

## “The Builder of the Church”

Mat. 16:18-20

- INTRO. – Last week, we began a new series on what God has to say about His church, and we began with a focus on the house God is building. Today we want to zero in on the One who is doing the building of that building – that spiritual house made of living stones.
- Since we *know* that the universe was created by God (as Col. 1:16 says), “All things were made by Him and for Him...” and since the highest purpose for man is to glorify God, it is only natural that God would be calling out (in every age) a people who will come together to be the praise of His glory (as Eph. 1:6 says).
- There are *many* in this world who are *not* willing to acknowledge Him as Lord, but there are many who *are*, and it is with these that God is calling out a redeemed church that will forever be privileged to render Him glory and honor and praise.
- Now, in Mat. 16, we have one of the most well-known passages in all the Word of God. Jesus’ disciples are at a critical point of understanding and belief – and Jesus brings them to the point of acknowledging Who He really is by asking them about their understanding of His identity.
- In v. 13, He asked them, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Now, Jesus had been speaking to those who, from their earliest years had been taught about the coming Messiah, but had a view which was partly scriptural and partly distorted by their traditions.
- Yes, they knew that the Messiah would bring truth and righteousness, but they thought that He would be (primarily) a military conqueror, who would free them from all their enemies and establish Israel as the supreme ruler of the world.
- So Jesus is trying to see if His disciples are picking up on the fact that He is *not* like they thought He would be; that His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom in the hearts and lives of men.
- And at this particular point in Jesus’ ministry, the people were beginning to get somewhat frustrated with Jesus, because He had *not* made any moves to free Israel from the Roman rule.
- Even the disciples were beginning to feel frustrated. They haven’t quite grasped the true spiritual nature of the kingdom Jesus came to establish, and they are beginning to wonder when Jesus would make His move militarily.
- There is certainly no question about His power and His ability to overthrow Rome. They had witnessed all His miracles first hand and knew exactly what he could do. But why was He waiting to set up His earthly kingdom?

- Before very long Jesus would make it even *more* difficult for them by announcing to them that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die at the hands of the Jews.
- But for now, He is going to re-affirm to them that everything is still under control, no matter what else happens, because what He is doing is exactly according to the will of the Father.
- He is going to tell them that He will indeed establish His church, and that nothing in this world can stop it! (Of course, I'm speaking of the *universal* church, *not* a particular *local* church)
- And He is saying to them, in this incredible moment (that we have recorded for us here in Mat. 16), that they will never have any reason to fear; that they have every reason to put their absolute trust in Him and that what they saw on the surface was *not* the whole story.
- And folks, what a wonderful word of encouragement this has been for persecuted, bewildered, rejected saints throughout the history of the church! Listen my friend, the going may get very tough at times, but make no mistake about it: ***Nothing can ever stop what God is building!!!***
- At the end of time, the church of Jesus Christ will still be standing strong! And all the redeemed of the Lord will one day stand around the throne of God complete, without any spot or wrinkle, as a

bride adorned for her husband (just like God's Word says).

- Nothing Satan can do will ever thwart God's ultimate plan for His church. *Not* even death can hinder the work that He is doing in the building of His church.
- Now, in our text this morning, (Mat. 16:18-20), we see at least 7 features of the church that Christ is building. And I want us to spend just a few moments this morning examining these aspects of the builder of the church. First of all, we see:

#### I. THE INSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH

- V. 18 says, "...upon this rock..." Jesus says that He is going to build His church on a "rock." But what is this "rock" that Jesus is referring to? This has been debated throughout the history of the church. We need to grapple with it for just a moment or two.
- Now, the first thing we need to do is to dispel this business about Peter being the first Pope, and papal succession passing down from him. The Catholic church has been teaching that for more than 1500 years.
- They, of course, go back to this passage of Scripture for their rationale, and carry it to such a point where if, at any time, the Pope speaks "ex cathedra," that he has divine authority to speak for

God and to decree what (supposedly) God is decreeing.

- In fact, when we were in Italy we saw the seat of papal authority where the Pope sits when he makes this kind of “ex cathedra” pronouncement. It is there in the Basilica of San Giovanni.
- And, you see, this is all because they see this passage as Jesus giving Peter the “keys to the Kingdom” which are (in turn) passed down from Pope to Pope throughout the generations. In every Catholic church in Rome you always see Peter depicted as holding the keys to the kingdom.
- But folks, such an interpretation is faulty (I believe) for several reasons. First of all, the NT makes it very clear that Christ *alone* is the foundation and head of the church.
- For example, Eph. 2:20 speaks of the church “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.” (We saw this last week)
- Secondly, this interpretation of Matt. 16 does *not* stand the test of good hermeneutics. The “Rock” is *not* Peter, but the Lord Jesus Christ. The confession of his identity was Peter’s, but even that was revealed to him by the Father.
- So how should we interpret this statement from Jesus that He would build His church on “this

rock?” Well, there are several different interpretations, and (other than the one which sees Peter as the first Pope) they *all* make *some* sense, and have some validity theologically.

- By the way, each of these interpretations has backing from solid, biblical, evangelical scholars. I don’t think we should be dogmatic here, because I believe there is some validity in all of these. Perhaps the correct answer to the question of which interpretation is correct in this instance is *not* “a, b or c” but “all the above.”
- Let’s look at the various ways this has been interpreted. One interpretation points to a play on words as Jesus uses the Greek word “petros” (small stone) to refer to Peter and then uses the word “petra” (great mountainous rock) to refer to that upon which He is building His church.
- Some then say that the great mountainous rock points to Christ Himself, and others say that it point to the great confession of faith that Peter had made, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. (v. 16)
- I believe a more likely meaning is that Jesus is speaking to Peter as a representative of the apostles and prophets, upon which He is going to establish His church (as Eph. 2:20 says). Peter was clearly the spokesman for the 12 and was used by God to bring the first Jew and the first Gentile into the Kingdom through faith in Christ.

- At Pentecost, Peter took the lead and delivered the very first sermon of the church age. He also became the “Senior Pastor” (if you will) of the primary church, which was the church at Jerusalem.
- But listen, as instrumental as Peter was in the early church, he (nor any of the other apostles) ever saw any special authority or position vested in Peter that was *not* vested in all the other apostles and prophets.
- This was made very clear just a short time after this conversation in Mat. 16, when the disciples came to Jesus in Mat. 18 and asked Him who was the greatest in the Kingdom.
- If Peter had been established by Jesus as the first Pope, they would *not* have asked this question, or at least Jesus would have immediately set them straight by saying, “Don’t you remember, Peter is the greatest because I said that on him I would build my church.”
- But Jesus didn’t say that, did He? He gave no indication (at all) that Peter had any special position or authority beyond that of any of the other apostles or prophets.
- Instead, he set a little child out in front of them and said, “whoever will humble himself and become like this little child (with simple child-like faith), the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
- Then later on, James and John had their mother come and ask Jesus if her 2 sons could sit on each side of Him in heaven. And again, we see no connection in Jesus’ response that would indicate that Peter was superior in any way to any of the other apostles.
- Although Peter recognized himself as an apostle, he never claimed any superior rank, title, or privilege over the other apostles. He referred to himself as a “fellow elder” in 1 Peter 5:1 and as a “bond-servant of Jesus Christ” in 2 Peter 1:1.
- And rather than claiming any homage or honor for himself, he soberly warned his fellow elders *not* to “lord it over” those under their pastoral care (1 Peter 5:3).
- Now listen, it was on the apostles as a group, *not* Peter as an individual, that Christ said He would build His church. And the reason He said that, is because the apostles (along with the NT prophets) were the ones who taught the Word of God to the first believers.
- The early church respected the apostles and the prophets, but they did *not* pay homage to *them* or to their office. Instead the focus was on their *doctrine*; what they taught. That’s where the authority was.

- The authority of the apostles and the prophets in the early church was all wrapped up in the message they had for the church, which was “not revealed by flesh and blood, but by the Father in heaven...” (Mat. 16:17)
- So, whether we interpret Mat. 16:18 to refer to Peter as a small stone compared to the great stone (meaning Christ Himself or the confession Peter made that He is the Christ) or if we interpret it to mean that Peter was the representative of all the apostles and prophets, the truth is the same: The foundation of the church is the revelation of God through His Apostles, and the Lord of the Church (Jesus Christ) is the chief corner stone.
- Paul put it this way in 1 Cor. 3:11, “...no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” And Jesus is still building His church with “living stones...built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5)
- Well, we’d better move on or we’ll never get through all 7 of these. I’ve got some of you nervous, don’t I? Notice secondly:

## II. THE INTEGRITY OF THE CHURCH

- V. 18 says “...I will build My church...” Now, one definition of “integrity” is “to be unimpaired or unimpeded.”
- And here’s where I’m going with this: Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the “Christ, the Son of the Living God.” On the basis of that understanding, Jesus was giving His disciples a divine promise. He was promising them that His church was going to be built no matter what. (Again, speaking of the *universal* church)
- Now, if Jesus was merely a man, there could certainly be cause for concern. But, you see, if Jesus is really who He said He was, (the Son of the Living God), then there would be absolutely no reason to worry.
- My friend, you can take it to the bank – Jesus Christ is building His church and there is absolutely *nothing* in this universe that can ever stop it!!!
- No matter how liberal, or fanatical, or ritualistic, or apostate some of its outward adherents may become, (and no matter how decadent the rest of the world may be), Jesus Christ is still building His true church!
- No matter how oppressive or hopeless the outward circumstances may *appear* from a human perspective, God’s people belong to a cause that cannot and will *not* fail!!! It is a guaranteed victory!
- And the reason it is guaranteed is because the very same One who spoke this world into existence is

the One who has established (and is building) His church. *Not* even hell itself can stand against it! (pause)

- Well, notice a third aspect of the church that we see here in Mat. 16:

### III. THE INTIMACY OF THE CHURCH

- Jesus said “...I will build My church...” As the owner (and the architect) and the builder of the church, Jesus was re-assuring His disciples (and all who would follow them in the faith) that we can be absolutely confident in His divine love and care.
- We are His Body, “purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28) “The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” (1 Cor. 6:17) Christ is *not* ashamed to call us “His brethren.” (Heb. 2:11)
- We are *His* church, and He jealously guards His own. The protection we enjoy (as His possession) is based on an intimate relationship with Him in His church. #4:

### IV. THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

- The word used for “church” (in v. 18) is the Greek word “ekklesia.” It means “the called out ones.” We are the church, the ones He has called out from among the world.

- Now, it wasn’t until *after* Pentecost that the church began to understand this term as a distinct, redeemed community of faith; but Jesus knew *already* that He was preparing a people who would be separate from the world for the purpose of His glory and honor.

- Listen folks, this is why it is so important for us to live holy lives! This is why the pursuit of purity and holiness is so important. We are called to be separate from the world. Though we are *in* the world, we are *not* to be *of* the world!

- We are the “ekklesia” – the “called out ones.” Why would we want to sing music that sounds just like the world? Why would we want to conduct business in the church the same way that the world conducts business? Why would we ever treat each other the same way that people in the world treat one another?

- We’re *not* of the world! We are separate and called out. Let’s live that way!!! #5:

### V. THE INVINCIBILITY OF THE CHURCH

- Verse 18 continues, “...and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.” Now, this part has often been misunderstood. Although it *is* true that nothing (*not* even Satan and his demons) can thwart God’s ultimate plan in the building of His church; this passage probably does *not* refer to the attacks of Satan.

- The word “Hades” here is *not* the word for “hell” (as in some translations). It is the counterpart to the Hebrew word “sheol” which refers to “the abode of the dead.”
- Now listen, there is absolutely no doubt that the church is going to be victorious over Satan. That is spelled out in many *other* passages in Scripture. But I don’t think *that* is what Jesus had in mind *here*.
- What I believe Jesus was referring to here, is the fact that *not* even death has the power to hold God’s people captive. Even death, (the greatest enemy of man), is *not* able to stand against what Christ is doing in the building of His church!
- Remember, gates are *not* offensive weapons. They are designed to protect from attack or to keep someone inside (as in the gates of a prison). What Christ is saying *here* (I believe) is that even the gates of Hades are *not* strong enough to overpower (“katschuo,” to have mastery over) the church of God. Even death can’t hold God’s elect.
- Because death is no longer master over the Lord of the church, it is no longer master over those who belong to Him. Jesus said, “Because I live, you also shall live.” (John 14:19)
- Satan, (who once had the power and keys of death), failed in his attempt to keep Jesus in the grave; and

*now* has no more power to hold those of us who are “in Christ” either.

- Christ’s victory over death was so final that He speaks of it in the past tense: (He says in Heb. 2:14) “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.”
- Satan no longer has any power over those who are in Christ Jesus. Since the risen Christ conquered the power of the grave, the devil has no more power to wield death against those of us who belong to Him.
- That is the same great truth that Peter declared on Pentecost: “God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” (Acts 2:24)
- It is the same truth that Paul wrote so confidently about in 1 Cor. 15, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. <sup>55</sup>“O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” <sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; <sup>57</sup>but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:54-57)
- My friend, there is nothing in this world that can stop what God is doing in the building of His church: *Not* even death!

- ILL. - The history of the church has been represented by the Waldensians in a picture of an anvil, with many worn-out hammers all around it. Beneath this scene are the words: One Anvil – Many Hammers. (expound)
- ILL. - The Emperor Diocletian set up a stone pillar on which was inscribed these words: For having Exterminated The Name Christian From The Earth. MAN, WAS HE WRONG!!!
- Though he put *many* to death, rather than *destroy* the church, the church thrived (and grew) with each martyr that entered the arena.
- Throughout Christian history there have been many hammers, but the anvil of the church God is building still stands strong! #6:

## VI. THE INSTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH

- Look with me at v. 19, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”
- Now, the Lord is still addressing Peter (I believe as a representative of the apostles) and He establishes great authority to “bind and loose.”

- Now, what does this mean? Well, shortly after the resurrection, Jesus told all the disciples something very similar in John 20:23. He said, “If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained.”
- I believe that this authority, that He is giving to the Apostles (and subsequently to *other* spiritual leaders in the church) is primarily the authority to practice church discipline when it is warranted.
- In fact, in Mat. 18, He tells the whole church what he told Peter earlier: “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (Mat. 18:18)
- But listen, the authority to practice church discipline is a *judicial* function, *not* a *legislative* one. We only have authority to carry out what God has already commanded.
- The authority given here, is the authority for a local church, (represented by its spiritual leadership), to discipline an unrepentant brother or sister according to the Word of God.
- None of us has the right to *determine* what is right or wrong, forgiven or unforgiven. God has already

determined those, and has given them to us in His Word.

- But we *do* have the authority to judge on the basis of what God has already declared in His Word to be right or wrong, forgiven or unforgiven. We can authoritatively declare what is acceptable to God (or forbidden by Him) because we have His Word on it.
- And when we are in agreement with God's Word, God is in agreement with us. And this is what Jesus is saying to Peter in v. 19. Well, there is one more thing we need to see very quickly:

## VII. THE INCONCEIVABILITY OF THE CHURCH

- Look at v. 20, "Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ." People's expectations of the Kingdom were so warped and self-centered that they were *not* able to see the spiritual nature of the Kingdom.
- To try to convince them of it (at this point) was like casting pearls before swine. They would be much more prepared to see it when the greatest proof of all was provided: the resurrection from the dead.
- They were *not* able to see (at this time) what Jesus declared to Pilate in John 18:36, "My kingdom is

not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

- Jesus knew that, until the resurrection, people would *not* be ready for the truth that had been revealed to Peter, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
- I think He also knew, that until the HS came to empower them, the messengers were *not* ready to deliver the message of the truth in a hostile world.
- But that power *did* finally come, and on that day, Peter stood up and boldly declared "That God has made this same Jesus both Lord and Christ!!!" (Acts 2:36) And thus the church was born...
- PRAYER