



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 16:13-23

Topic

Jesus calls Peter a rock, then tells him that believers are the living rocks with which The Lord is building His church in His absence

Title

"He Will Rock You"

Introduction

Legos harken back all the way to 1934. The name comes from the Danish phrase *leg godt*, which means "play well." They were originally made of wood. The manufacturer began producing plastic toys in 1947. In 1949 an early version of the now famous interlocking bricks were called "Automatic Binding Bricks."

In 1958, the modern brick design was developed, and it took another five years to find the right material for it, ABS polymer.

Most of you have probably seen the recent Lego movie. What you might not know is that movies starring Legos have been made by amateurs for many years. They are called brick films and are created using stop motion camera techniques.

We have a brick film on our website depicting the rapture of the church occurring as we were celebrating our twenty-year anniversary as a fellowship. You should check it out.

In our text, Jesus describes His followers as blocks with which He is building. We're not animated Legos; but we are living stones being fitted together as the building of God on earth, the dwelling place of God by His Holy Spirit.

Right after describing His followers as living stones, one of them, Peter, acts as a stumbling stone, drawing a stern rebuke from The Lord.

And therein lies the lesson for us. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You're Called Out To Be A Living Stone, and #2 You're Challenged To Not Be A Stumbling Stone.

#1 You're Called-Out To Be A Living Stone

(v13-19)

We are catching-up with Jesus at an incredible turning point in His earthly ministry. He's been telling His disciples that He will be rejected by Israel's leaders, and as a result He will not at this time establish the kingdom on the earth that God promised His chosen people. He will establish it in the future, when He returns in His Second Coming.

Between those two comings, He sends His disciples out into the whole world to preach the Gospel. For the first time, Jesus reveals that those who receive Him through the Gospel are His "church."

Mat 16:13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

He retreated, gathered around Him His closest disciples - the twelve - and started a dialog by which He would reveal to them God's plan for the age between His two comings - the age in which we live.

Jesus is Someone Who must be reckoned with. Every person needs to answer the question, "Who do you say that Jesus is?"

There's a short video clip circulating on the internet in which Bono, from U-2, is asked about Jesus. He openly confesses that Jesus is God, going so far as to say that if He is not God, then He must be considered *nuts* on account of His claims. You can tell it catches the interviewer off guard. Jesus cannot be ignored.

Mat 16:14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

It's a strange list, but no stranger than the answers people give today. Probably the most common answers are that Jesus was a great moral teacher, or another of the prophets. A billboard in Columbus, Ohio, reads "Jesus is Muslim." Jehovah's Witnesses say Jesus is Michael the Archangel.

I like the way Josh McDowell puts it: Jesus was liar, lunatic - or Lord.

Mat 16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Jesus had just identified Himself for them as "the Son of Man." The phrase comes from the Book of Daniel.

Dan 7:13 "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Dan 7:14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.

The Son of Man was their Messiah, Who would come and establish "an everlasting dominion," the "kingdom... which shall not be destroyed."

The Son of Man, however, was more than a man.

Mat 16:16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

"Son of Man" and "the Christ" seem somewhat equivalent to me; two ways to say the same thing. The Son of Man Daniel saw coming is the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, in Whom and through Whom all God's promises to Israel and the world would be fulfilled.

"Son of the living God" seems an acknowledgment of deity, does it not? The Son of Man, the Christ, is also the only begotten Son of the Father, very God of very God, God in human flesh.

Mat 16:17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

In other words, Peter did not, nor could he have, come to this conclusion without the grace of God operating on his heart.

We contribute nothing to our salvation. It is all a work of grace. It is by grace through faith we believe and are saved; and faith is not a work.

We believe - or at least, I do - that grace operates on the human heart in a way theologians call prevenient. It means it comes before, working on the heart, freeing the will to exercise faith. Thus the offer of salvation is a genuine offer to whosoever will believe.

Now if the Son of Man, the Christ, the Son of the living God, was not going to at that time establish the kingdom; if He was returning to Heaven; what **was** He going to do?

Mat 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Mat 16:19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The main thing Jesus will be doing, and is doing, is building His "church." The word itself was a common word, used of communities or assemblies of people. It literally means "a called out people," as in a special group from among a larger population.

The word was never used to refer to a building or an institution; only to people.

Jesus is building, on the earth between His comings, a spiritual community. It is comprised of all those who respond by faith to the grace of God.

It isn't an institution, but it does have structure. I mention this because today many people are criticizing the church and seeking to redefine it according to their own ideas. People are saying the church should never meet except in homes, or that there should not be large churches, or that there's no need for any leadership. I've even heard it said that you can tithe to yourself - or at least use your tithe any way you want rather than giving it to the work of The Lord.

The church is explained for us in the New Testament letters. If you look for it in the New Testament, you'll see it was a called out group of believers who met locally at least once a week, usually on Sunday. Among its gifted members were leaders - pastors, elders, and deacons. Believers gave to the work of the church joyfully, regularly, and sacrificially. They met in homes, mostly, on account of the culture. But they also met in rented buildings.

I guess what I'm saying is that when you encounter these modern criticisms of the church, take it back to the first century and you'll see what we're doing is what the first church did.

One of the most important things Jesus felt He needed to tell us about His church was that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

"Hades" is the temporary abode of the souls of the dead. Before Jesus died and rose from the dead, the souls of every person who died went to Hades. According to Jesus (Luke 16), there are two compartments in Hades. One is a place of torment, where the souls of nonbeliever go; the other is a place of comfort, called Abraham's Bosom, where the souls of believers go.

I should say, where the souls of believers *went*, because it seems that after Jesus rose from the dead, He took with Him to Heaven all the souls that were in Abraham's Bosom. Today if a believer dies, he or she does not go to Hades, but is absent from their body and present with The Lord.

Nonbeliever's souls are still sent to Hades to await the final judgment, after which they will, in resurrection bodies, be cast alive into the Lake of Fire.

"The gates of Hades shall not prevail" means several important things:

- It means that the building of His church will continue without fail until He returns for it.
- It means that, even though members of His church die, death cannot hold them.
- In light of Jesus' impending announcement of His own death, it means that His death is not the end of His church, but rather the beginning.

Surrounding His announcement of the church and its triumph over death are a few phrases that have caused confusion and controversy.

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church." This phrase gets attributed to Roman Catholics as their basis for declaring Peter their first Pope. Protestants stumble all over themselves to prove why it doesn't mean that, using several elaborate arguments.

Sometimes we forget that the Bible is a progressive revelation of God, and that it interprets itself. This wasn't the last time this language was used to describe the church. In fact, Peter himself used it in his letters, giving us his own interpretation.

First, let's look at the words themselves. "You are Peter" (*Petros*, "rock"), "and on this rock" (*petra*) I will build my church."

Petros is a masculine singular noun. *Petra* is feminine. And while related, they represent a distinction.

- The masculine singular form refers to Peter as one singular rock or stone.
- The feminine form may be understood to represent bedrock or a rock quarry.

Peter was one rock among a rock quarry. He was not the foundation upon which the church was built.

He would later say the same thing himself, using the words "stone" and "stones" to get his thought across.

1Pe 2:4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,

1Pe 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the "living stone"; believers are the "living stones" He is building His church with.

Peter included himself as one of the stones; no more, no less. In other passages, he described himself as an apostle (First Peter 1:1), an elder (First Peter 5:11), and as a servant (Second Peter 1:1). No more; no less.

The apostle Paul would state this same truth in Ephesians 2:19-22, saying that the church Jesus is building is "God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole [stone] building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in The Lord... a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Paul called Jesus the "chief cornerstone." He also called Him the "foundation" (First Corinthians 3:11).

Peter was blessed; he was certainly a leader among the twelve; but he was no more than you or I, a living stone in the building Jesus is constructing upon Himself as it's foundation.

What about the keys of the kingdom, and the binding and loosing mentioned in verse nineteen?

Later in Matthew - in 18:18 - Jesus says this to **all** the disciples, and, by extension, **to all future believers**. It wasn't something just for Peter.

"Keys," and "binding and loosing," are the symbols and the duties, respectively, of stewards. We are stewards of the Gospel. When we share it, it is the key that unlocks the entrance into the kingdom of God for those who respond to the grace of God by faith.

"Binding" means *prohibiting*; "loosing" means *permitting*. Again, the idea is that we have been delegated authority by God to act on His behalf on the earth - obviously within the boundaries of His will revealed in His Word.

You'll notice the verse reads, "*whatever* you bind" or loose, not "*whoever*." It has to do with our handling of the Word of God as God's stewards.

Wilmington said of this, "the actions of a Spirit-led believer carry Heaven's authority."

You've been called-out to be a living stone in the Lord's spiritual community that He is building. You are a living stone with Heaven's authority.

Think of it for a moment. You can declare to a person that, if they repent and believe Jesus in response to the grace of God, their sins are forgiven, and they have eternal life.

That, my friends, is the delegated authority given to you as stewards of the Gospel.

#2 You're Challenged To Not Be A Stumbling Stone

(v20-23)

This is the first time Jesus speaks openly and plainly about His impending death and resurrection.

There have been hints:

- In John 2:18–22 Jesus had predicted that if the Jews destroyed the Temple, He would raise it again in three days. They didn't realize He was speaking of Himself as the Temple, and of His death and resurrection.
- To Nicodemus, who came with his questions, in John 3, Jesus had said that He had to be lifted up, even as the serpent in the wilderness, in order to save those who believed in Him (vv. 14–18).
- In His interchange with the Pharisees, in Matthew 12:38–41, He had indicated that He would spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth.
- The same thought had been repeated in Matthew 16:4.

Now, however, the time had come to speak plainly.

Mat 16:20 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

As we will see in a moment, though Jesus spoke plainly, even the twelve did not understand that He was going to the Cross. Certainly "no one" else would.

Any announcement Jesus was the Son of Man, the Christ, would cause the people to think their kingdom was about to be established when, in fact, it was being postponed while the church was being built.

Mat 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

"The elders and chief priests and scribes" is shorthand for the Sanhedrin - the rulers of the Jews. Jesus would be officially rejected by Israel's rulers.

His prophetic statement "raised the third day" seemed to get lost in "suffer many things... and be killed."

Mat 16:22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

Why do we want to fault Peter when we probably would have done the same thing?

We have a tendency, do we not, to want to soften the blow of bad news? We do it all the time.

Even when people are dying, we often try to give them false hope.

There's optimism; there's pessimism; I'm talking about realism. Let's be real with one another, and with others.

Peter was trying to encourage The Lord. But think how terribly discouraging this must have been. Jesus needed support to go to the Cross, not temptation to avoid it.

I wonder if the Lord's eyes welled with tears as He looked upon the guy who had just uttered a tremendous statement of faith?

Mat 16:23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Strong words, to be sure. But Peter needed to hear them - for his own spiritual good and growth. Through His own sorrow, Jesus was ministering to Peter. What a friend we have in Jesus.

Peter wasn't demon-possessed, or even demon oppressed. He was simply, but sadly, saying exactly what Satan had said in the wilderness temptation of Christ - "avoid the Cross."

Anytime we are "not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men," we, too, are playing into Satan's strategies.

In this case, the "things of men" would say, "don't suffer; don't die." But without His death we could not be saved.

Today the "things of men" opposed to the "things of God" are all around us. A big one today is *happiness* versus *holiness*.

God wants us to be holy, and that means living within the loving boundaries He has established for us in His Word. Things like abstaining from premarital sex, from adultery, from homosexuality and other sexual sins.

It's bad enough that nonbelievers are involved in these things, but even believers balk at holiness, claiming God wants them to be happy.

To which Jesus would still say, "Get behind Me, Satan!"

"Offense" is *stumbling-block*. Peter the stone became Peter the stumbling-block.

That's a great point of application for us. None of us living stones want to be stumbling-blocks to the work of The Lord.

But if we are not mindful of the things of God - hey, that's exactly what we become, both to other believers, and to nonbelievers.

We are building blocks, living stones whom Jesus, the living stone, has placed in His building. But once in place, we are also builders.

1Co 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, **you are God's building**.

1Co 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he **builds** on it.

1Co 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

We talk, in our society, about building things. We build families; we build wealth; we build careers.

Well, we are also, and maybe even primarily, to be building within the church.

Each of us should "take heed how" we build in terms of how much of our time... How much of our talent... And how much of our treasure we are using to build within the church.