

Sermon Text for November 17, 2024

By Rev. Robert Bronkema

Jeremiah 23:5-6 and Matthew 16:13-20 *“On Christ the solid rock I stand”*

I had quite a whirlwind of the last couple of days. I had what is called a ModCon, or a Moderators Conference which is meant to prepare you to be Moderator of the Presbytery. I had purchased my plane tickets a month or so ago and then before I left I just checked to see how far it would be to drive, you know in case things went bad on Saturday, and I noticed that it was only 9 hours. That’s about how far Myrtle Beach is and so that’s not very far for me. So I was starting to second guess my decision to fly but I got on the plane and landed in Louisville and we were taxiing on the runway and I wanted to get my Uber to my hotel so I opened up the app and it said that it would cost me \$276 and my hotel was 8 hours away by car.

I nervously looked at my boarding pass to make sure it said Louisville KY and not like Tennessee or some other southern state that had Louisville. No, that checked out, so I did it again and this time my app did say that I was in Tennessee and now the price had gone up to about \$300. I asked my seat partner, we are in Louisville KY right, he said yes we are, I explained what was happening and with a smile he said, oh, you probably just need to reboot. I wasn’t sure if he was talking about me or my phone. I almost wished that he was talking about me.

Sometimes we do just need to reboot and get back to the basics and this Sunday is one of those Sundays. You know sometimes after I craft a sermon I think, boy that sure would have been good for next Sunday, or last Sunday. This week is one that after I was done I was thinking it would be very appropriate for our birthday celebration Sunday, but here we are today and I’m guessing that one of you needs to hear it or else the Holy Spirit wouldn’t have given it to us today. Rebooting and getting back to the basics.

Our Matthew Scripture for today is considered the climactic Scripture of all of Matthew that we have seen so far. It is the mountaintop proclamation, the most important and everything in Matthew so far has led us to these verses today, so if you miss it today, you have really missed it. It’s the reboot, remember. Today we find a declaration that Jesus is the Messiah and a proclamation by Jesus himself that any church which builds its identity and keeps its identity upon Jesus will never fall and the gates of death and hell will never prevail against it. We need to be told again and again how important it is what we do here as a church. It is something that

will last forever as long as we keep Jesus at the center. Nothing is more fundamental than that message. Let's read this climactic Scripture.

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Before we get to Matthew we are going to spend some time in Jeremiah. He is the prophet who tells us in these verses that the Lord is our righteousness. Ironic that we are in the Gospel of righteousness and here we find ourselves with an Old Testament prophet proclaiming that the Lord is our righteousness. You can never get too much righteousness. Jeremiah is telling his people hundreds of years before Jesus walked upon this earth that the coming of the Messiah, for us the coming of Jesus, makes a difference now because he is our righteousness. For our sake as we look at the Gospel of righteousness it would mean to us that the Messiah is our righteousness, and we are able to act according to God's will because of the Messiah.

I have told you in the past that Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet because no one ever listened to him or believed him. He had a rough go for 40 years. He has been telling the people to repent and to turn their hearts to God and in these verses he gives the promises that God makes to His people if they would turn to Him. I will be your safety and your provision. But what does God being our safety and our provision look like to us?

Here is the church history part that is so important for these verses in Jeremiah, but especially as we get to Matthew. For the past 192 years God has provided to this church in ways that some would call miraculous. Some of you were around for very lean years, before Rev. Powl and even after. You have been there when the session asked their pastor to take less because they weren't sure it would make it through the year, it's in the book that we just gave to our new members. But survive and even thrive, this church has done.

In 2020 I told you from this pulpit in December that and then later in 2021 that it probably would not be until the end of 2024 that we see our attendance and our finances begin to recover and get stronger. During that time we were given a generous inheritance which half of which was earmarked for mission giving. It was such a generous inheritance that it would be able to sustain any shortfalls we might have, should we choose to use it in that way.

You see, when we believe that God will provide, God provides through the church and through saints like you. But when we begin to doubt, then we try to come up with ways to make ends meet on our own, without using the resources and the signs that are given right in front of us. I have seen in the churches where I have served people second guess God when generosity stares us in the face.

For the past 31 years every church that I have served has seen their needs met financially in the most providential, unexpected ways possible. Not by our planning, but by our praying and then taking the initiative when God provides and not second guessing the generosity of God. But when we miss the basis for what we are doing, that Jesus is the Messiah and that means that he will provide and also gives us responsibilities to carry out his mission, when that fails to be our foundation then other necessities get in the way.

In our Matthew Scripture it is almost as if Jesus puts his disciples to the test and asks them one of the most basic, fundamental questions and we are just holding our breath to see if they get it right. If not, they are going to have to reboot because they are in this for the wrong reason. He asks them in vs.15 if they really understand who he is. He has already asked them whom the people around them, what does society and culture, what does the world think of me, who does it say that I am? A lot of answers, and apparently none of them right because then he asks them: Who do you say that I am.

I want you to close your eyes and imagine that you are in the presence of Jesus and he asks you the question: who am I to you. Say your name to yourself and hear Jesus ask you, who am I to you. That's the question that brings us here every Sunday, isn't it? Well, at least the answer is what brings us here every Sunday. Who is Jesus to you? Fortunately for us we get a disciple who actually gets the question right. Look at vs. 16 where we have Peter who responds: You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Everyone give Peter a hand. Everyone stand up and give Peter a standing ovation. You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. This is the point. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Jesus responds by calling him by his full name, Robert Kelton Bronkema, he normally would only have heard it if he was in trouble by his parents, but Jesus is so excited to have had Peter answer correctly that he says Peter bar Jonah, blessed are you. You got it right. No one taught you this, not flesh and blood. You didn't learn this from Sunday School, or from a sermon, or from the religious leaders, but God told you this directly. Praise be to God. Now keep in mind that in 5 verses I will say to you: get thee behind me Satan, but for right now at least, great answer!

He tells him that upon this rock he will build the church. Now, we can go down a rabbit trail and raise up the historic difficulties in these verses for Protestants and Catholics in their very different interpretations but I'll let you google that because the Protestant and Catholic church were not around in Jesus' day so there is no need to attach meaning to that which had no meaning then. He tells Peter, upon this rock, your testimony that I am the Messiah, I will build

my church. This is the first time in Matthew that he talks about the church and the only time besides later in Matthew 18. It is upon this foundation that the church is built, On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

The church, this church, is constantly being asked: who am I to you? I was in Louisville and I had been there a number of times before over my 30 years, and it was almost unrecognizable. That is because our denomination is almost unrecognizable. Much of that has to do with us moving away from Christ the solid rock and shifting our gaze to the sinking sand. How do we answer that question in our families, in our individual lives, how do we answer that question in this church when we are faced with questions of provision?

Who do we say Jesus is? Is he Lord over our finances, over our health, over our families, over our free time, over our politics, over our country. The list goes on, what is it that gets your attention the most and that you are least likely wanting to turn over to God? Are we allowing Jesus to be the Lord in all things because he will either be Lord of all things in our life and in the church, or he will be Lord over none of it. There is no grey area, either we hand it all over to God, or we just try to make things up as we go.

We, as the church, are called upon by Jesus to be his representatives and if we are worried about making ends meet when he has already provided, then who is Jesus to us? Let me read you some Scripture, because if you aren't going to believe me and my experiences of seeing God at work in the church, maybe you'll believe Scripture. I Corinthians 3:11 we read – For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Do we remember what people in Scripture said about Jesus? Remember when the disciples were in the boat in chapter 14 they said: Truly you are the son of God. That's the church speaking there upon seeing God at work. We have seen it too. What about doubting Thomas when he saw Jesus he said in John 20:28 – My Lord and My God! That's the church speaking again. Well if you don't believe the church what about the Roman Centurion who crucified Jesus when he said in Matthew 27:54 – Truly this man was God's Son.

The church, or God's eschatological community will never come to an end. The church can never be destroyed as long as it is built and continues to be rebuilt upon the rock of Jesus the Christ. Here it is almost as if Jesus is transferring whatever power and authority the Pharisees and the Sadducees thought they had and giving it to the church in these verses. All of what we do is completely dependent upon Jesus and his identity as the Messiah, as our Lord. Amen.