

Salvation is Rock Solid Certain!

It is based on the person of Jesus
It is guarded by the power of Jesus

In case you did not realize it yet, there is a lot of uncertainty in our world these days. Because of COVID, no one can plan anything with any degree of certainty. We do not know how the school year is going to go, or when we will be able to go shopping without looking like a robber, or when businesses will recover (if ever), or how many will test positive or die. All of the uncertainty in our world leave us feeling anxious, edgy, nervous and worried. This morning, on the basis of Matthew 16:13-20, we will be glad to see that the most important thing in life, our salvation, is rock-solid certain.

It is based on the person of Jesus

When Jesus was alone with his disciples, he asked (:13), “**Who do people say the Son of Man is?**” The disciples explained (:14), “**Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.**” People thought that Jesus was some great prophet. There’s not a slacker in that group. Unfortunately, they did not think that he was **THE PROPHET**, the Savior sent from heaven.

Americans today do not even consider Jesus to be a great prophet. I watched a video as a group in New York city randomly asked people, “Who is Jesus?” Some of the answers were, “He was a man. A marketing genius to get so many people to follow him. A magician. He was God’s son, just like Gandhi or Muhammad or any of us. He was a symbol of forgiveness. Someone who tried to impart wisdom and make the world a better place.” They all said nice things about Jesus, but not nice enough. A recent Barna survey found just over 50% of Americans say that Jesus was God. That sounds promising, but even that 50% is deceptive. Christianity Today magazine took a survey and found that 78% of those who call themselves Christian believe that Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God the Father. What? So, even among people who call themselves Christian, 78% think that Jesus is not the eternal God equal to the Father.

In Jesus’ day and today, most people say nice things about Jesus, but, sadly, they never want to say quite enough. The same thing can happen to us. Because we are physical people who live in a physical world, it is very easy for us to start looking to Jesus as a physical, or earthly, Savior. Lots of people do. I saw an article this week that encouraged people to read the Bible. It’s sub-title was, “Book of healing – Bible offers hope, comfort in troubled

times like ours.” That sounded good. I read the article and it only talked about how the Bible has stories of hope and healing. It NEVER even mentioned sin, forgiveness, heaven or Jesus. Even if there was perfect peace in our world – which will never happen – what good would it do if we did not have Jesus as our Savior? Watch out for such hollow talk about Jesus the Bible and Jesus. It’s very common.

It is easy to look to Jesus as some sort of financial advisor who can help us get out of debt, or a social reformer who will make our country a Christian moral country, or a coach who will help our team win, or a physician who will heal all our diseases, or something else. The devil would not mind it a bit if Jesus made our lives on earth happy all the time as long we do not look to Jesus as our spiritual Savior. The devil wants you to think of Jesus as less than he is.

Jesus then asked his disciples (:15), “**But what about [all of] you? Who do you say I am?**” Simon Peter, the most outspoken of the disciples answered on behalf of the others (:16), “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” Peter did not mean that Jesus is younger than, or less than, true God, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses say. When talking about God, the Bible uses the terms “Father” and “Son” to describe their relationship with each other. They are separate, but together. Peter was saying, “Jesus, you are God in the flesh, absolutely equal to the Father. You are not a stone or a hunk of metal like some idol. You are living and active and all-powerful.”

Peter said that Jesus was “**the Christ.**” “Christ” is a Greek word. In Hebrew, it’s “**Messiah.**” Both “Christ” and “Messiah” mean “the anointed one,” the one who is specially chosen for a special task.” Throughout the Old Testament, the Anointed One is described as the person who was going to come to save the world from sin and death. He would be crushed and pierced as he would be blamed for our sins so that we could live with God in heaven. Peter’s answer was spot on. Jesus is far more than just a great prophet, or teacher, or advisor, or helper, or friend. Jesus is God himself.

If Jesus is not true God then your salvation would be uncertain. If Jesus was not true God, then he would not have been able to live the perfect life we needed in order to get into heaven. If Jesus was not true God, then he would not be able to connect to each and every human being of every time and place. If Jesus was not true God then he would not have been able to rise from the dead to guarantee life after death for us. If Jesus is not true God then your salvation is uncertain.

My friends, Jesus surpasses all expectations. He is true God. Peter and the other apostles saw him perform miracle after miracle, proving that he is

God. His resurrection from the dead especially proves that is who he claimed to be – true God in the flesh. That does not make sense to us how someone can be both God (who is everywhere all the time) and human (who can only be in one spot at a time). Because it defies the laws of science, it is impossible for flesh and blood humans to figure it out on our own. Jesus explained (:17), **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”** The only way someone can believe in Jesus as true God, their Savior, is if God gives them that faith. God has to reveal it to them, pull back the cover so we recognize Jesus as true God, our Savior.

Just as the Father revealed the truth of Jesus to Peter, he has revealed that truth to you. You, also, are blessed – happy in a specifically spiritual sense. You know and believe that Jesus is true God, your Savior from sin and death. Even though he is everywhere all the time, Jesus connects with you one on one. Since you are connected to him through faith, his life is your life. You are holy and pure! His death is your death. Your sins are forgiven! His resurrection is your resurrection. You will rise from the dead! As true God, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is rock solid. Your salvation is based on the person of Jesus – who he is and what he did. Since Jesus is true God, that means that your salvation is rock solid certain.

It is guarded by the power of Jesus

Jesus continued (:18), **“I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”**

These words have been misunderstood and misused by many. The Roman Catholic Church uses these words to say that Peter is the first pope, the foundation of the church. Not quite. Jesus is making a play on words. He said to Simon, **“You are Peter.”** The word Peter means “rock,” a piece of a rock, a stone that someone could pick up and throw, nothing too significant. Then Jesus said, **“and on this rock [He is making a distinction.] I will build my church.”** This word for “rock” means a huge rocky area, like a cliff. It is something large and solid that you could build a castle on. Jesus is talking about a concept, not a person. Jesus is not talking about Peter but about Peter-like faith. The holy Christian church is not built on Peter. It is based on faith. Those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be saved. Nothing can change that truth. It is rock-solid certain. It is guarded by the power of Jesus.

Throughout history, people and nations have tried to get rid of Christ and Christianity. The Roman Empire 2000 years ago declared Christianity illegal and killed Christians. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union tried to eliminate Christianity. Today, Muslim nations and others, like North Korea and China, are trying to get rid of Christianity. Such enemies of Christ may be

able to arrest, prosecute, persecute and even kill Christians, but they will never eliminate the Christian Church. Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against his kingdom. Not even the strongest efforts by Satan and his demons will be able to destroy the Christian Church. And the Lord will guard your faith, too.

As you read through the Bible you see, again and again, how the Lord treated the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans and other nations like toy soldiers that he set up and knocked down. Do you think that the Lord lost any power since then? Of course not. He is still seated on his throne and controlling all things for the good of his body, which is the church, which is YOU. People and powers continue to push back against Jesus, and yet, as Ps 2:4 says, **“The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.”** All of those old empires are gone, but God’s kingdom is still going strong. The fact that you are sitting here in church this morning listening to God’s Word, confessing faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and shining your faith in your daily life with deeds of love and kindness is proof that Jesus is keeping his promise to preserve his church forever. He is guarding it with his power.

In verse 19, Jesus talks about the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The keys are the power to tell unbelievers that they are locked out of heaven because they reject Jesus and the power to tell believers that the doors of heaven are open to them. Every time you hear that announcement of forgiveness, that Jesus loves you, that heaven is your home, your faith is strengthened. Your foundation on Christ is made more secure.

So much in our world is insecure, and not just because of COVID. Some disease, or cancer or tumor could be diagnosed tomorrow. The economy and our own finances could collapse overnight. Some storm or accident could hit at any time. All of this uncertainty can leave us feeling anxious, edgy, nervous, worried, insecure. In such uncertain times, you can find comfort and confidence knowing that the most important thing in life, your salvation, is secure! In the midst of an uncertain world, your salvation is rock solid certain. Amen.