

I Will Build My Church

Matthew 16:16-20

Big Idea: No power on earth can stand against Jesus' promise to build His church.

Introduction:

This morning I want to shift over to the Gospel of Matthew because it speaks to the glory of the church in a way that we have not yet touched on.

I am compelled to turn to this passage this morning for two reasons. First, because it is a text that has been blatantly misappropriated by the Roman Catholic Church causing monumental confusion around the world regarding Jesus' teaching about church leadership. And secondly because when it is properly understood, this passage delivers strong encouragement for the church to remain faithful to its core values not matter else happens in the culture.

Since the very beginning there have been many forces determined to destroy the church. For example:

1. Herod attempted to destroy it before it began, by killing every baby boy two years old and younger in Bethlehem - the town of Jesus' birth.

2. The Jews attempted to purge Israel of Christianity, first by killing Jesus, then Stephen, and in Acts 9 we find Paul on the road to Damascus with official orders to arrest and, if necessary, execute any followers of Christ he might find.

3. It is said the rage of Emperor Nero was so fierce against the Christians that "a man might see cities full of men's bodies, the old lying with the young, women as well as men cast into the streets" (Fox, p. 9)

4. In England, No other king or queen spilled as much blood in a time of peace as Mary, Queen of Scots did for four years by hanging, beheading, burning, and imprisonment of devoted Christian Englishmen.

5. In 1900 the new Empress of China gave orders to exterminate the Christian religion resulting in hundreds of believers being brutally executed.

6. In 1915 Turkish authorities became alarmed at the number of Armenian Christians in their country, so they launched a campaign to get rid of them. As a result 600,000 men women and children were killed.

7. In the 1920's Joseph Stalin (Premier of the USSR) wrote, "There can be nothing more abominable than religion." He then set out to eradicate it from the Soviet Union and 60 million people lost their lives.

8. Today the persecution continues around the world. In fact it has been estimated that more men women and children died for their faith in Christ in the 20th century than in all previous centuries since the resurrection of Christ combined.

So the church is and always has been under the assault of hostile, external forces. Today, however, the church is also under assault by many more subtle forces within the ranks of professing Christians who claim that if significant changes are not made the church will face extinction. For instance, George Barna wrote a book which basically says that if the church doesn't change drastically it faces obsolescence. "Today's church is incapable of responding to the present moral crises. It must *reinvent itself* or face virtual oblivion by the mid 21st century" (Quoted at 1999 Shepherd's Conf, by John MacArthur).

In his book *Dying For Change*, Leith Anderson, warns that if the church doesn't become more "consumer responsive" take on the image of a "full-service church" and meet the high expectations of our culture by providing better quality and variety in music, extensive youth programs, diverse educational opportunities, a counseling staff, support groups, singles ministry, athletic activities, multiple Sunday-Morning services, and modern nursery, we are in serious trouble.

But is that how Jesus saw the future of the church? Our text this morning offers a powerful answer to that question. Here Jesus lays out His promise regarding the future of the church.

I. The Foundation of the Church:

Read Matthew 16:16-18

1. Let's begin by recalling the context here. Jesus has just asked His disciples who they believe He is. Peter responds by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

2. In Mark's gospel we are not told how Christ responded to Peter. But here, Jesus' response is profound, powerful, and often terribly misunderstood.

3. The words "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church" are at the root of a major disagreement between Catholics and Protestants. On the basis of this statement, Roman Catholicism teaches that the church is built on Peter as the very first Pope, thus establishing papal succession, and making the papacy the very heart and soul of divine authority on earth.

4. It has been noted over the years that this statement may be simply a play on words. In the Greek it comes across as a pun. The name Peter (lit. small stone) contrasts with "upon this rock" (lit. large stone). The "rock" Jesus is speaking of refers to Peter's confession rather than to Peter himself. We might paraphrase the meaning like this: "You are a little stone, but I will build my church on the solid rock of the truth you have just confessed. Namely, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." Moreover, the Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18), and nothing in the Bible speaks of a single earthly leader who should head the church in Christ's place. (cf. *Ashamed Of The Gospel*; p. 175)

5. More like, however, Jesus was speaking to Peter as the representative of the apostles. The NT, after all, says that the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Corner Stone” (Eph. 2:20). So there is legitimate sense in which Peter and all the apostles constituted the foundation on which the church is built. In other words, the church Jesus is building is being constructed upon the teaching and ministry of the apostles

A. Acts 2:42 tells us that after the church was born on the day of Pentecost, it experienced phenomenal growth very quickly and that the focus of the new believers as they met in each other’s homes was devotion to the “apostles teaching.” Not just Peter. Not just the instruction of James, John or Stephen. But the teaching of that plurality of God-inspired men who were speaking forth eternal truth.

B. Verse 47 of that same chapter tells us that “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

C. Then, throughout the remainder of the account of the book of Acts, apostolic teaching and ministry continues to be the foundation upon which every congregation is built.

D. Peter Himself tells us that the church is a building made of “living stones... built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). In other words, every single believer is an important “stone” in God’s building project.

E. Peter and the apostles were the foundation stones. Christ, not Peter, is the Corner Stone. And every person who comes to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is added to the church like a living stone in a spiritual house.

6. This is the foundation of the church.

II. The Certainty of the Church:

1. The most important words in this passage are “I will build My church.” Everything else that is said here either points toward or springs from that declaration.

2. This was an important truth for the disciples to learn at this point. You see they had been with Jesus for 2 1/2 years and things had not played out as they had anticipated. They had expected Jesus to smash the Roman Empire and the false religious leaders and set up the kingdom of God on earth. But that wasn’t happening. He wasn’t letting it happen. Rather, all it seemed they had accomplished was the making of some very serious enemies.

A. The Jews were out to kill him.

B. Herod too, was hoping to get his hands on Him.

C. The crowds had been sorely disappointed because He wouldn’t use His power to topple Rome.

D. Jesus own family didn’t even like Him anymore.

E. It seemed all they had succeeded in doing was to disenfranchise themselves from

everyone on the planet.

F. And if that weren't enough, Jesus had begun talking about His own death in Jerusalem. Things just didn't seem to be working out.

3. So it was just at this moment that Jesus made them this promise: "I will build My church."

4. Jesus' men needed to know that the plan was right on course. Nothing was lost. Things were going along just as He had planned it.

5. This should be instructive for us. As one scholar writes, "No matter how beleaguered, persecuted, martyred, rejected, maligned, poor, or ignoble the true church may seem, the Lord will not abandon His chosen ones. When the people of God seem weakest, look again. Jesus is *still* building His church. The original plan is still in operation. Modern times are no threat to His sovereign purposes. The circumstances of our troubled world do not alter His design. And no matter how corrupt and worldly the visible church has been or may become, Jesus Christ is still building His church on the original, sure foundation of apostolic teaching and ministry. (Ashamed of the Gospel, p. 177).

6. We have had people come and say things like, "You know, you could build this church a lot faster if you just added a band." Or, "Your church could really go to the next level if you preached shorter sermons and didn't seem so black and white all the time." Or, "I think it would be no time at all before you maxed out these facilities if you would just quit singing those old hymns, add a little drama, and become a little more relevant to the culture."

7. *You know what? We're not going to do any of that.* And do you know why? Because this church isn't mine and I'm not building it. This church is the Lord's and He is more committed to building it than I could ever be. And besides that, we're not going to reach more people for Christ by acting more like the culture. God draws men and women to Himself through the preaching of the truth which was first of all delivered to the apostles and then passed on to faithful men with the command, "Preach the word."

8. God has not called the elders of the church to be novel. He has called us to be faithful. And the measure of a church is not its breadth but its depth. It's not about how many people we have showing up on Sunday but about how well those who do show up know God and love His Son, and obey His word. That's the true measure of a church.

9. We don't measure a church by how much unbelievers or nominal believers like us. At the end of his life and ministry Paul wrote to Timothy, "All who are in Asia turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15), and, "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me" (4:16). The beloved apostle John, near the end of his life while exiled to the island of Patmos, the Lord gave him a message for each of the seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3). Five of the seven had severe problems that threatened their very existence. Nevertheless, Christ continues to build His church.

10. And today, around the world it is estimated that more people are coming to a genuine saving knowledge of Christ than ever before in history. And you know where it is happening? In the countries where Christians are the most persecuted.

11. You see, faithful churches are not in danger of becoming obsolete because Jesus is building

His church. We've seen the foundation of the church; the Certainty of the church, and now...

III. The Intimacy of the Church:

1. Building the church is not just some kind of religious exercise of impersonal enterprise for Jesus. The Church is His most precious possession for which He paid the highest conceivable price. Jesus said, "I will build *My* church."

A. The church is described as Christ's body, over which He is the head.

1. Can there be any more personal connection between two things as a head and body? Indeed the two are in fact one.
2. So much so that Jesus views any attack on the church as a personal attack upon Himself.
3. When Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the church, Jesus intervenes by calling out, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting *ME*? (Acts 9:4)
4. Jesus says at the judgment he will say to the condemned, "In as much as you have shown contempt for the least of these, My brethren, you have shown contempt for *ME* (Mat. 25:45)

5. Let there be no mistake. This is a very personal issue with Jesus. The church is His body.

B. The church is also Christ's Bride

1. Could God have chosen any better analogy to portray the intimacy between Christ and the people He loves?
2. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5, He loved her so much that He "*gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory*" (5:25-27)
3. Paul goes on to say that a husband is to love his wife like he loves his own body. "He who loves his wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church (v. 28-29).
4. Do you see the picture here? The church is precious to Jesus. He gave his life for her and now he nourishes and cherishes her.

A. The word "nourish" here means to "provide for." He makes sure she is well taken care of and has everything she needs. Nothing escapes His notice. He knows when she is hungry or sick or suffering or lonely or just plain tired – and He provides for her. He "nourishes" her.

B. The word "cherish" here means "to warm, comfort, and tenderly care for." It conveys the kind of heart that is behind Christ's ministry

to His bride as He serves the church. He doesn't approach her like a hired servant. His ministry isn't motivated by a sense of duty. He sacrifices for her and serves her out of pure delight! He is her husband. He cherishes her like a precious bride.

Can you see the intimacy here? Jesus says, "This is *MY* church.

C. The church is made up of God's Children.

Ephesians 5:1 "Therefore be imitators of God as beloved Children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us."

1 John 3:1 "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called the children of God?"

2. My point is simply this, that Christ's interest's in building the church are not impersonally. The church isn't some kind of second hand business enterprise Jesus is building, He loves it as His own body, His bride, his Children. He loves the church personally and intimately. So nothing is going to stop Him from making it into everything God promised it would be.

3. We've seen the foundation of the church; the Certainty of the church, The Intimacy of the Church, and finally...

IV. The Invincibility of the Church:

1. In verse 18, Jesus says, "The gates of Hades will not overpower it."

2. This is a phrase that is often misunderstood. Jesus is not suggesting that the church will be able to defend itself from the attacks of evil forces. "Gates" are not offensive weapons of war. They don't push forward or attack anything. They are purely defensive by design.

3. Jesus was picturing Hades as a prison which does not have the capacity to restrain or imprison the church.

4. Now pay special attention to this. The word "Hades" in the Greek refers not to Hell, but to the abode of the dead. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Sheol* (cf. Ps. 6:5). The KJV translates the word "Hell", but that is a bit misleading. Jesus wasn't referring to the place of punishment and eternal torment made for the devil and his angels. Rather, He was simply speaking of death and the grave. So when Jesus says, "The gates of Hades will not overpower it", He was telling the disciples that *the grace will not have the power to hold those who belong to Christ*.

5. Death could not hold Jesus in the grace and it will not be able to hold a single man, woman, or child who belongs to Him. As Paul wrote, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

6. More specifically, Jesus' words here are a promise of the resurrection of all who believe. Revelation 1:18 "I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades."

7. So Christ's building of the church is an invincible endeavor. It will be achieved by the omnipotent power of God Himself so that not even death – the arch-enemy of all man-kind will be able to thwart Christ's plan.

8. So you see, beloved, the modern prophets who predict the church's doom are dead wrong. We don't have to reinvent the church to save it. We don't have to come up with some new, clever, and expensive strategy for accomplishing God's plan. We simply need to be faithful to do what He has called us to do.

9. A couple decades ago people were saying "If you don't become seeker-sensitive your church is going to die." Later on some were saying, "The way to rescue the church is to become 'Real' and Emergent." Since then the leaders of the Seeker movement have published a paper entitled "We Were Wrong", The Emergent church has gone the way of the Dodo, the Purpose Driven Church has run its course, but Christ promise to build His church has never even hit a speed bump.

10. It won't be long before someone else comes along with a new and hip idea about what the church needs to be if it's going to survive. But when all the money is spent, and media frenzy dies away and the smoke clears, my hope is that Calvary Bible Church will be standing stronger than it every was in the simple and precious promise of Jesus, "I will build my church."

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