

## ***Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast***

### ***What Does Matthew 16:18-20 mean?***

*Hello, everybody, and welcome back to the Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. I hope you enjoy this conversation.*

**TRAVIS:** All right. And we are back. Hi, Wes.

**WES:** Hi, Travis. How are you?

**TRAVIS:** I'm doing great. How about yourself?

**WES:** Doing very well.

**TRAVIS:** Back here with another podcast again today.

**WES:** Yes.

**TRAVIS:** Sounds like we've got a fun discussion ahead of us today.

**WES:** Yeah, I think it will be. A couple different passages to discuss.

**TRAVIS:** So I've got the question here. I'll go ahead and read it. Do you want me to read -- there's a message before it.

**WES:** Yeah, just read the whole thing. And that might be a good thing to mention to people, too. Sometimes we ask for questions, and if anybody has any questions that they'd like us to discuss, they can go to [RadicallyChristian.com](http://RadicallyChristian.com) and there's a contact page and they can send us an e-mail, and we would be happy to consider talking about their question. But if anybody has any feedback, too, that they'd like to share on the podcast, send that, too, you know, as long as it's nice. Just kidding. Even your negative feedback, we'll read it. We may not read it on the air, but...

**TRAVIS:** Constructive criticism.

**WES:** Exactly. We have plenty of constructive criticism. We just tend not to read that on the air.

**TRAVIS:** So this one -- before the question is a little bit of an intro, and it says, "Hello. Love your podcasts and blogs. They've helped me see some things and understand things that, growing up in the church, I always had questions about but never heard good explanations of the text; for example, "new heavens and new earth." Favorite topic around here.

**WES:** Yes, it is.

**TRAVIS:** "My question is, what does it mean, 'Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven'? I'd appreciate if you can clarify what Jesus is talking about. God bless you both in the work you do in the service to our king," and it's from Scott.

**WES:** Okay. Thank you, Scott. Great question. Great question. So this phrase -- this exact phrase comes up twice in Matthew's gospel account, so I think it'll be fun just to discuss these two passages, and then within that context -- within the context of those passages, talk about the phrase itself. But the discussion, I think, will be a little bit broader than just that phrase because, again, another favorite topic around here is context and how important context is, and so we'll try to talk about the context a little bit and then jump into what does that phrase mean.

So we're going to start in Matthew 16, starting in verse 13, and this is, you know, a very well-known passage about Jesus asking his disciples who people say that he is. He tended to refer to himself as the "Son of Man,"

which itself is a Messianic title, but Jesus tended to not say directly that he was the Messiah. When he talked to the woman at the well, she said that the Messiah was coming, and he affirmed that he was the Messiah, but very seldom, if ever, did Jesus just come out and directly, explicitly say that he was the Messiah. And I think part of that -- this actually could be an interesting side discussion, is words have different meanings, different connotations at different times to different people, and what people meant by "Messiah" had all kinds of different connotations, and throwing that word around could get you killed. Obviously, even without throwing that word around, you could get killed.

The word "Messiah" itself means "anointed one," so the Hebrew word is what we're transliterating when we say "Messiah," and it means "anointed one." The Greek word is "Christ," *Christos*, and so Christ is the -- so when we say "Jesus Christ," what we're saying is Jesus is the anointed one; Jesus is the Hebrew, the Jewish Messiah. So as people are sort of figuring that out, Jesus asks his disciples -- this is in Matthew 16:13, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" So apparently, they thought that either these prophets had been reincarnated, had come back -- Elijah was said to have come -- was going to come before the Messiah came. John the Baptist was the fulfillment of that prophesy that -- John the Baptist wasn't Elijah. He wasn't reincarnated Elijah, but he did come in the spirit of Elijah, so to speak. He was Elijah-like in many ways.

And so some people are saying that Jesus is John the Baptist, some are saying that he's Elijah, some are saying that he's Jeremiah or one of the

prophets. And, "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the son of the living God.'" So you are the Messiah. You are God's anointed one, the son of the living God. Now, I was just thinking about -- I wonder what Peter meant by "the son of God." What did he mean by that? Did he mean that Jesus is deity, that Jesus is God incarnate? Maybe. Jesus certainly is. I am saying that. I'm affirming that, and I know Peter would eventually affirm that, but was Peter saying that right now? It's possible that he was, certainly, but it's also possible that he wasn't quite there yet, and I say that because of Psalm 2.

Do you want to read Psalm 2 for us, Travis? Because I think that that sort of sets the context for maybe what was Peter saying when he was saying, "You are the Messiah." And, again, this wasn't something that Jesus went around saying about himself. It's something that Peter had observed the evidence, he had looked at all of the facts, sort of put together all of the puzzle pieces, and it was beginning to be revealed to him -- we'll talk about that in a second -- but it was beginning to be revealed to him, and he was starting to realize -- his eyes were being opened to this truth. His heart was being opened to this truth, that Jesus was the long-expected and awaited Messiah.

So if you would, read Psalm 2 because this really helps us to sort of shape our imagination and our thought process to who the Messiah is.

**TRAVIS:** Psalm chapter 2: "Why are the nations so angry? Why do they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepare for battle; the rulers plot together against the Lord and against his anointed one."

**WES:** Okay. So stop right there for just a second. So that "anointed one,"

that's the Hebrew word that we're transliterating when we say "Messiah," so you could translate that as "against Yahweh, the Lord," "against Yahweh and against his anointed one, his Messiah."

Okay. Go ahead.

**TRAVIS:** Verse 3: "'Let us break their chains,' they cry, 'and free ourselves from slavery to God.' But the one who rules in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. Then in anger he rebukes them, terrifying them with his fierce fury. For the Lord declares, 'I have placed my chosen king on the throne in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain.' The king proclaims the Lord's decree: 'The Lord said to me, you are my son. Today I have become your Father.'"

**WES:** So stop there for just a second. So there was this sense -- there was a sense in which God was the father of David. There's a sense in which God was the father of Solomon and all the Davidic kings, that they had that sort of father-son relationship. What the New Testament reveals to us is that the father-son relationship between Jesus and the second person of the Godhead -- or, rather, between the Father and the second person of the Godhead, Jesus -- what the New Testament reveals is that that father-son relationship is eternal, that they have this eternal bond, this eternal connection, this eternal reigning together, sharing glory together, as Jesus puts it, and so that sonship, that relationship and connection, it is pre-incarnate, before Jesus becomes a human being.

And so when we say that Jesus is the son of God, we mean something deeper and richer and fuller about his relationship to the Father than David had to God, but that relationship that God had with David and that God

would continue to have with the Davidic kings, it could be described as a father-son relationship, but it was one that merely pointed forward to the relationship that Yahweh -- that the Father would have with his anointed one, with his anointed king. And so what does Peter mean when he says, "You are the Christ. You are the anointed, chosen king of God, and you are God's son"? It's possible that he means, "You are God in the flesh. You are the second person of the Godhead," but it could mean that he's thinking in terms of Psalm 2, that he's thinking, "You have this special relationship with God. You are God's chosen king, and you are the one who is -- like David, has this special connection with God as if he's your own father." To the extent -- this Psalm is all about how the Jewish Messiah, the Jewish anointed king would someday rule the nations and that it would be futile for the nations to try to throw off God's rule and reign, and that God was going to rule and reign over all the nations through his son.

And, again, if you had read this prior to the first century, you would have thought, oh, yes, the Messiah will be God's son, but you might not have realized that saying "God's son" also meant himself being both human and deity. So it's hard to know exactly what Peter meant when he confesses this. Maybe it's truer than even he has yet to realize.

**TRAVIS:** Something you made me think of -- one of my favorite things in reading about all of human history, but particularly in secular history -- historical accounts, we go all the way back to the Mesopotamians and on down even through Rome, and certainly Medieval Europe, but it's something that humans seem to have intuited long before Christ and even before the Hebrews made any sort of mark on the world during the Old Testament

times, that the leader of a people needs to be -- they often called their leaders the son of God.

**WES:** Yes, yes. Absolutely.

**TRAVIS:** Now, what ended up happening so much of the time, and certainly in the case of the Egyptians and the Romans, is that, eventually, the leaders just started taking on the mantle of God.

**WES:** Right, yes. They deified them, yes.

**TRAVIS:** And I think it's so interesting that that's present in the Christian story all the way back to David and Solomon, as you said, and then on down to Christ, who -- the interesting distinction is he always talked about he didn't come to be served but to be a servant, but also what I believe Paul says about it, that he didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped.

**WES:** Yes, yes, like held on to. Like over my dead body am I going to give this up.

**TRAVIS:** Which even, you know, not only in his behavior, but even, as you mentioned at the beginning of this conversation, the fact that he wasn't quick to claim the title of son of God, he wasn't quick to claim the title of Messiah. And that's something -- as you mentioned, did Peter -- did he kind of know what he was saying? I think it's easy for me to read that story and I'm already thinking about the resurrection, but at this point in Matthew 16, or in Peter saying that, making that confession, they haven't actually seen the fullness of what Christ was embodying and came to be. So anyway, I think that's so interesting to see, that that pattern is present throughout a lot of human civilizations, but it's inverted in a way that is so common -- it's a

common type of inversion throughout the Biblical narrative in Jesus.

**WES:** The king, the anointed chosen king, the one who is wearing the mantle of the God has become a servant and has given his life as a sacrifice for the sins of his people. Even though he himself is completely innocent of any crimes, he takes on their sin as his own and suffers and dies in their place. It's just -- it's absolutely amazing. And so there was this expectation about the coming king, is that he would have this father-son relationship with God. So, again, I don't know whether Peter meant it in a deified kind of way, but he certainly meant it in a royal sort of way, that he means, "You are the Messiah. You're the one we've been waiting for."

But even just that -- I mean, just thinking through the weight of that confession, to say I don't know how -- I don't know how this can be true, because already he knew that Jesus wasn't a Messiah like they were expecting the Messiah to be -- many people were expecting the Messiah to be. And just saying that, letting those words come out of your mouth was a dangerous thing. I mean, again, I think it's The Bible Project guys talked about how if you had someone who was walking around the United States claiming to be the president, you would think, "You're crazy." But if people started to say, "Actually, you are the rightful president" --

**TRAVIS:** Now we've got a problem.

**WES:** Or even more, like, "You are the king. Like you're the king of America." I mean -- so now you're putting yourself -- I mean, it's one thing to kind of hang out with them, but for you to say, "Yes, this is the Christ, this is the son of the living God. This is the one we've been waiting for. All of our hopes, all of our expectations, all of our faith, all of our trust, all of our



loyalty, all of our allegiance, it all belongs to him" -- so this is really a pledge of allegiance to say, "You are my king. I'm surrendering to you. I'm going to follow you. You're the one I've been waiting for." This is huge. This moment cannot be overstated.

So he asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they say, "Well, you know, there's different opinions about that." He says, "No, who do you say that I am?" And then Peter says this, and he's the first one to speak up. Peter gets a bad rap a lot because so many times he sticks his foot in his mouth and he says things he ought not to say, but he also is the first to say what needs to be said. And it could be that others were thinking the same truth and that that truth had been revealed to them by God, as well, but they weren't ready to say it, and Peter is ready to say it.

So Jesus says -- v. 17, "And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah,' son of Jonah. "'For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" So in other words, "Nobody told you that. God showed you that. This is the truth." You know, sometimes we talk about truth, and there's, like, truth that's like truth with a small T, and truth with a big T, that there is "the truth" and this is "the truth," and "the truth" is not self-evident. This is a non self-evident truth. Paul would put it in terms, in I Corinthians, that you have to have the Spirit. You have to have this truth revealed to you by God, and so this isn't just something that somebody figured out or, you know, whatever. Like this is something that God has -- earlier, I talked about sort of putting the pieces together and putting together the clues, but it wasn't by Peter's effort that this happened. It was God who showed him this, and, "Do you remember this," and "Do

you remember this," and brought these things to his attention, opened his heart, opened his mind to this reality so that he could process and accept this truth, that his -- the eyes of his heart had been enlightened, that the truth, the light, was beginning to shine into his heart, and Jesus always gives credit to God. This is a work of God that this truth has dawned on you, that you have realized this truth and that God has shown you this.

Okay. So then he says, in verse 18 -- I'd like you to read, if you've got that, Matthew 16:18.

**TRAVIS:** "Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church" --

**WES:** Okay. So it says it in the text, "which means rock"?

**TRAVIS:** Yeah.

**WES:** Is it, like, parenthetical?

**TRAVIS:** Yeah.

**WES:** Okay. Interesting.

**TRAVIS:** -- "and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

**WES:** Okay. So yeah -- so, again, the New Living Translation -- I assume that's what you're reading from --

**TRAVIS:** Yep.

**WES:** -- explains that the name "Peter" means rock, *petros*, so, "And I tell you that you are *petros*, and on this *petra*, this rock, I will build my church." Now, again, when we think "church," don't think building. When you think "church," think assembly, think gathered-together people. So he says, "I'm going to build an assembly of people," but there is a building metaphor here. So he is talking about people, but he's also talking about

using people as building blocks, and he says we're going to start with that: your confession, your faith, your declaration of allegiance and loyalty, that you've pledged your allegiance, you've confessed, "God has shown me. God has shown me that you are his son. You are the Christ. You're the anointed king. You're the one we've been waiting for. I give you my loyalty and allegiance."

So Jesus seems to be saying something like, "You're not the last one. You may be the first one, but you're not the last one, and so I'm going to gather together my people that are going to be gathered together." There's a lot of, you know, tradition that goes around this passage, and the Catholic church uses this as proof of Peter being the first apostle. You know, is he talking about Peter being the rock? Is he talking about -- well, I mean, it's not really -- that's really insignificant. In my mind, what's really important is he's saying, "I'm going to gather together a lot of people, and they're all going to be stones in this living temple, this temple that I'm putting together, this building that I'm putting together, this assembly that I'm putting together, this gathering of people that I'm putting together. It's going to be built upon what you've just confessed -- what you've just confessed, that my identity is the son of God," which, again, may have even been more true than even Peter realized that it was. He knew that it was true, but there was probably depth to it that he hadn't yet plumbed. He hadn't yet seen all of the depth of that reality and -- but on that reality, on that big-T Truth, God, the church, the assembly of the Lord, was going to be gathered.

And then he says the gates of -- and it's interesting that my translation, your translation, most translations, translate this as "hell," but the word

really is "Hades." It's not Gehenna. Gehenna is the pit, the valley of death and destruction and worms and, you know, that kind of thing, but Hades is the realm of the dead. It's the place of death. So I think, really, what he's saying is that the power of death will not prevail against the building of and the prevailing of my people. It will not prevail against the building of my gathered people, my church. It is going to be based on this truth and this reality, and death itself will not stop us. Death itself will not stop the church.

**TRAVIS:** Are you the one that told me that where they think they were when he's having this discussion is at a place that was called the gates of Hades, as well?

**WES:** No, but, I mean, I've heard that. I think that they're at Caesarea Philippi. I'm not sure about that.

**TRAVIS:** That just popped into my head as you were saying that.

**WES:** That's interesting.

**TRAVIS:** It is interesting that you bring up the gates of hell. The NLT says "the powers of hell," and it really being more Hades. I was thinking -- because we get that confused a lot with Greek mythology now because they're speaking Greek -- the Jews all speak Greek, for the most part.

**WES:** At least writing in Greek. We don't know; they may have been speaking Aramaic, yeah.

**TRAVIS:** Right. But using the term "Hades," it would have just been that spiritual realm that you pass into after your body --

**WES:** The place of disembodied spirits, yes.

**TRAVIS:** Tartarus, the actual pocket in Hades that was meant for the evil ones, that would have been closer to hell.

**WES:** Yeah. Tartarus is like this -- the ones we see there are like the evil angels that are being, you know, held --

**TRAVIS:** Bound.

**WES:** -- in chains. But Hades itself -- really, you know, again, in the Jewish mindset -- it's hard to know exactly what, you know, the Jewish people thought of -- the Hebrew was "Sheol," but most of the things that the Hebrew scriptures say about Sheol, which would be translated with the Greek word "Hades" in like the Septuagint, was that Sheol was a place of just being dead. Like it's a place of -- you know, again, Greek mythology had all kinds of ideas about what's happening in the underworld, but for the most part, the Jewish perspective was that Sheol was a place of death, like not knowing, not praising, not saying, not doing. It's a place of sleep. And so -- now, again, there's all kinds of debates about, you know, what's life like when you die or what's your existence like when you die. That's not Jesus' point here. Jesus' point here seems to be that the powers of death -- specifically his death, but even the death of his people is not going to stop them, that nothing can stop the church.

**TRAVIS:** I think that's something that you've challenged me on in talking about death as a concept, is that I think Christianity and religion, as a whole, has sort of drifted into this place of -- this kind of bifurcated view of the afterlife, like it's heaven or hell, and it's like those are obviously places that are very significant in the Biblical text. But one thing that jumped out at me as he's talking about this is it's -- he's talking about death, like death is offensive enough on its own. And it's something you've really challenged me on, that -- sometimes I think we -- I know I've taken for granted the fact

that, well, as a Christian, I don't have to -- you know, I have comfort when I lose somebody. It doesn't make it easy, but it makes it a lot more positive to think they're with -- you know, Jesus has got them now, and I don't have to fear death in the same way. But it is offensive. It is a sign of this broken world.

**WES:** And prior to Jesus -- to that point, prior to Jesus, there was no proof that there was life after death. In fact, there was an entire segment of the Jewish leadership that did not believe in any life after death, like it was just this, like this is it.

**TRAVIS:** That would have been the Sadducees.

**WES:** Right, the Sadducees. And so the Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection. The Pharisees believed -- believed against belief, based on the scriptures, that said, listen, God still has some promises that he needs to keep, and if he's going to keep those -- and we know he is because he's a God who keeps promises -- the only way he can keep his promises to us, his people, is to raise people from the dead because there's been plenty of faithful people who have died not receiving the promises that they were given --

**TRAVIS:** Right.

**WES:** -- so he has to raise them from the dead. It was the same sort of thinking that Abraham had when he got to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac, and he thought, listen, God is going to keep his promises through Isaac, and if Isaac dies right now, the only way to keep those promises is to raise him from the dead, so I guess God's going to raise him from the dead. And it was the same thinking that the Pharisees seemed to have, is that God's going

to keep his promises, and the only way to do that is to raise people from the dead eventually. But Jesus is the one who proves that that theory is true.

**TRAVIS:** That's what makes this such a radical statement.

**WES:** Yes, because he says death is not going to stop this from coming to pass. It's not going to stop this from being established and from prevailing. All of the promises -- again, there's so much packed into this. Psalm 2 is packed into this. Abraham is packed into this. Isaac is packed into this. The entire story of Israel is packed into what is going on right now. Peter is saying to Jesus, "You're the one. You're the one that's going to bring all of these promises," and Jesus says, "Yes, and I'm going to gather together a multitude of people upon this rock, and the gates of death will not stop this from coming to pass." And so Jesus is claiming that he is stronger than death, that he is going to overcome death and that he is going to break the bonds of death, and it's exactly what he does in the resurrection, and it's exactly the hope that we have.

So before we have to take a break, let's -- you want to read verse 19 for us? Because this is really the question that was asked.

**TRAVIS:** "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven." Mine's a little different there.

**WES:** Yeah, it is a little different. So my translation says, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven," but it's the same sort of concept. What's a little bit different, though, is -- I don't know if you have a footnote that says something like this, but most Bibles have a footnote that says something like

"or shall have been bound or shall have been loosed." So if we read it that way, it says something like, "Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." A little bit harder to read, but very different meaning. And if you read commentaries on this passage, it is very complicated, the grammar here and what exactly Jesus is saying. There's one grammatical option, which would be that Jesus is saying, "Hey, whatever you guys say, goes. If you say it, that's the law."

**TRAVIS:** At first glance, that's what I --

**WES:** Right. "You get to dictate what heaven says." Obviously, that can't be what he means. That doesn't really make any sense. So even if we render it that way, I don't think -- even that, I don't think that's what he means by that.

I think, one way or the other, what Jesus means is what you preach on earth is a message from heaven, that you are preaching a message from heaven, that what you are binding and loosing, and specifically the people you are binding and loosing, specifically the people you are bringing into -- because he tells Peter, he says, "You're going to have the key to the kingdom and -- or the keys to the kingdom, and you're going to open up the door to certain people and you're going to close the door to certain people."

*I just want to take a short break from our Bible study to tell you that if you are enjoying this discussion, you might also enjoy my book "Beyond the Verse." You can find the audio version of the book at [RadicallyChristian.com/audible](http://RadicallyChristian.com/audible). If you're not already an Audible*



*subscriber, you can actually get my book for free when you sign up for a free trial, so go to [RadicallyChristian.com/audible](http://RadicallyChristian.com/audible). Now back to the Bible study.*

**WES:** Okay. Now that we're back from the very sudden break that we took, let me read from the Expositor's Bible Commentary because I really like the way that it sort of explains what Peter is doing here, what he's doing in confessing Jesus, and then what Jesus is doing by responding to him the way that he does. It says, "Peter, on confessing Jesus as Messiah, is told that he has received this confession by the Father's revelation and will be given the keys of the kingdom, i.e., by proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (chapter 4:23), which, by revelation, he is increasingly understanding he will open the kingdom to many and shut it against many." So that's what keys do, right? Keys open things and close things, and that by proclaiming this truth, this reality about Jesus, the gospel, the good news that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, that he is God's chosen one, that he is the son of God, that he's the Christ, the son of the living God, and that he is ruling over his kingdom and that his kingdom will not be prevailed against by the gates of death -- by proclaiming this, by living this out, he is going to be opening the kingdom of God to many and closing it to many.

So Jesus is saying, I believe, that what you're binding has been bound in heaven, and what you are loosing, it has been loosed in heaven. So you are proclaiming this message that has been established in heaven, and you are partnering -- I think that's the beautiful part of this, is that Jesus is -- I think a good word is "deputizing." He is deputizing his apostles, starting with Peter, but also will deputize all of his apostles to bind and loose what

has been bound and loosed in heaven by preaching the gospel. And by preaching the gospel, they are opening the kingdom to many and closing it to many.

It's actually incredibly relevant as we talk sometimes about -- is the church, is the kingdom of God, is it inclusive or exclusive? And the truth is, yes, it's both. It's incredibly inclusive. In fact, it's probably the most inclusive major world religion. It is definitely the most multi-ethnic world religion because it is not about ethnicity. It doesn't matter where you came from. It doesn't matter the language you speak. It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done. It is open to everyone. But it is exclusive in the sense that there are rules and regulations. There are -- there's sort of a way that you have to be transformed and changed. You have to repent of living a certain way and begin to be transformed, not only in your thinking, but also in your living, and if you don't conform -- I hate using the word "conform," but if you don't conform to the standard, if you don't acquiesce to the standard that Jesus has set for us, then the kingdom is bound against you. The doors are closed against you.

So it is incredibly inclusive, and it's also incredibly exclusive. It is inclusive specifically to the people who say that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. And if you are willing to confess, and not just confess with your mouth, but live out that reality that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, then the kingdom is open to you. If you are not willing to confess that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, and give him your loyalty and allegiance, then the kingdom is closed to you. And the apostles, in their apostolic ministry, that's exactly what they're doing. They're opening

the kingdom of God to people and closing it to people. So there are Jewish people who have lived their whole life thinking that they are, and that they would be, a part of God's kingdom, a part of God's eternal kingdom, a part of the Messiah's kingdom, but they refused to bow their knee to King Jesus. They refused to give him their loyalty and allegiance, and so the kingdom of God is closed to them. But to people like prostitutes and tax collectors who were willing to confess Jesus as the Messiah, the kingdom of God is open to them, shockingly so. That you've got these people that everyone would have thought were on the outside of the kingdom, they never were going to get in the kingdom, and Jesus would tell the Pharisees, "Hey, prostitutes, tax collectors are going to get in before you. In fact, many of you aren't even going to be part of the kingdom at all."

**TRAVIS:** So I'm going to go down a little bit of a rabbit hole.

**WES:** It's a good episode for that. That's okay.

**TRAVIS:** So as we keep reading this passage out of Matthew 16, I keep thinking of this thing I heard about several years ago. I'm not taking credit for it. I did not make this revelation. But do you know the -- have you heard anybody talk about the Christ comparison of the story of Pinocchio?

**WES:** No, I don't think so.

**TRAVIS:** So it starts with, you know, this -- Geppetto, the cobbler, having a son, right? I think he's a cobbler. That's right. And he looks up -- he goes to the North Star to make this wish, right? But as the story moves along, Pinocchio has to save his father, Geppetto, from the belly of a whale. And the animators, when they -- in the Disney telling of Pinocchio, that very old movie now -- when he goes into the whale to find his father, it's not just his

father there; it's his whole father's house is in there, but the house isn't just set up. It's like there's a piano on top of the couch, and -- I'd have to go back and watch the movie to remember the setup, but all the furniture is scattered, so he has to go save his father from the belly of the whale with the items in his house, as well.

And I heard somebody make this comparison that it's -- I mean, it's -- upon further investigation of what the writers were doing, they were taking the story of Christ and extracting something out of it that I had never heard anybody talk about before, which is the whole idea of Christ coming down from heaven, the son of God (Pinocchio) coming down to redeem what of his father's has been scattered on earth and has been locked away from where it's supposed to be.

And so I keep thinking about this idea that he says, "Peter, based on your confession, based on this rock, I'm going to build my church." And you mentioned, you know, that we're all supposed to be what the church is made up of, rocks in this foundation of the church, making up the church. And so this opening that Jesus is pronouncing based on Peter's confession -- and now he's giving authority to now go gather my rocks, go gather my people. You're going to start building this church soon. I never really thought about it until we were reading this and I thought again of the Pinocchio comparison, that the way -- you know, we talk sometimes about the veil of the curtain being torn and how that was, you know, symbolic of the Holy of Holies separating everybody but the high priest from having communion with God in an intimate way, that what Jesus was doing here on earth was coming down and redeeming what of the Father's had been scattered and

been lost, and he was opening up a way back, and the way back is the confession that Peter made that -- Peter made it, but then anybody else who makes that confession, you get to be a rock in this church. Again, I just --

**WES:** Yeah, that's -- there's so many metaphors. My mind is going way crazy going down the metaphor -- down the rabbit hole of Pinocchio, and I'm thinking, wait, he lied. And so, anyway, I don't want to go too far down that.

**TRAVIS:** Not the middle part of the movie.

**WES:** Okay. So -- but there are so many metaphors here, and it's interesting how Jesus -- we've talked about sort of the kingdom parables that Jesus has used, that when we talk about the kingdom, what we're talking about is God's rule and reign, that there is chaos in the world, that the world has become chaotic and filled with sin and death and brokenness because God has been rejected as king. God's rule and reign has been rejected by humanity, and we chose to live under the rule and reign of sin, under the rule and reign of the evil one rather than the rule and reign of our creator, and that has caused brokenness and chaos and death.

And so one of the metaphors is like sheep, and Jesus is a shepherd and he's gathering his sheep. Here's another metaphor of building something, of building the people into an assembly upon a foundation, and all of it is around Jesus. His identity is the foundation. It is the true north. It is the cornerstone. It is what the entire kingdom is oriented around, and that's where it begins, that when our eyes are open to this reality, when our hearts begin to be open to this reality that Jesus is the Christ -- that's why -- like Paul will say in Romans 10, that if you believe with your heart and confess

with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, everything begins there. That's not to diminish things like baptism because, of course, that's necessary and important, and that it's at baptism that we declare that we -- that we have that watershed moment where we go from our lives being chaos to being reordered in Christ. But baptism, getting wet, means nothing unless you're reorienting your heart, your mind, your life around Jesus, and that's what Peter is saying. He's saying you're the one that I'm going to reorient my life around.

It's very similar to what Peter says when Jesus asks if they want to leave. He's talking about people eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and he asked, "Do you guys want to leave, too?" And Peter says, "Where else would we go? You have the words of eternal life." So Peter is beginning to have this revelation, yes, because he's putting the pieces together, but yes, also, because God is at work in his heart and mind to help him to see the big-T Truth. And when he sees that big-T Truth, he confesses it and begins to order his life around it, and then everyone who comes to Jesus is confessing that. That's what we all have in common. We all have that confession in common. We all have our baptism in common. We all have this faith in common. There's a lot of things that are different. We are dissimilar in so many ways from our brothers and sisters, but this reality, that we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, that is what we all have in common.

And as the apostles go into the world and proclaim this message, there are those who believe it and that their eyes are open to it, their heart is open to it, they reorient their lives around it, and then the apostles, and then later

the church, opens the kingdom to them so that they can come in. And what Jesus is saying is, you're loosing what is loosed in heaven, and what is loosed in heaven is loosed on earth, that there's this partnership between heaven, God, and the forces of God, the hosts of heaven, and the people on earth, Jesus' people that are cooperating with and partnering with and have been deputized by the Messiah, that he is partnering with his apostles on earth. He's partnering with his people, his assembly, his church on earth so that when they are preaching and teaching this good news message, this big-T Truth, that what they're binding and loosing is being bound and loosed in heaven or has already been bound or loosed in heaven. It really doesn't matter how you phrase it grammatically. He's saying there's this partnership between the church on earth and the hosts in heaven, the Messiah in heaven, the Father in heaven, and that they're working together to open the kingdom to certain people who confess Jesus as Christ and close the kingdom to those who will not confess Jesus as Christ. That's what this whole conversation revolves around, is the confession that Peter makes.

Now, before we lose too much more time, let's go to Matthew chapter 18 because this is the second time that this phrase is used. It's a little bit different context. It's actually quite a bit different context, but, I think, a very similar meaning. So Matthew 18, starting in verse 15. Are you going read it out of your crazy translation over there?

**TRAVIS:** "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or

three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector."

**WES:** So here we have even further discussion, a very similar idea, right? It's still about opening and closing. It's still about who's in and who's out. And in this case, we have this sinning against each other, people that have offended each other, people who have hurt each other, because this is still going to happen. Unfortunately, this is still going to happen amongst believers. And he says if your brother sins against you, here's how you handle it. You go to them and you talk to them. If you talk to them and you reconcile and you work it out and you can live in unity, great. You've won your brother. Exciting, wonderful. That's the way it should happen. But if they don't listen to you, take somebody with you. Take some witnesses with you and try to resolve this. But if he refuses even to listen to that small group, then tell it to the assembly, to the gathering -- the gathered people, to the church, and if he refuses even to listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

So, again, binding and loosing. So it's not just a person who confesses Jesus as Lord. It is that; it begins with that, but it's also people who live in unity and harmony with their brothers and sisters, and if you hurt each other and you sin against each other and you refuse to repent, you're out. You're out. You can't be part of this kingdom and say, "I don't care about your feelings. I don't care about your rights. I don't care how you're treated. I'm going to do what I want to do." If you are going to live that way, then we're going to treat you like a tax collector and a Gentile; in other



words, someone who's on the outside of the kingdom. The doors of the kingdom are shut to you so long as you don't confess Jesus as Lord and so long as you don't live in harmony with your brothers and sisters.

I mean, really -- we've said this so many times on this podcast, but the whole of scripture -- the whole of scripture comes down to this, Micah 6:8. "What does the Lord require of you? Justice, kindness, walk humbly with your God." Jesus says, "Okay. I'm going to sum up the whole law and prophets: Love the Lord; love your neighbor. Peter says that -- or, rather, Paul says that the whole law of Christ is fulfilled in bearing one another's burdens. It all comes down to this. In the gospel of John, Jesus gives two commandments: Believe in him, love one another as I love you. That's it. Like it comes down to those two. The 10 Commandments can be organized that way. You know, the first column of the ten commandments and the second column, the loving the Lord your God, loving your neighbor as yourself.

And so the kingdom is open to everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and who will not sin against one another and who will live in harmony and unity with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Now, that includes a lot of things, and we can spend a lot of time unpacking that, but this is it. If you sin against your brother or sister, repent. And if they repent, forgive them. Keep forgiving them. But if they refuse to repent, then close the doors to the kingdom to them.

Read, if you would, verse 18 because this is where we get that phrase again.

**TRAVIS:** "I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be

forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."

**WES:** Okay. So, again, if you just read that at face value or sort of take it out of context, it sounds like, "Well, you set the rules. Whatever the church decides, I guess heaven's going to go along with it." I don't think that's at all what Jesus means to communicate to his apostles. And, again, it could be translated, "Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

But, again, he's saying there's this partnership between the church on earth and God, the Father, and the son in heaven, and that we are cooperating with one another and that the verdict that you pass -- that when you say, "You're out because you won't confess Jesus as Lord," or, "You're out because you won't repent of sinning against your brother or sister; you've sinned and you've been told and warned and disciplined and you still won't repent and you're out" -- when the church passes that verdict, heaven is passing that verdict. In fact, he goes on to say, verse 19, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." Again, we tend to pull that out of context and make it sound like, "Well, we're having a little devotional here so Jesus is with us." I mean, that's true, I think, but that's not what Jesus means. He's talking about two or three witnesses. Specifically, he's talking about when you've gathered together and you've warned a brother or sister to stop sinning and they won't, and they continue to persist in sin and they won't repent, and you pass judgment on them; you bring down a verdict against

them and say, "You're guilty and you're living as a tax collector; you're living as a Gentile; you're living as someone who doesn't know God," and you pass that verdict, it's not just you that's passing that verdict. "It's me," Jesus is saying, "in heaven, I'm with you. I'm with you, and I'm passing the verdict with you. Heaven is passing the verdict with you," and that's huge.

That's saying -- I mean, there's so many things this is saying, but it's almost like you could think the Sanhedrin -- that's where the power -- you would have thought that's where the power was. The power was -- if you thought, okay, well, where is the Jewish God's power? Well, it lies with the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin, and when these elders pass a verdict or pass a law, then they're speaking for heaven. And Jesus says, actually, it's anywhere my disciples are gathered and they are preaching the gospel, they're teaching the gospel, they're binding what has been bound in heaven, they're loosing what has been loosed in heaven. Anywhere where my disciples are binding and loosing what has been bound and loosed in heaven, they're speaking for heaven. And it's incredible. It's incredible that Jesus has deputized, partnered together with -- I think there's, obviously, first-layer application to the apostolic ministry -- the apostles' ministry, but I think there's also this ongoing reality that Jesus is with us and we need to not be afraid to -- you know, to use a Restoration phrase, speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. It's the same sort of idea, but it would be more accurate to say speak where heaven speaks and be silent where heaven is silent, and when you speak where heaven speaks, when you are speaking the oracles of God, when you're speaking big-T Truth and you're saying Jesus is the Christ, and if someone won't confess that, then

they're not your family. They are not your brother. They are not your sister. It doesn't mean you hurt people. It doesn't mean you mistreat people, but it does mean we have to recognize that we are the pillar and the support of the truth as the church. We are God's people, and we have this obligation and responsibility to speak the truth of heaven and to continue on this ministry of opening the kingdom of God to those who are repentant and have faith in Jesus, and closing the kingdom of God to those who are unrepentant and don't have faith in Jesus.

*Thank you so much for being part of the Radically Christian Bible Study podcast today. We hope that you've enjoyed this episode. I want to give a special thanks to Travis Pauley and to our McDermott Road church family for making this podcast possible. As always, we love you, God loves you, and we hope that you have a wonderful day.*