics. We're involved in schools. We're involved in society, **influencing the world for Christ with salt and light, truth and gospel.**

What does Satan want? He wants us to fear. To be on the defensive. He wants us to blend in with the world—afraid to speak the truth and live the truth—because he knows fear can make you follow culture rather than follow Christ. We say amen to this, but we all shut down and are paralyzed by fear. Fear can be subtle. Think about how many times have you *not* spoken up for Christ or for the truth when you had the chance? You were afraid you'd be judged by your friends or coworkers. But I want to encourage you in that while it's more tempting than ever to blend in and to not stand for the truth or stand for your faith, it's easier than ever to stand out and make a difference! **1 Peter 3:15** says to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you with gentleness and respect. Now is not the time to be silent. It's time to stand and to stand firmly but respectfully.

P=Plan. To live in light of our eternal destination.

When you're lost, what do you do? You get out your map. You look for the destination. As Christians living in a culture where we're feeling some dysphoria and prone to fear, to get out the map and look to where we are going. Look at where history is really heading and see that we're always on the right side of history when we stand with Jesus and the truth. And it's better to stand with God and be judged by the world than to stand with the world and be judged by God.

1 John 2:17 says, “*This world is passing away and also its lusts, but the one who does the will of God lives forever*” **Matthew 10:28** says, “*Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.*” You have to remember that one day when Jesus comes with His righteous kingdom and good and evil will flip places. This is Jesus' reminder and argument. **Live now in light of the future.** Look at **verse 24:** “*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man*

give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.”

To let fear keep you from being a faithful disciples now is foolish because you'll lose out now in this life and rewards in the next. It's exchanging eternity for here and now. I want to encourage you as you go about your week this week, and I'll be praying for you, to be more aware of the fear in your heart and rebuke it and to stand for your faith and share your faith. Put your faith into action. Pray for opportunities this week to share truth and share Jesus. Be bold (Romans 1:16-17).

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1980), 21

² Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Jewish Messianic Perspective, Vol 2* (San Antionio: Ariel Ministries, 2017), 583.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 426.

⁴ Fruchtenbaum, 590.

⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 2 Chapters 11–28*, 121.

⁶ Pastor Dr. Todd Fink, *Caesarea Philippi, Israel: The Gates of Hell and Christ’s Church – Matthew 16:18*, accessed 31 August 2022.

⁷ Fruchtenbaum, citing *Jesus & The Land*, pp. 103-104.

⁸ Titus Kennedy, *Excavating the Evidence for Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022), 173-174.

⁹ Ibid., 174.

¹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.28.

¹¹ Dave Stotts, *Drive Thru History: The Gospels; Episode 11 – Jesus Travels North*.

¹² Merriam Websters *The Mythical Origin of “Panic”*:

“And when as the first charge was ready to be giuen, and before they came to handy-strokes, all Izates souldiers forsooke him, and turning their backes to their enemies, fled in great disorder, as if they had been surprized with a Panique feare.”

—Flavius Josephus (trans. By Tho. Lodge), *The Famous and Memorable Workes of Josephus*, 1602

“....there hapned in the night a sudden feare and fright among them without any apparent cause, such as they call Panique Frights, wherewith being woonderfully troubled and scarred, they went a shipboord, without all order....’

—Plutarch (trans. By Philemon Holland), *The Philosophie*, 1603