

1. Our LifeLines verse for October 2 will be Joshua 1:8.
2. LifeLines will meet through Monday, November 13!

LifeLines September 25, 2023

Today's Scripture: 1 Verse

Matthews 16:18

And I tell you, you are Peter, & on this rock I will
build My church, & the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.*

(*This is a good time to remember that both the OT & NT books of the Bible were not written with punctuation or verse numbers.)

WHY WE'RE HERE

2 Timothy 3:16-17, All scripture is inspired by God & is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, & for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

CONTEXT (Here's a controversial verse!)

Jesus took the disciples to Caesarea Philippi, at the foot of Mount Hermon. Today, it's called Banias (BAAH-ni-us). The nearby natural springs running down from the mountain are the largest source of the Jordan River. This is about 25 miles north of the more religious cities of the Galilee region, in Jesus' time. It was an area dominated by immoral activities & pagan worship. In this setting, the word *church* was used for the first time in the NT.

In that area & the nearby city of Dan, Canaanites, Greeks & Romans had built sanctuaries. The cave of Pan's seemingly bottomless pit had been a worship site for Baal & other false gods, like the Greek god Pan, & fertility gods. People, including babies & children, were sacrificed here.

(See pictures of the Grotto of Pan.) Worshipers of false gods believed the cave at Caesarea Philippi to be "the gates of hell," the very gate to the underworld. At one time, water flowed from the mouth of the cave. They thought their gods traveled to & from the cave. In carved out places in the towering cliffs were shrines & statues to the pagan gods. Horrible, detestable deeds were performed there.

Jesus took the disciples to this evil pagan area. The disciples must have been shocked when Jesus brought them to that place. Devout Jews would have avoided contact with the people or the area, yet this is the pagan setting Jesus chose to deliver an important message to His disciples. Why? He didn't want His followers being afraid of or hiding from evil. He wanted them to be confident enough in their faith to attack evil head on – in other words, *to storm the gates of hell!* He said His church would overcome the worst evils, even evils such as were practiced in this area.

This is where Jesus asked the disciples who people said He was. They offered various responses. When Jesus asked who *they* say He is, it's Peter's response that attracted the attention. When Simon Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, & Son of God, Jesus blessed him for listening to God, saying only God could have revealed this to Simon Peter.

Protestants & Catholics debate as to whom or what the "rock" is upon which Jesus would build His church. Peter was certainly central in proclaiming the gospel to the Jews as Paul was for the Gentiles. So...Is the rock Peter? Is the rock the declaration he made? Or could we be the rock?

DIFFERENT VERSIONS (Versions not listed are similar to the NRSV.)

AMP

And I tell you, you are Peter (Greek, Petros – large piece of rock), & on this rock (Greek, petra – a huge rock like Gibraltar) I will build My church, & the gates of Hades (the powers of the infernal region) shall not overpower it (or be strong to its detriment or hold out against it).

NCV

So I tell you, you are Peter. On this rock I will build My church, & the power of death will not be able to defeat it.

SELAH

BREAKING DOWN THE VERSE

And I tell you, you are Peter... Jesus declared Peter would be *one* of the building stones of the church. Peter = Petros (Greek), a detached stone or boulder. (When Jesus later chastised Peter, who wanted to prevent Jesus from going to the cross – get behind Me, Satan – he became a stumbling block!) For those who believe “rock” *does* refer to Peter, it can only be by virtue of the declaration he made.

& on this rock... Most theologians agree that Peter is *not* the rock being spoken of! The rock/foundation upon which the church & all of Christianity is built is believed (by most theologians) to be *the statement Peter made* – “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Rock = petra (Greek) means a mass of rock, as in a whole foundation.) Jesus doesn’t say, “and on *you*” I will build My church. He says, “& on *this rock*.” The church isn’t founded on Peter, but on the wonderful, eternal significant confession of faith about the person of Christ *that God revealed to Peter*.

I will build My church... Jesus said *He* is the one who will do this! He said He would build His church, *His church*, on Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah. The future tense refers to the birth of the church in The Acts of the Apostles. *We* don’t build churches, but we *are* the instruments through which Jesus builds His church. We do this by being disciples, witnesses & stewards who sow seeds & more!

The foundation of Jesus’ church is the rock of who Jesus is, Jesus’ teachings, & the apostle’s teachings. The church is not intended to be defined as merely a building. It is *the assembly of God’s people*, a *community* in which the holiness of God lives & is displayed!

Jesus planned to build His church to confront evil in the bedrock of false gods as in the area of Caesarea Philippi, where ungodly values dominated.

& the gates of Hades will not prevail against it... “Gates of hell” can refer to threats from forces of evil, the powers of death & darkness or evil or anything that stands in opposition to the will of God in Christ Jesus. The term also applies directly to the area adjacent to where the apostles stood that day!

Jesus’ commission to them was huge & probably overwhelming – to attack evil & build the church in places of moral corruption. Nothing, not even Satan will permanently overpower the church. Nothing stands a chance against the Word of God. Jesus’ church was going to attack the gates of hell.

When we are not ashamed of or embarrassed about our faith, we can stand on the rock of our faith in the Son of the living God. No matter how fierce the resistance, we are to stand firm on our faith, committed to the one true God. God’s side is the offensive team, & strong faith equips us to confront evil in any form.

SELAH

RELATED VERSES (Add other related verses as you think of them.)

Exodus 14:14, The Lord will fight for you, & you have only to keep still.

Isaiah 28:16, Therefore thus says the Lord God, “See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation.”

Isaiah 43:18-19, Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness & rivers in the desert.

Daniel 2:44, And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms & bring them to an end, & it shall stand forever;

Matthew 7:24-25, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine & acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the floods came, & the winds blew & beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.”

Matthew 16:16-17, Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh & blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in heaven.”

Matthew 16:23, But He turned & said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Matthew 21:42a, Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;’”

Luke 9:26, “Those who are ashamed of Me & of My words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His glory & the glory of the Father & of the holy angels.”

Acts 20:28, Keep watch over yourselves & over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that He obtained with the blood of His own Son.

1 Corinthians 3:11, For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

Galatians 5:19-21, Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, & things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 1:22-23, And He has put all things under His feet & has made Him the head over all things for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 2:20, ...built upon the foundation of the apostles & prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.

Ephesians 3:21, To Him (God) be glory in the church & in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever & ever. Amen.

Ephesians 5:23, For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which He is the Savior.

Colossians 1:18a, He is the head of the body, the church.

Revelation 3:20, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear My voice & open the door, I will come in to you & eat with you, & you with Me."

Revelation 21:14, And the wall of the city has 12 foundations, & on them are the 12 names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

SUMMARY

What others think of Christ may not be as important as what *we* think of Him. Each person is responsible for his own beliefs. Jesus was rejected by His own Jewish people, even crucified; but He rose from the dead, & built His church through those who followed Him & those who came after Him. We are still "building" the church today, because *we are the church!*

Who do *we* say Jesus is? If He is our Lord & Savior, are we treating Him as such? If He were to call asking to visit your home, would you invite friends over & make it a big deal? Would you make sure everything was *just right* for this important visitor? Would you tell *everyone*?

Well, He *is in* us everyday & *with us* every day through the person of the Holy Spirit. Let's be sure our lives reflect His Light in us. Let's be sure the gates of hell never prevail in our lives!

CONCLUSION

The church belongs to Jesus. It is *His* church. He bought it with *His blood*. We are the very bride of Christ. The church operates under His authority, is advanced by His power & exists for His glory.

He is the head of the body that is the church. The church, the body of Christ, exists only because of the central truth that Jesus is the Son of the living God, the Messiah. That is the power that keeps the gates of hell from overcoming those who are "in Christ." As the people of God, *we can be a rock*, too, by standing firm in our faith, by never hiding our faith & by proclaiming the truth about Christ – His gospel, the Good News.

Wherever people are proclaiming the gospel of Christ, Jesus will build His church. He continues to build His church on Peter's confession & declaration. We each have a part to play.

Let Matthew 16:18 be a *LifeLine* for you!

SCRIPTURE IS OUR –

LifeLine!

Take a minute or two & write something you want to remember about this LifeLine:
