

Autism Bible Study: Matthew 16:13-20

My dearest readers,

Welcome to another post here on angelloforero.com. At this time, I'll make a Bible study from a passage thereof that is indeed, very controversial. However, as I take advantage of the non-sectarian nature of my university major in theology, I must assume that this shouldn't be taken seriously, as the issue is found in v.18 of the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. However, it shouldn't be something too serious, because the nature of the ABS is to promote Ecclesial Inclusion within Protestant faith communities at a grasp. Protestant Christianity is beautiful (as the Bible is). And one should never depart from attending the assembly (Hebrews 10:25). Well, that may sound awkward because many Protestants (in my local settings) tend to preach that way.

But, what if this Bible passage (alongside Hebrews 10:25, which will be studied at another time) could encourage autistic individuals to attend Church from Monday through Sunday rather than reading God's Word on their own?! Hence the essence of Romans 10:14. The main purpose for the ABS is that every person with Autism can attend a Protestant Church without diving into controversy about which denomination is correct. I say this because many Autism organizations tend to be pledged toward wokeism. And even more, many Christian schools marginalize people with autism. Hence the ideas for promoting Autism Theology and Ecclesial Inclusion within Protestantism.

Now on, focusing on this Bible passage, we will study about St. Peter the Apostle. Let's get into it.

What is the main idea of the text?

The following Bible passage, as stated above, contains some hypotheses about the Church's foundation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Note two facts: The location and the question asked by the Lord in v.13. However, the most important thing surrounding theology is the question about who is the Messiah. All the twelve disciples start responding, according to their own words, who was such a Messiah. In those stances, one of the disciples, Simon, responded "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (v.16).

Then Jesus responds to such a question by saying that Simon (the son of John) was a blessed man because the Father had called the Son to reveal the following, given that he was not given such a message from any carnal human being (v.17). Then, the v.18 is considered the principal idea of such a text that explains the origins of Our Faith: "Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it"

Something beautiful about this passage is that Jesus instructs Peter about the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven which will be given to him. But what is the beautiful thing about this passage? Great question, the answer prevails in that whatever Peter could forbid on earth, it would be forbidden as well in Heaven! (v.19). After having said these words to Peter, our Lord told his original twelve disciples NOT to say to anybody that He was the Messiah (v.20).

What is the meaning of such a passage?

As we get into the main idea of the text, which is explained above, what can we say about this? Which church or Church was the one Jesus and His disciples were talking about? These are many questions that a neurotypical might have, and even worse, these questions can be sort of difficult questions by the disabled! For that reason, I lay into the biblical scholars who can say more than my thousand words.

“Jesus’ question to his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is’ marks a major turning point in this gospel. As their answers show, the people were still in the dark about the identity of Jesus [...] Peter’s answer, however, was one target: ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’ (v.16). Thus, Jesus said, on this confession (“this rock”) he would build his church. The church has now come into full view of this gospel. Access (‘the keys’) into the kingdom of heaven would henceforth come through the church” (Sailhamer & Frees, 2011)

“No matter how much Satan attacks, the church will win, and he will lose. The offensive advance of the church exercising kingdom authority overrides hell’s attempts to stop it. But would Jesus accomplish his building program? Since Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus used his name in wordplay. In Greek, Peter’s name is *Petros*, which means ‘stone’. But when Jesus said, on this rock, I will build my church (16:18), he used the Greek word *petra*, which was a collection of rocks knitted together to form a larger slab. Jesus’s church, then, would be comprised of his unified brothers who confess him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, as Peter did.” (Evans, 2019)

An analysis of what this passage means in terms of disability and the church.

“I love the church. Those who know me well know that I am an apologist for the local church. I believe that thousands of years ago, Jesus made an outrageous prediction and promise that he would build not a place but a people who would be unstoppable, and because of that they would be handed the keys to his kingdom”. (Hardwick, 2021, p.7)

I couldn’t better begin with the analysis of what this passage means in terms of disability and the church than by citing an African-American, autistic pastor who, despite our theological and doctrinal differences, loves the church as told by him in his work *Disability and the Church*. The church herself is beautiful, and there’s supposed to be a welcoming place for everyone. And when I say everyone, I say people with disabilities as well as people of color and other ones. For me, it was not the case. Despite a certain reality that surrounds my being, I always wanted to get involved in any ministry inside my local Baptist church (both in Bogotá and here in Barranquilla). There is something I want to recall and is about the soul-winning ministry. In the beginning, I tried to win the souls of my paternal family who live in Bucaramanga (Santander, Colombia). However, there were two principal sources of avoiding: Economic resources and my false expectations that they would do the same as my maternal family did. But it was never the case. The thing is that God never wanted this. Instead, He wanted me to establish a special-needs ministry in my local Baptist church here in Barranquilla. At the moment, such a ministry hasn’t been started yet. Perhaps for the ruin that the church is or perhaps for the interests of the congregants, it hasn’t been started yet. However, when everything is lost, you realize that there are even some para-church organizations that focus on helping your church to make things happen. And yes, that’s the purpose of what para-church organizations are, to work with the church.

A good example of this is Joni and Friends. Yes, the top disability Christian non-profit whose outreach point is the disabled. However, as you realize, there are even pastors/ministers inside my denominational line that oppose para-church organizations. One good example is a Reformed Baptist pastor (2020), from Bogota (Colombia). He says the following respecting para-church organizations:

“A para-church organization is an organism that exists on a parallel [and different] form to the church, which pretends to fulfill some function God only commanded to the church.

These organizations are not under any specific local church (although they take advantage of their closeness to many of them) and are managed by particular people who can be Christians or church people, but who do not hold or depend on these. On the contrary, they would be supervised by the church, supervised by their pastors, and supported by a local church.

The issue is that today, there exist tons of para-church organizations (universities, colleges, evangelism groups, benevolences, worship groups, evangelists, coalitions, etc.), that often confuse with biblical/ecclesial ministries, that use/subordinate the local churches, to absorb their resources, use their staff, they make stronger and robust delimiting gifts and resources that God gives to His church to fulfill His function. That is why we see today enormous, elegant, and powerful para-church ministries and at the same time, weak churches as weak and as puny as ever.”

Let me tell you that I took the course “Beyond Suffering” in Spanish, and I’m writing the Autism Bible Study using the “Exegetical Project” sketch for writing down this and the other resting Bible studies embedded in my blog. So, do you know why I chose to study theology at a non-sectarian, secular university? It is because I wanted to watch myself out of bibliolatry, just assume that the Theology Program is to prepare for the leading of the Lord, but in reality, it isn’t. It is instead, a professional program that is a product of Liberal Theology. You know, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, etc. Fortunately, I managed to stay firm in my faith because I had done some internships with my Baptist pastor, indeed. There are many para-church organizations that indeed, stand up for the local church to the stick column of truth. In some instances, I must say that while churches are exclusively houses of worship, para-church organizations are indeed part of the commerce institution (in my understanding, of course).

So, what do these themes have to do with the passage in question? I am saying this because of the essential topic of this passage that comes from one of the New Testament Gospels. Please note that the Gospel of Matthew is the first book listed in the New Testament embedded in our Bibles.

My life and ministry in the church

If Jesus Christ founded the institution of the Church so the gates of hell do not prevail in Her, what has happened to the modern church? What is the problem with working with people with disabilities? Let me remind you that if the schools aren't prepared to handle an autistic child, don't wait for the church to be prepared either.

It must be said that the modern-day church has forgotten the essence of what disability might have in many of us. This reminds me of an author who had said that the Early Church, indeed, was so inclusive towards people with disabilities:

“People with disabilities were a priority for the early church. And they were a priority because of the church's prioritization of and commitment to caring for the poor. ‘Disability’ appears in their writings not as a one-off topic but as part of their larger interest in their writings not as a one-off topic but as part of their larger interest in the materially and socially poor. Working from the teachings of Jesus, the church fathers, saw it as part of their Christian vocation to live charitably towards those the world ostracized.” (Brown, 2020, cited by Hardwick, 2021, p.49)

If the world ostracized the disabled in that time, I'm sorry to say that is the church today that is indeed, the one who ostracizes all those in society. In reality, they behave as the Levi and the High Priest of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and even worse they judge you! Still, they judge you and want you to stay still in the church. So much hypocrisy among them! Using as a pretext the Bible (Heb. 10:25), as a way to insist those who want to get away from the hell they live in church.

I must assume, if you are a Christian in crisis and think that your faith can be fixed by entering and embracing the Christian left, let me tell you that you are not alone, you are accompanied by the demons. Because you are a poor ignorant.

“Keys symbolize access. When Jesus announced his intention to create a gathering of his followers, he framed the birth of his kingdom with the expressed intent of inclusion. The church was born to give humanity access to God's Kingdom, a kingdom whose ethics and ideals are not only inclusive but eternal”. (Hardwick, 2021, p.39).

My dearest Christian communities. If you see a new congregant gathering in your church who is indeed, a disabled individual. Would you open them the door so they can be visible in their communities in case they have strong interests? I always keep thinking about leaving the special-needs ministry position in my church to a “Bible-minded” autistic individual whose explicit obsession is the Good Book. However, I am still in the process of implementing a special-needs ministry in my local Baptist church. My pastor is still pending on it.

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