

The Church that Christ Builds, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 16:18–20

Code: 2319

INTRODUCTION

A. A Look at Life

1. From the perspective of the lost

Throughout history philosophers and historians have wondered why man exists. For instance, the modern French author Andr[ac]e Maurois wrote a book on the subject entitled Relativism. He believed the universe was indifferent, concluding there is no way for anyone to attain total, absolute truth in any area. Several ancient Greek philosophers had a similar view, seeing life as a constant repetition of cycles without any purpose or goal. The popular French writer Jean-Paul Sartre espoused the view that every person exists as an isolated individual in the midst of a purposeless universe. The French molecular biologist Jacques Monod wrote that man exists because of chance and lives without duty or destiny (Chance and Necessity [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 971]. With that kind of philosophy being espoused, is it any wonder people have reached the point of despair and our society is filled with violence, destruction, and hedonism?

2. From the perspective of Scripture

According to Scripture, man exists to glorify God. That's why the Bible says we are to "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God" (Phil. 2:11). And "whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). God alone is worthy to receive glory and has created man to reflect His eternal majesty and splendor. To that end, God is saving a redeemed people out of a sinful world.

B. A Look at the Disciples

1. Their expectations

In Matthew 16 Christ wanted to assure His disciples that the unfolding of history would continue to bring Him glory. They were anticipating the Messiah to come and reign as King, delivering the Jewish people from bondage and oppression, while ushering in righteousness, peace, and prosperity. Tragically, the Jewish populace didn't even recognize their Messiah. They thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. Besides that, the Jewish religious leaders hated Christ and wanted Him killed. So the expectations the disciples had for a conquering king appeared unfulfilled.

Their level of anticipation certainly didn't rise any when Christ said "he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things . . . and be killed" (Matt. 16:21). In fact, their feelings were so to the contrary that Peter blurted out, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee" (v. 22). Christ replied, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever

will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (vv. 24-25). Death would come not only to Christ, but also to the disciples. But in spite of such gloom, the disciples confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God" (v. 16).

2. Their perplexity

Although the disciples collectively made that confession, they were still perplexed about the unfolding of the messianic kingdom. What had happened to it? Was it still on schedule? In response to what they must have been thinking, Christ promised, "I will [continue to] build my church, and the gates of [death] shall not prevail against it" (v. 18). Undoubtedly that promise brought the disciples confidence and encouragement.

Whenever you wonder if history is ultimately bringing glory to God, find your assurance and strength in those same words. In history God is calling an assembly of redeemed people to the eternal praise of His glory. Let's continue our study of that divine assembly called the church.

REVIEW

I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE CHURCH'S EXISTENCE (v. 18)

II. THE INTIMACY BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE (v. 18)

III. THE IDENTITY OF THOSE IN THE CHURCH (v. 18)

LESSON

IV. THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH (v. 18)

"This rock" identifies the foundation on which the church is built. There are several views about the identity of that foundation. Some say it is the apostle Peter, some say it is Peter's confession, and others say it is all the apostles.

A. Is It Peter?

Many believe the church is built on the apostle Peter --that he is the father or first head of the church. This is the traditional view of the Roman Catholic Church. Its advocates point out that the Greek name "Peter" means "rock" or "stone." They teach that Peter's authority passed from him to a successor's bearing the same authority. They consider that authority to be as binding as the Bible.

However, Scripture clearly reveals that Christ, not Peter, is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). In Matthew 18 the disciples came to Jesus asking, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (v. 1). If it were obvious to them that Peter was the greatest, there would have been no need to ask. Therefore the keys of the kingdom mentioned two chapters previously (Matt. 16:19) must not have belonged to Peter alone. In comparing greatness to the humility of a little child (18:4), Christ didn't reveal any kingdom primacy for Peter.

In Matthew 20:21 we find a similar incident. The mother of James and John asked Christ to allow her two sons to sit next to Him in His kingdom. " That's another clear indication that neither James nor John knew of any kingdom primacy that had been given to Peter. Otherwise there would have been no need for the mother's question.

Did Peter himself think he was the father or head of the church? In his first epistle he wrote, "The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder" (1 Peter 5:1; emphasis added). Peter recognized the elders in the church as his equals and addressed them as such. He knew it was important for elders not to abuse their authority, but instead to "be clothed with humility" (v. 5).

B. Is It Peter's Confession?

The traditional Protestant view is that "this rock" refers to Peter's confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). The Greek name translated "Peter" (petros) means "rock," but "this rock" (petra, a different form of the same basic word) refers to a larger rock such as a rock bed or a rocky mountain or peak. That leads some to believe the antecedent of "this rock" is Peter's confession--that Christ was saying He would build His church on the rock bed of Peter's confession about the reality of Christ's deity. That's a fair interpretation because there is a distinction in meaning between the two words.

C. Is It the Apostles?

I believe, however, that the best interpretation of "upon this rock I will build my church" is to see the apostles as the foundation of the church. Ephesians 2 says the household of God (the church) is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (v. 20). It's important to remember that Peter made his confession about Christ (Matt. 16:16) on behalf of all the disciples. So it's no problem to see Peter representing all the disciples here in verse 18.

This isn't the only occasion where Peter served as spokesman for the Twelve (e. g. Matt. 15:15; 19:27; John 6:68). Furthermore, he had a leading role in ministering on behalf all the disciples in the days of the early church. For example, the Lord used his preaching to add over five thousand people to the church (Acts 4:4). It was through Peter's testimony and ministry that a lame man was healed (3:4-6). Peter had a leading part in guiding the election process for a replacement for Judas (1:15-22). And before the Sanhedrin Peter heroically proclaimed Jesus Christ (4:8-12). So it's not difficult to see Peter representing the Twelve here in Matthew 16:18.

The church is built, not on the office or rank of the apostles, but on their teaching. The apostles laid the foundation for the church in proclaiming the Word of God and in many ways were inseparable

from their own message. Acts 2 says the early church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (v. 42). The church's foundation is God's revelation, as given to us through the apostles.

In 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul says, "No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (NASB). That complements what he wrote in Ephesians 2:20: the apostles and prophets were chosen to be foundation stones because they confessed Christ to be the true foundation. They were intimately attached and inseparably linked to Christ and His Word. Saying the church is built on the foundation of the apostles is the same as saying that it's built on Christ. And today Christ is still building His church on people, who like apostles, embrace Christ as Lord.

V. THE INVINCIBILITY OF THE CHURCH (v. 18)

"The gates of hades shall not prevail against it."

"Gates" is used here in the sense of holding people in--like prison gates. "Hades" is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament term "Sheol." It's a general reference to the grave, not to the eternal torments of hell. The Greek term translated "prevail" means "to conquer." According to Hebrews 2:14 Satan has the power of death, so he tries to kill Christians in an attempt to destroy the church. But he will never prevail because "God hath raised up [Christ], having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it" (Acts 2:24).

Because death could not hold Christ captive, the believer is also set free from death's bondage. Christ said it like this: "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). First Corinthians 15 says, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 55, 57).

So Christ's statement in Matthew 16:18 is a promise of resurrection. That certainly fits the context of the passage because Christ would soon tell them not only about His death and resurrection (v. 21), but also about the coming persecution and death of His followers (v. 25). Death won't defeat Christ's program of building the church. Everyone who loves Christ leaves this world to enter into God's glorious world "to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb. 12:23, NASB). Christ said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hades and of death" (Rev. 1:18). Christ has complete authority and control over death. He experienced death so "he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

VI. THE AUTHORITY OF ALL BELIEVERS (v. 19)

"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Here Christ was giving the disciples authority to approve (to bind) or disapprove (to loose) the actions of others. Christ spoke of that same authority in John 20:23: "Whosoever's sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever's sins ye retain, they are retained. " In Matthew 18:18 Christ gave the entire church that authority by saying, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. " So the kind of authority Christ spoke about in Matthew 16 was given not only to Peter and the other apostles, but also to every believer.

A. Based on God's Word

All believers have that authority because God's Word reveals to us the kind of behavior God approves or disapproves of. So if you ask a man if he has received Christ as his Lord and Savior and he says yes, you can say, "Your sins are forgiven. " But if says no you can say, "Your sins aren't forgiven. " Similarly, we can say to others, "It's wrong to do that!" If what we say is based on God's Word--not on a person's title, office, human worthiness, or intelligence--we know it will concur with what's said in heaven. Because God's Word is our authority, it's important that we not compromise the truth it teaches.

B. Exercised in the Church

God has entrusted the Word to His church so it might shine as a light in the world (Matt. 5:14). When the church upholds the Word, the Lord's will is done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9). That way the church serves as a divine pattern for the lost world to see. It has a responsibility to tell the lost about sin, righteousness, and judgment. By telling them what God's Word says, they will hear what heaven says.

Because God has given His Word to the church, the church is His authority in the world. With such divine authority, there's no need to worry about the world's reaction to the gospel message. Even though many will reject Christ, the church must never compromise the truth. Upholding the standard of His Word will bring Him the glory He deserves.

VII. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHURCH (v. 20)

"Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus, the Christ."

Because most Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to be a political and military figure, Christ knew their hearing He was the Messiah would only add to their hatred against Him (Matt. 7:6). He was then building His church as a spiritual entity, not a political or military kingdom. Therefore He told His disciples to "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). It was the promise of receiving power from the Holy Spirit to witness about Christ "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (v. 8; cf. Mark 16:15). When that promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples' witness became bold and clear: "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

Focusing on the Facts

1. Summarize how the lost look at life.
2. According to Scripture, why does man exist (1 Cor. 10:31)?
3. In what way did the disciples anticipate the Messiah's coming? What happened to their level of anticipation?
4. What caused the disciples to be perplexed? How did Christ respond to them?
5. "___ ___" identifies the foundation on which the church is built (Matt. 16:18).
6. Why is it not correct to say that the church is built on Peter alone? Support your answer with Scripture.
7. Explain the traditional Protestant view of "this rock" (v. 18).
8. Perhaps the most biblical view is to see the ___ as the foundation of the church.
9. Today what kind of people is Christ building His church on?
10. What does "hades" refer to in Matthew 16:18?
11. In what way is Satan limited against the church?
12. "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18) is a promise of ___.
13. If what we say is based on God's Word, what will it concur with?

Pondering the Principles

1. London pastor Samuel J. Stone's hymn "The Church's One Foundation" is based on the Apostles' Creed and affirms Christ as Lord and foundation of the church. Read through it slowly and meditatively, allowing it to deepen your love for Christ and His church:

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;

She is His new creation by water and the word.

From Heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.

Elect from ev'ry nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses, with ev'ry grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed.
Yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation of peace forevermore;
Till, with the vision glorious, her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

2. God's Word is the basis of the church's authority. In his Body of Divinity the Puritan Thomas Watson wrote, "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. . . . The Word is a rule of faith, a canon to direct our lives. The Word is the judge of controversies, the rock of infallibility. That only is to be received for truth which agrees with Scripture. . . . All maxims in divinity are to be brought to the touchstone of Scripture, as all measures are brought to the standard" ([Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986], pp. 26, 30). Since God's Word is so vital to the church, it's important for you to be a serious student of it. One way to study is through reading literature and listening to cassette tapes that explain the meaning of Scripture. Make it your priority to be a student

of the Word!

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