

Faith Matters - # 21 – “On This Rock” – Sept. 24, 2017

Jesus will increase his followers worldwide. How can he do it? He said, “On this rock I will build my church.” Those inspiring words of Jesus have been understood in one of two ways, depending on what question churches ask. One church asks: Who is this rock on which Jesus will build his church? and another asks, What is this rock that Jesus will build his church on? Who or what will be the foundation of Christ’s church?

The answer to “Who?” is obvious. It’s Peter. His Latin name “Petros” and his Aramaic name Cephas both mean “rock”. So on this rock, Peter, Jesus will build his church. Some people point out that Peter, the rock, crumbled when he denied Jesus three times. But our failures never stop God from trusting us; Moses had been a murderer, yet God called him to lead his people out of slavery; Saul oversaw the death of Christians before he was converted. Peter is given the keys to the Kingdom¹.

The answer to “What is this rock?” is just as obvious. Jesus had asked him who he thought Jesus was. Peter replied, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”². That confession is the rock, the foundation, on which Jesus will build his church. Scripture says the keys to the Kingdom are also given to the community³.

So we have two answers concerning the rock on which the Church will be built. We have to be careful when we think we have the one “right” answer, because when you are right, you may be blind to other ways of finding truth. But we can be sure that all churches do accept Jesus as Messiah, that is, he is the only one to rescue us from the power of death and evil, and all do accept that he is the Son of the living God.

As Paul says, “No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid, that foundation is Jesus Christ”⁴. Too often, churches have tried other foundations: power, tradition, popularity, social action, rules and regulations....

But let’s not forget the rest of what Jesus said: “I will build my church”. Not, “you will build your church”; not even “You will build my church”. He says, “I will build my church.” Despite the church’s decline in Canada, it will be built and on the foundation of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God. That’s a reason both to celebrate and to help Jesus make it happen!

1 - Matthew 16:19. 2 - 16:16. 3 - 18:18 & John 20:23 4 - I Cor. 3:11

(by Rev. Willard Pottinger, Erskine Presbyterian Church, Hamilton)