

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

50 – What Rock?!?

Announcements:

11/13 @5:00

Joint Service

La Luz Bible

Church

11/15 @6:30 -

Women's Bible

Study

11/16 @7:00 -

Prayer

11/17 @6:30 -

Grace Group

11/20 @8:30 -

Sunday School

11/20 @After Service

THANKSGIVING

POTLUCK

ICE BREAKER: What do you hope is the legacy that you will leave after Jesus calls you home?

READ: Matthew 16:13-20

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church - Matthew 16:18.

I mentioned on Sunday that this is possibly the most important passage in all of the book of Matthew. But as we might expect with any important passage, it is not without its fair share of controversy. The vast majority stems from the question: What is “this rock”? Morris notes that this “is a saying that has caused *endless* controversy in the church’s history.” He then lists over four different views then notes that: “Each of the views has been argued passionately by some exegetes, often maintaining at the same time that other views can be espoused only by people who refuse to accept the plain meaning of the Greek.” So this means that just a simple appeal to authority or the advice to “just go to the Greek” will not be enough to figure out exactly what Jesus is saying here. So today I would like to look at two of the most popular opinions to try and understand what is at stake, and what we can say with certainty about this passage.

The first thought that some people have is that Peter is the rock. The biggest strength of this view is that this is the most plain reading of the text. Grammatically speaking, there is no explicit change in subject between “you are Peter” and “this rock.” Therefore, to read this passage in this way is to read that Jesus is building the church, in some way, on Peter. But then what does this mean? We should note here that there are a variety of answers, from the unbroken succession of Church leadership in the Pope to ancient church planting. However I would argue that if you are going to say that Peter is the rock that the church is built around there is only one satisfactory answer. Jesus is saying that the church is built on the apostolic authority and more importantly the apostolic teaching that is embodied in Peter. In other words what Jesus is saying here is very similar to what Paul says in Ephesians 2:19-20 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” Another way to say this is that the *confession* of Peter cannot be separated from the man who makes that confession, and that truth, the truth of who Jesus is, is truly what the church is built upon.

DISCUSS: What does it mean to say that the church is built on Peter? What are some strengths and/or weaknesses of this view?

The other sort of family of beliefs would claim that it is foolish to claim that Peter is the Rock. From Matthew Henry: “Nothing can be more wrong than to suppose that Christ meant the person of Peter was the rock. Without doubt Christ himself is the Rock, the tried foundation of the church; and woe to him that attempts to lay any other!” To not get into any of the Greek or grammar, the best way to see this thought in the text is to imagine some motions with Jesus saying these things. Pointing to Peter he says you are Peter (*Petros* compared to the word for rock: *petra*) and then pointing to himself he says on THIS rock I will build my church! (to say it cutely in English we could say something like: you may be Rocky, but I am the Rock!) This is the more theological approach, again we could look to Ephesians 2:19-20 and note that Christ is the cornerstone; he is the foundation, he is the head of the church; to claim the church is built on any other is not just wrong, but dangerous!

DISCUSS: What does it mean when we say the church is built on Christ? What are some strengths of reading the passage this way? What are some weaknesses?

As is often the case with difficult things like this, I would like to give my (huge emphasis here on this word!) OPINION. I would largely agree with the first view, that it is apostolic authority that is best represented in both the person and more importantly the confession of Peter. Sortly put, it is because we proclaim the same Christ now that Peter did 2000 years ago in the district of Cesarea Phillipi, and the church is built out of people who make this same confession each generation built on the other. Contextually, this fits in well with the theme of authority that runs through all of Matthew. Jesus has all authority (see Matthew 7:28-29, for example), and he gave this authority to his disciples (here, but also see Matthew 28:18-20) and they built the church (see, like, the whole book of Acts!). To argue against the Theological position I would say it misses the (here's your 15 cent words for the day) difference between proximate and ultimate causes. It is true, Christ is the only rock of the church, he is the ultimate cause of all these things, but what Jesus is talking about here are the in-between causes, one of which is this confession. Therefore it is completely coherent to say that Jesus is THE (as in THE ONLY) Rock that the church is built on (as the ultimate cause), and that it is also built on the confession of who Jesus is (as one of many proximate causes, others being his grace and mercy, the sealing work of the Holy Spirit, the election of the saints, etc.). However, I have no issues with people who disagree on this one. We must show grace, and knowing that there are a variety of different views, all held by people that we love and respect, can help us to see that there is room for some disagreement here.