

**The Church in Biblical Perspective:
The Ekklesia: God's Church for the Ages –
His Preeminence—Our Passion**

Matthew 16:13-20

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

January 16, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Our text for this study is found in Matthew 16 on the preeminence of Christ, “His Preeminence, Our Passion.” We will look at a couple of passages in this study. Let’s look at this marvelous text with Jesus and the disciples in the Northern part of Israel, right at the foot of Mount Hermon at a place called Caesarea Philippi. Matthew 16:13- 20 says

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

The grass withers, the flower fades and this is God’s Word. It abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

Last week we started a couple of months study and my plea was this. I know in many ways what we are going to cover many of you already know but my plea to you was as Briarwood moves from 50 years of celebration into the future, I don’t think the key is that we get ingenious to re-engineer the church. I think the key is that we embrace the foundational principles that Christ has given for His church and we ask God that they be done with excellence, that He enlarge them in our hearts, that they be expanded and that we grow in doing the basics well, the foundations well. So it is no accident that our theme for the year is the two life lines – prayer and the Word. You can’t get more basic than how the Lord

communicates with us through the Word and how we communicate with Him through prayer. Those are so crucial.

Here is how we started last week. God's church is our home, the Ekklesia. The word 'ekklesia' means the called together ones. That is what the church is. It's not a building. I know all of you have heard that Sunday school deal, right? "Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door, here's the people." Okay, it's a great rhyme but its bad theology. The church isn't the building. The church is the people. The church is the meeting place of the building. We are called together ones. So we are committed as the family of God to one another. This is the 'house' we meet in. We learned last week from Ephesians 2 that God's household is built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. Christ is the Cornerstone and it's our home. It's God's church, our home, where we dwell with our Father in the power of the Spirit and it's where we serve Him. So that is the Ekklesia, God's church, our home.

Now we get started. Having established that now we move forward. We move forward in a way that had been the history and legacy of this church but it can't be assumed. It must be embraced. It must be enlarged. It must be expanded and that's this. It is the preeminence of Christ, not the preeminence of anything other than Christ. It's not the preeminence of Briarwood or our denomination or of any servant in the church or pastor in the church. It is the preeminence of Christ that is absolutely crucial. Every journey starts with the first step and you can't take the first step until you know the destination.

I want to come back to that statement by first of all saying this. What is the mission of Briarwood? At the end of this transcription is an outline of what we covered in the last study. Our mission is For God's glory, Briarwood is committed to EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. Do you want lost people to be saved? Yes we do but we're not going for them we're going to them for Christ. Do we want worship to arise to the glory of God? Absolutely. Why and how? It is because of Christ. Do we want the Good News to be shared? Yes we do for Christ. Do we want Gospel deeds to be done of mercy, love, justice and benevolence? Absolutely. Why? It is for Christ and to be Christ centered. That means we have a vision and our vision is simply this; For Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled EQUIPPING CENTER where every member is a minister (giving praise to God in worship) and a missionary. We minister worship to God, we minister the Gospel to the world through evangelism, we minister love to one another and we minister the grace of the Lord Jesus to ourselves to grow deep in the Lord. Every believer is taking that Gospel forward.

How do we do the mission? We do it for Christ. What is the mission? It is for coming generations, the next generation of churches. The key is to the next generation of churches, preachers, and missionaries. We can't be church planting centered or evangelism centered or mercy centered or worship

centered. All of those things are glorious and they will only be done if we are Christ centered. We must be Christ centered. It's our legacy. Praise the Lord! It must be maintained. It can't be Briarwood centered. If we maintain being Christ centered (we'll talk about Gospel driven and Spirit filled later) Christ will be preeminent which is the passion of His church. Christ's preeminent is our passion. It absolutely consumes us and in everything we love we love for Christ because of Christ, from Christ and to Christ. He is our all. I think that is so crucial and I believe if we stay Christ centered we can be effective for the next generation of believers, pastors, missionaries and churches. All of those things will come forth when a church is Christ centered. So let's build on that for the next few moments.

So how can we be Christ centered so that we're Gospel driven, Spirit filled with every member a missionary equipping a community? How can we be Christ centered? Let's start with one passage of Scripture and a few more later on. I love this text in Matthew 16. I read it every time I go to Israel. I stand on the very road where Jesus gave these words and we walk our way through it. Jesus is having a marvelous dialogue and so what is the preeminence of Christ and His passion? Let's look at the preeminence of Christ and His passion from this text.

First of all the Lord let's us see an interview with two questions by Christ and two answers to Christ. Question number one is 'who do "people" say that I am?' What are people saying about Me? This is a very general question. The Apostles answer back, 'You are a great Prophet. You're Jeremiah, You're Elijah, You're John the Baptist.' I want to tell you what I think is being said there. I think that the disciples think they need to encourage Jesus after He asks this question so they say things like 'You're a great Preacher, You're like one of the Prophets. People are talking about You in the same breath as they do Elijah, Jeremiah and even that guy that just got killed, John the Baptist. They are really saying great things about You.'

Then Jesus moves from the general question with the general answer, well meaning, but we haven't gotten to where we need to be and He then goes to a very specific question. Question number two is 'Who do "you" say that I AM?' He carefully uses the phrase 'I AM' which is a name for God. I am that I am. In the Gospel of John they will really develop it, i.e. "I am the door, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the Shepherd, I am..., I am..., I am... Very clearly when John the elder writes the Gospel of John is emphasizing that. So here we are now looking at this same text where Jesus is uttering that phrase 'I AM' and up pops Peter. You can depend on Peter. He is a preacher's blessing of every possible illustration you ever need. He doesn't have huff and mouth disease but heart and mouth disease. His heart is going to come right out of his mouth and sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so good. Here it is great because he answers "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are the Prophet, the Priest, the King. You are greater than Moses and Aaron, the Prophet. You are greater

than Melchizedek, the Priest. You are greater than David, the King. You are the Christ, the Anointed One, the Sent One. You are God having come in the flesh.”

Then Jesus says something to Peter that every single one of you that have ever uttered ‘Jesus is my Christ, my Savior’ He could have said to you. Jesus says “Simon son of John, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father who is in heaven.” In other words, you can’t come and confess Christ in all of His majesty unless the Father sends the Spirit to open your heart, gives you eyes to see and ears to hear. Blessed are you. Blessings have come from the Blessed One to set you free to see Me as the Christ. This didn’t come from human ability but from the throne of heaven. Jesus says in Matthew 16:17-18, **17** And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar- Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

So now we move from the interview to where the preeminent Christ gives a promise with two declarations. One declaration is ‘I will build My church’ and the second declaration is ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ Now notice something. When we see this we immediately get excited when we hear ‘I will build My church.’ There is the absolute confidence we have from the mouth of Christ through the cross of Christ, the glorious truth that Christ’s church will be triumphant. I will build My church and those promises are yes and amen in Jesus like everything else. So Jesus will build His church.

The second thing He said was the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I want to turn those inside out for a minute. What does that tell you? It tells you that Jesus is the Builder and He uses us as workmen, right? Here is something else it tells you. It also tells you it’s His church. So let’s talk about Briarwood for a minute. I have a personal responsibility to speak pastorally and if what I’m about to say is application to other churches, praise the Lord but this is what we need to be reminded of. This isn’t Harry’s church. It doesn’t belong to the PCA (Presbyterian Church in America). It doesn’t belong to you. It belongs to Christ. Christ says, “I will build My church.” It is His and it belongs to Christ. Now I want to act like I own it in the sense of what He owns I want to take good care of because I’m a steward but it’s His. It belongs to Him and it’s sacred. It belongs to Him. It’s His church, My church, the preeminence of Christ.

Let’s go to the other declaration. Because of Him, here is the promise. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The phrase ‘the gates of hell’ deserves a lot more treatment than I will give here but how many of you have ever been overcome by a gate? It’s interesting how it looks at the gate as a statement of power that you usually use for defense but what He is saying on the back side of this is Satan and his kingdom has been defeated. They are going to act like they are on offense but actually it’s on defense. His days are numbered from the day that Christ went to the cross and defeated the evil one. So here is ‘I will build My

church' and 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' but by the way, having said that let's also make something else clear. What else is Jesus saying by that? He is also saying that the church will be assaulted by the kingdom of darkness and Satan. Why would He give a promise that it won't prevail if it's not going to try to prevail? So Satan will assault a Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled church. Jesus will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it but it will be assaulted.

Here's the deal. I want to be very particular for us. God has blessed us for 50 years. Christ given blessings for this church does not insulate us from the attacks of the evil one in the future. The blessings of Christ do not insulate us from Satan's snares, his temptations, his attacks outside, or his attacks inside the church. Let me go a step further. Our legacy of thanking God for blessings out of blessings, with all of our imperfections being obvious, but God has been gracious to us. That legacy of God's blessings to us throughout all of these years, for 50 years, does not insulate us from the attacks of the evil one in the futures but on the contrary it positions us as a target. Satan would love for us to live in the past or abandon the future. He would love for us to get detoured and distracted. He would love for us where Christ has been everything to make everything Christ has done for us everything instead of Christ continuing to be everything. So here is the truth. Satan will assault. Christ has promised to prevail. He builds a victorious church.

In other words, the church until Jesus comes back, is going to face exactly what Jesus faced when He came the first time. The Son of God comes to save sinners. What does Satan do? He attacks. He attacks in Bethlehem through the destruction of the innocence. He attacked in the wilderness. He attacks and attacks and attacks. He even attacked in this text. He says "Peter upon this rock," which deserves quite a bit more treatment than I can give today because there's a verse that Christendom has divided over for years now. They say "Who is the rock?" Peter (which means stone, rock), I say to you, upon this rock I will build My church. So the Roman church has said that Peter is the rock. The only problem is that is if that is true then the first time He makes the statement is four verses later. Jesus says "I'm going to go to Jerusalem, I'm going to die because they will put me to death and I'll rise again" and Peter newly crowned who is supposedly in the seat of papal authority then says "God forbid that this should happen." And Jesus says, "Get thee behind Me Satan." That's not too good for your first utterance in papal authority. I don't think Peter is the rock. The protestant church has always said the rock is Christ. Look at all the text that we have to support that. So the protestant church says "It's the confession that is the rock. It's Peter's confession." It's interesting that the first time Jesus says this to Peter that Satan's first attack is through Peter. You are the personification of Satan, get thee behind Me Satan, you have set your mind on man's interest not God's interest. Right there Satan is attacking the church. So is it simply this confession that upon this rock I will build My church and the rock is the

confession that Christ is the Son of God, the Messiah. Obviously, that is where I would kind of tend to but there is a third option.

The third option is Peter, on behalf of the Apostles, who are speaking on behalf of the Prophets, in which the Prophets led to the Apostles and we're built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets being the Old Testament and New Testament and Christ is the Cornerstone. I think what He is saying here is that Peter with the Word of God that comes through the Prophets and the Apostles, the foundation, is all based and leans upon Christ the Cornerstone. So here is the foundation of the Word of God, focused upon Christ that becomes the Rock of the church that cannot be prevailed upon by Satan and his attacks that begin in the very next breath almost. There is the confidence that we have.

So that is the preeminence of Christ and His passion. Is that our passion and should it be our passion? Should the preeminence of Christ be our passion? I want to look in Colossians 1. It is so interesting to me because actually in my quiet times in the morning I am in the book of Colossians right now and in this passage this last week. Colossians 1:15-20 says

15 He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (The incarnation is the glory of God revealed.). 16 For by him all things were created (So the Father created everything, how? By Him.), in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things (The Son of God is eternal.), and in him all things hold together (He sustains everything.). 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

It is this Christ and Him crucified. Do you see why the Apostle Paul says "I determine to know nothing among you but Christ and Christ crucified"? It is because it is Christ and the work of the cross. This is the Christ that created everything. This is the Christ who upholds everything by the Word of His power. It is this Christ that came and went to a cross and died for our sins to purchase His church, to establish us and therefore this Christ now is preeminent in everything. Back in Colossians 1:18b-19 it says so "that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell..." having come in the flesh. He is our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, and everything comes from Him. All that we have come from Him to us for Him therefore He is preeminent. I don't like the translation that says He has first place because He has every place. He is not at the top of the list. He is the list. 'For to me to live is Christ.' He is everything. He is preeminent and He is our passion.

Why should He be our passion? I want to give you three reasons. Here is why His preeminence should be our passion as the church. Number one, Christ is preeminent and our passion because He loves His church – His Bride. Men, there is a wonderful text of Scripture that you need to put on your speed dial. It's called Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:25-27 says **25** *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* I love to do weddings. I have two favorite times in a wedding. One is “you may kiss the bride.” I love that moment because everybody’s personality comes out then. All the introverts just quickly kiss. When one is an introvert and the other is an extravert, one is backing up and one is moving forward. If both are extraverts my next words are usually “Okay, that’s enough.” But the time I love the most in a wedding is the groom has come and the doors are opened and the bride is seen. I love to then look at the groom. It will be tears, smiles that can’t be kept by a mouth that’s grinning or some combination of the two usually, when he sees the bride. I don’t want to trivialize it but I think that day is going to be so glorious – the bride that Jesus loves will be brought and “Father I lose not one of them.” What a glorious day that will be. He is preeminent in our passion because He loves us. We are His bride.

Secondly, He is preeminent in our passion because He purchased us, the church – His flock. I want to look at a passage in Acts 20. Here is this marvelous church with a great legacy. How would you like to have the Apostle Paul as your pastor and church founder for three years? Now he is about to leave them. He is going to be arrested and he says to them that they will never see him again so he has some last words for them which starts in Acts 20:17 and goes to the end of the chapter but I just want to look at three of those verses. This is what he says to the shepherds of that church. Acts 20:28-30 says **28** *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, (why is it God’s church) which he obtained with his own blood. (Why?) 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you (the leaders), not sparing the flock. 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* Paul says “I’m about to leave and Satan is going to assault this church.” One might say, “Oh but Harry this church has produced Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. They have planted Smyrna, Pergamum and all of these churches. They have turned Asia Minor upside down and you mean Satan is going to attack Ephesus?” Absolutely and he’ll not only attack with persecution from the outside but he’ll attack with penetration from the inside. He’ll penetrate the inside with grumblings and a critical spirit. He’ll penetrate the leadership with false leaders who are self centered and teaching perverted things. Why does the Apostle Paul know that? It is because Jesus has already told him that Satan will attack but He also told him that He would prevail when He builds His church. I think the Apostle

Paul knows that because it has been going on for three years while he was there. Now it will just go on that much more when he leaves.

So what is it that Paul tells them to do? He wants them to watch themselves so they can watch over God's church that belongs to Him. It is God's flock. Why? Christ purchased it with His own blood. So His preeminence and our passion are because He purchased the church with His blood. It is His flock that we are a part of.

Thirdly, Christ is preeminent and our passion because He indwells it by His Spirit – His body. We are called the body of Christ. Jesus came into this world. He took upon Himself a body, did the work of the Father, did public ministry and when He finished He looked at His embryonic church and said "As the Father sent Me, now I send you." So Jesus came in body number one and did the work of the Father. He ascended to heaven and until He comes back in that glorified body we are body number two. How can we belong to Christ as the body of Christ? It is because He pours forth His Spirit within us to indwell us and to empower us.

I have one single takeaway. The takeaway is the preeminence of Christ is our passion because all things are from Him, for Him and through Him, therefore to Him be glory forever and ever, Amen. Everything you have, everything, that house, those children, that family, that job, that relationship, that future anticipation, that hope, that dream, that difficulty you have to face, everything has come from Him to you so that through Him everything now might come back to Him. Our passion is that in all things Christ might have the preeminence. We are to be Christ centered. He is the center. He is the sum. He is the substance. He is the circumference. How do you draw a circle? You don't start with the circumference. You start with the center. You place it. Our center is Christ and He is our circumference.

How do you start a journey? You start with the first step. How do you know where to take the first step? It is because you have a destination. He is the first step and He is the destination. He is the center. He is the sum. He is the substance. He is the circumference. It is Christ that is in everything, through everything and to whom is to be given everything. How can we as a church have courage and compassion all at the same time? How can we be confident, careful, consistent and committed? All of that comes from and through a church that is Christ centered. It is from a church that Christ is the center, sum, substance and the circumference of everything.

How many churches are there in Revelation 2 and 3? There are seven. What is the word picture for these churches in Revelation 2 and 3? They are called lamp stands. Who is in the middle? It is Jesus. He is the center of His church. He is the center of each local church, the center of all the churches together, and if He is in the center then the seven must be in a circle. So Christ is the center of everything. If He is the center of that church He becomes the circumference of

everything. He is the sum of everything. He is the substance of everything. Christ is to have preeminence because He is our Creator, our Redeemer and our Sustainer. He is our Savior. He is sovereign. He is sufficient. He is to be preeminent because He is prominent. He is to be preeminent and prominent because we proclaim Him. He is our proclamation. We want people to hear of Christ. He saves sinners. He comforts the saints. He is the One who convicts us. He is the One who sustains us and grows us for His own glory.

Brothers and sisters, we will be attacked in the future. Our legacy does not insulate us from that. We'll be attacked outside. We'll be attacked inside. There will be constant assaults of Satan to distract us, detour us and to bring deceitful doctrines. He'll attack the pulpit ministry of this church. He'll attack the congregational communities, the Sunday schools, the small groups and the ministries of this church. He'll attack our worship. He will want it to be something other than Christ preeminent and God centered. He'll attack our evangelism. He'll attack every single piece of it. As he attacks we will prevail in Christ because Christ has gone through the gates of hell. He has knocked them down and grabbed the keys. He has given them to us and He says "In My Name, I have given you the keys of the Kingdom and what you bind on earth has been bound in heaven and what you loose on earth has been loosed in heaven." It is Christ who prevails and because it is His church then His people will prevail. So He is preeminent and therefore He is our passion. So should that be and will that be?

Let me ask you a question. When Bruce Stallings prayed this morning through whom did he pray? This is not hard. Did you hear the last words of his prayer? He prayed "in the name of Jesus the Christ, Amen." We pray through Christ. Who is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us right now? It is Christ. When the church is called the body, it's the body of whom? It is the body of Christ. When it is called the bride, it is the bride of whom? It is the bride of Christ. When it is called the army it is the army of the Lord. When it is called the flock it is the flock of Christ. Who is the chief shepherd of the flock? It is Christ. Who is it that purchased the church? It is Christ. Who is it that gave us the Word of God? It is Christ. Where does the Word of God bring us? The Old Testament brings us to Him and the New Testament explains Him. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets He explained Himself in all the Scriptures. Christ is the focus of the Word.

Who poured forth the Spirit of God to give us life? It was Christ. Who gives us the gifts of the Spirit? It is Christ. Who gave us the Spirit whereby we have the fruit of the Spirit to be like Christ? What has Christ given us the Holy Spirit for? It is that He might be preeminent. There is a lot of inappropriate teaching on the Holy Spirit and most of the reason is because of the vacuum of the church not giving proper teaching but here's the one thing you know. When we understand the Spirit of God we won't be talking so much about the Spirit of God but we'll be surrendering to the Spirit of God. We will walk in the Spirit but who will we talk

about? The Holy Spirit has come to bear witness of Christ. It is Christ who gave us the Holy Spirit.

It is Christ who purchased His church. Who provides for the church? It is Christ. Who loves the church? It is Christ. Who died for the church? It is Christ. Who rose again to take the church to glory? It is Christ. Who went into glory to prepare a place for us? It is Christ. Why does He prepare a place for us? It is that we might be with Him, Christ. Who is interceding for us? It is Christ. Who is coming again for us? It is Christ. Who will we rise to meet? It is Christ. Who will receive us with the words 'well done thou good and faithful servants'? It is Christ. Who is it that upholds us and sustains us? It is Christ.

Who is it that your friends, family and neighbors who you want to be saved, need to hear? It is Christ. Who do your brothers and sisters need to hear when they are being trapped in sin or dealing with the consequences of sin or when they need to be consoled? They need the peace of Christ. They need the love of Christ. They need to know the preeminence of Christ. Who is it that will never leave us nor forsake us? It is Christ. Christ is preeminent and He is our passion for from Him, through Him and to Him are all things.

To Him be the glory and it's very crucial for us in a church like not to make Briarwood the center of this church. It is not about Briarwood. The reason that Briarwood has a legacy is those that went before us didn't make it about Briarwood. They made Briarwood about Christ. May it be so forever, to Him be the glory who alone deserves preeminence, now and forever. Then we'll see evangelism. Then we'll see disciple making. Then we'll see church planting. Then we will see mercy ministry. We will see that when Christ is the center, the sum, the substance and the circumference. To Him be the glory forever, Amen. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for our glorious Savior. God, we are so grateful that we who are so undeserving and unmerited have been blessed. Those who went before us and those who are here now, we now step forward. This is Your church, our home and Christ is the center. More than that He is the sum, the substance and the circumference and to Him be glory forever for everything is from Him, for Him and to Him. So Jesus here we are. Be exalted forever, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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