

The Church that Christ Builds, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 16:18–20

Code: 2318

INTRODUCTION

The heart of Matthew 16:13-20 is Christ's statement, "I will build my church" (v. 18). Everything else in the passage amplifies that great statement.

Identifying the Church's Builder

Years ago someone was trying to find out why particular churches experienced great growth. That person visited my office and said, "All across the country I have found that large churches have leaders who desire to build the church. I want to ask you the same question I have asked them: Do you have a great desire to build the church?" I answered--much to his surprise--that I had no desire to build the church because Christ said He would do that. It's comforting to know that the building of the church doesn't depend on people, gimmicks, or programs. The Lord is the only Builder, and it's our joy as Christians to be a part of what He's building.

A. The Discouragement of the Disciples

Christ's promise to build His church came as the disciples were facing discouragement. Because of their association with Christ, they became hated objects of the nation Israel. They realized the Jewish leaders would be pleased with Christ's death and that the Jewish populace sought only a political-military Messiah. And instead of seeing Christ rule in kingdom of glory and grandeur, the disciples now heard Christ explain "how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed" (Matt. 16:21).

B. The Persecution of the Disciples

After telling them about His coming death, Christ revealed that the disciples themselves would bear a cross (vv. 24-28). The persecution of God's people is not something new. In the Old Testament God's people were persecuted during both the Egyptian and Babylonian captivities. At times their unique identity as God's people was in danger because of their apostasy and intermarriage with the surrounding nations. There were always times when the train of God's people looked like it was going to come to a halt. And the church, from early days to modern, has experienced severe persecution.

In the midst of the disciples' discouragement Christ assured them that His divine program was moving ahead. He did so by promising to build His church. Although that promise is a brief

statement, it provides encouragement for all disciples of Christ. Let's see why.

LESSON

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE CHURCH'S EXISTENCE

"I will build my church."

It's certain that Christ will build His church because it's His divine promise (cf. Isa. 55:11). Christ is God and God cannot lie. The tense of the verb is emphasizing the continuation of action, not the time of action. That is, Christ has already been building in the past, is building presently, and will continue to build in the future.

A. Because of the Divine Method

Christ is certain to build His church wherever believers live in righteous obedience to God's Word. By walking within the parameters set by Scripture, believers become channels through which Christ builds His church. But Christ will not build where He finds disobedience.

Church leaders are constantly looking for some tricks of the trade to make the church grow. I'm often asked, what methods I use. But God doesn't build His church through clever methodology, only through believers committed to righteousness. If you obey God's Word, you'll let Christ build the church His way.

B. Because of the Divine Builder

Scripture clearly shows that Christ is the divine Builder of the church.

1. Acts 2:39--"The promise [of salvation] is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord, our God, shall call." It is the Lord who calls sinners to repentance.
2. John 6:37--Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."
3. Acts 2:47--"The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."
4. Acts 5:14--"Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (cf. 11:24).
5. Acts 13:48--"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." God drew to salvation the ones He predetermined to set His love on.
6. Acts 18:10--The Lord said to Paul, "I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I

have many people in this city. " The Lord brought a select number of believers into His church at Corinth.

The epistles add more detail about how the Lord builds His church. For instance, we are instructed about worship, prayer, teaching, holiness, church discipline, and the qualifications for elders, deacons, and deaconesses. Those instructions point to the need for righteous living, which characterizes those the Lord uses in building His church.

C. Because of the Divine Goal

The church exists to manifest Christ's glory. Ephesians 5 says Christ is building the church to "sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (vv. 26-27). Indeed, "unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:21). Such glory manifests God's infinite wisdom to even the holy angels (3:10).

II. THE INTIMACY BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE

"I will build my church."

The Greek term translated "my" shows Christ to be the Owner, Architect, and Builder of the church. We are part of His own Body and one with Him in holy intimacy (Eph. 5:23). That intimacy is depicted throughout Scripture.

A. In the New Testament

1. Acts 20:28--"Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."
2. Acts 9:4--Christ said to Saul, "Why persecutest thou me?" When Saul persecuted Christians, it was the same as persecuting Christ.
3. 1 Corinthians 6:17--"He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."
4. John 10:27-28-- Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. . . . Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

B. In the Old Testament

The Old Testament refers to the righteous as the apple of God's eye (Ps. 17:8; Zech. 2:8). That figurative expression refers to the pupil, the most sensitive part of the eye. God was saying, "If you poke your finger in the eyes of My people, it's the same as poking it in My eye. " God cares like that because the church has been purchased with Christ's own blood (Acts 20:28). God draws near to His people and is like the friend who sticks closer than a brother (cf. Prov. 18:24).

The Wonder of Intimacy with Christ

While returning home on an airplane, a passenger asked me if I drink.

I replied, "I don't drink."

He asked, "Never?"

I said, "Never."

He asked, "Do you have cancer?"

I answered, "As far as I know I don't."

He said, as though he were preaching to me, "I drink every day. Some day you're going to be old and then what are you going to do? All the fun will be behind you. You should drink now while you're still young."

I replied, "I don't have any desire to drink--none at all."

Then he looked at me and asked, "What do you have that you don't need to drink?"

I responded, "I'm glad you asked. I have total peace and happiness."

He asked, "Where did you get that?"

And I answered, "I know Jesus Christ."

There was momentary silence. Then he asked in disbelief, "You know Jesus Christ?"

I said, "That's right. I know Jesus Christ."

He looked at me in bewilderment and remarked, "I went to a school where they told us about Jesus Christ, but I don't know Him."

I responded, "You can." I then had an opportunity to explain the gospel to him.

He went back to his seat and I took my seat behind him. He then told his traveling partner, "You won't believe this, but the gentleman seated behind us actually knows Jesus Christ!" And his partner, turning around to look at me, said, "You're kidding!" He also was amazed that someone could know Christ personally.

It's an amazing reality that we as believers know Jesus Christ. But what is even more astounding is that He knows us!

III. THE IDENTITY OF THOSE IN THE CHURCH

"I will build my church."

The Greek term translated "church" (ekkl[ma]esia) means "called out ones" and refers to an assembly. In the gospels the word occurs only here and in Matthew 18:17. Here it is used in its general sense for any gathering of people. The original meaning of the word synagogue also referred to a general gathering of people. Since it is likely Christ spoke in Aramaic, He probably used the general term kahal, which means "congregation," "assembly," or "multitude." Only later in the epistles do we find ekkl[ma]esia invested with a fuller meaning. So Christ was speaking of an assembly, congregation, or community of redeemed people. That general meaning is also evident in other Scriptures.

A. Acts 7:37-38

"This is that Moses who said unto the children of Israel, A Prophet shall the Lord, your God, raise up unto you of your brethren, like me; him shall ye hear. This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai." Here the word refers to the Jewish people gathered in the desert during the time of Moses.

B. Acts 19:32

"Some, therefore, cried one thing, and some another; for the assembly was in confusion." Here ekkl[ma]esia refers to a crowd in Ephesus that rejected the gospel message.

C. Hebrews 12:22-23

"Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect." Here "church" refers to all God's people.

Just as in Hebrews 12:23 "church" in Matthew 16 refers to all God's people. And "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew 16:19--used synonymously for the word church--also speaks of the assembly of people gathered to God. As the disciples were walking along the dusty road in Caesarea Philippi, they certainly understood ekkl[ma]esia in the same general sense, not as a building with a steeple. In those days there were no denominations, elders, deacons, or congregations as we have today. Although Christ was facing hostility and rejection, He would continue to gather His redeemed people, just as He had been doing all along and is continuing to do now.

CONCLUSION

People often wonder what will happen to the church if America falls. But the building of the church doesn't depend on the rise or fall of America because only the Lord builds the church. Since Christ builds only where He finds righteousness, it's important for us to live righteously. Be committed to His Word and allow His Spirit to change your life. That way you'll manifest His glory in the church.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What statement is the heart of Matthew 16:13-20?
2. It's a ____ for the believer to be a part of what God is building.
3. Why were Christ's disciples discouraged?
4. What is the significance of the verb tense in Matthew 16:18?
5. Where is Christ certain to build His church?
6. Christ builds His church through believers committed to ____.
7. What does Acts 2:39 show?
8. The ____ add more detail about how the Lord builds His church.
9. Why does the church exist?
10. The term "my" in Matthew 16:18 reveals the believer to be ____ with Christ in holy ____.
11. In Acts 9:4 who in effect was Saul persecuting?
12. Why did the Lord call His people "the apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8)?
13. Define "church" in Matthew 16:18. Support your answer with Scripture.

Pondering the Principles

1. As part of the church Christians enjoy holy intimacy with Christ. Bible scholar R. B. Kuiper wrote,

"How the Creator can regard mere creatures as His friends defies human understanding. How the holy God can bestow His friendship on sinful men is utterly incomprehensible. Suffice it to say that here we witness a supreme manifestation of divine condescension. And the intimacy of that friendship renders the divine condescension all the more marvelous" (The Glorious Body of Christ [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967], pp. 332-33). Are you enjoying intimacy with the Lord through the study of His Word and prayer? Read and study Luke 10:38-42, examining your walk with the Lord in light of that Scripture. Ask the Lord to help you have the same desire the apostle Paul had: "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8, NASB).

2. Nothing can thwart Christ's promise to build His church. Pastor-teacher J. C. Ryle said, "Great is the power which Christ displays in building His church! He carries on His work in spite of opposition from the world, the flesh and the devil. In storm, in tempest, through troublous times, silently, quietly, without noise, without stir, without excitement, the building progresses. . . . We ought to feel deeply thankful that the building of the true church is laid on the shoulders of One that is mighty. If the work depended on man, it would soon stand still. But, blessed be God, the work is in the hands of a Builder who never fails to accomplish His designs! Christ is the almighty Builder. He will carry on His work, though nations and visible churches may not know their duty. Christ will never fail. That which He has undertaken He will certainly accomplish" (Holiness [Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1989], p. 214). Have you offered thanks and praise to the Lord for building His church? Read Ephesians 1 and worship the Lord for His marvelous work.

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