

"You Are a Rock!"

Matthew 16:13-20

August 24, 2008

Last week I wrestled around with some of the things we say about God and asked you the direct question, "Who IS God anyway?"

Here Jesus asks of Peter a couple of key questions, but pretty much the same question I just asked you. "Who do men say that I am? And who do YOU say that I am?"

If you went to one of the great centers of learning in America today, or to one of the cultural centers in the first century, and asked, "Who is God, anyway?" you would probably get the same answers.

People all over American believe in God. I mentioned recently that 76% of Hoosiers believe in God. But it is an empty and shallow kind of belief. It is one thing to believe in God, it is quite another thing to put your faith in God.

According to Matthew, Peter had been called by Jesus, he had listened to Jesus teach and heard what he had to say. He had seen a storm calmed. He had tried his hand at walking on water. He had seen Jesus heal people. Now he was about to receive an awesome affirmation, and what you might call a commissioning. But it began with the two questions. The answer to the question "Who do YOU say I am" was "you are the son of the living God." Verse 17 clearly says this faith statement was given to him by God at work in him. He surely did not know the implications of that statement. He did not know what was coming in his life. But that is who he had decided Jesus was. Who do YOU believe Jesus is? Here is one man's answers

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Maybe the challenge at the end of this is to proclaim that because of who HE is, because of what we believe, because of what we know that WE TOO ARE A ROCK, just as Jesus said of Peter.

Some of you are going to come up and say to me this week, or are even sitting there right now thinking - Paul, you're nuts. I am no rock. No church could be built on me. You don't know how weak I am. You don't know where I've been, what I've done, how mixed up I am, how many times I have no idea what my faith is about, how many times I have said or would say "I don't know this man". Let me remind you that by the end of the story, in Matthew chapter 26, this one that Jesus called a rock, was the great denier. The one who fell asleep in the prayer meeting, the coward who didn't want to be whipped and put to death like Jesus, the one who wanted to do everything his own way and take Jesus with him down side streets away from his purpose. Yup, that's Peter. But yes, this too is Peter, because it is what Jesus saw in Peter and what Jesus declared of Peter.

Our knowledge of Him transforms us from what we are and where we are, to what He wants us to be and where He wants us to go. It's a whole new life and nothing is ever again the

same. As long as in the middle of the weakness and failures we keep our eyes on Him and keep coming back to Him.

I kept wondering – why did Jesus ask Peter what others say about him? What did it matter? Why should Peter care about what others think, as long as he had his own thoughts straight? Then the answer came to me. Because it should matter to Peter what others think of Jesus. Because Jesus wanted Peter to have a focus, to always think about the others. You know, don't you, that there are a lot of people who care only about their own faith, their own relationship with Jesus, their own salvation – and don't honestly give second thought to anyone else.

But this very question gives focus to Peter's life, and to the church. The Church must always be concerned not just with itself, but with others. The answer to this question of mine, the purpose of this issue with Peter, goes clear back to God's covenant with Abraham. That Abraham would be blessed and would be a blessing. And a self-centered faith, with no thought for the other person, is no faith at all. It is not what the Christian faith is all about.

To clearly understand who Jesus is drives one's life. To be a Jesus follower is not only about taking care of one's self, but about reaching out to others to help them, to care for them, to help them find faith and become followers as well.

You people here today have been called by God to be His Church. You are not here to just survive. You are not here to just make a living. You are not here on this earth to just be good boys and girls and go to heaven when you die. You are here for a purpose. God has called you, then commissioned you - just as he did Peter. You are the church. Wherever you are - in the lab, in the classroom, taking care of the children, heading up the plant, treating the patients, filling out the forms. You are the church. Your life has eternal significance. You are called to be the light of Christ in a broken world.