

DISCOVERING CHURCH

Matthew 16:13-18

ATTENTION:

- Let's enter an imaginary time tunnel and journey back about 20 centuries.
 - As we do, remember that in the time we find ourselves there is no United States of America.
 - The modern civilizations of Europe, Australia and Canada, as well as other contemporary cultures do not exist.
 - Even the nation of Israel looks completely different.
 - There are no Christian traditions, or churches as today.
 - Where we're standing, no one has likely even heard of a religious group called church before.
 - The Jewish culture of the day is dominated by the pagan Roman government that rules the land of Israel.
 - On top of all that, the official Jewish leaders of the day are proud, self-serving and corrupt.

ATTUNE:

- It was in such an environment that the church began.

BODY:

The first mention in the NT of the word *church* was from Jesus.

- Matthew describes the scene for us.
 - Jesus takes His disciples north into the Gentile area of Caesarea Philippi.
 - There, He asks His men what the public is saying about His identity:

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
- Matthew 16:13-16
- The culture around Jesus viewed Him as an ordinary man, carpenter, but Peter voiced a different opinion and he was never more right: *"You are the Messiah, (Christ, Anointed One) the Son of the living God."*

- Peter nailed it! Jesus responds...

¹⁷ Jesus responded, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Matthew 16:17-18

- In essence, Jesus told Peter,

"Your words about Me are true. In fact, they are a foundational statement: like a rock. On this rocklike declaration I will build My church."
- He also promised the *gates of Hades* would not *overpower*, erode it or erase it.
- The church will have staying power! Against all odds, it would prevail. Not even the adversary would overpower it.

"I will build My church." Let's examine *the* implications of this phrase.

- **First**, Jesus made it clear from the beginning that the church as God intended would have Christ as its Architect - Originator - His idea - He protects it - leads it – **"THE"** Head of it!
- **Second**, the word *will*, looks to the future - The church had yet to begin when Jesus made this statement - it was a promise for the near future.
 - At this time Peter and others had no clue what Jesus meant.
- **Third**, the term *build* suggests not only a beginning but also an ongoing process. Christ will construct it. He will enlarge it and shape it as He pleases.
- **Fourth**, the word *My* affirms ownership and authority.
 - It's essential to keep asking ourselves:
 - *Is Christ the Head of our local church?*
 - *Does He have first place in our ministry?*
 - *Is what we do all about Jesus, or have we drifted from that singular focus?*
 - To guard against erosion, we must never forget that it is His church.
- **Fifth**, The word *church* is first used here in the NT and is defined as a group of people *"called out"* from among others.

- The word was in use hundreds of years before Jesus was born - but here He adds the word *My* revealing that He would build His own called out people defined by faith in Him.
- **We now call this unique assembly “the church.”**

It is important that we return to the origin of church from time to time because it's there we see God's intention.

- Our understanding and application of what church is will erode if we stop returning to its Founder and foundation.
 - The church is a body of people called out from among the world for the distinct and unique purpose of its creator!
 - Glorifying their Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Not a reference to real estate but to a group of individuals who love Christ enormously.
 - It is without political roots or cultural boundaries;
 - It is devoid of language or racial barriers.
 - A local church is not a business using a cross as a logo.
 - The church Jesus built is a spiritual entity and He alone is the Head.

TRANSITION: What did church look like when Christ began building?

Looking in on the Early Church

- Let's journey forward in our time tunnel about one year.
 - We're no longer in Caesarea Philippi but now in the Holy City of Jerusalem.
 - The religious leaders of Israel and civil leaders of Rome have condemned Christ to death by crucifixion - just as Jesus had promised He rose from the dead on the third day!
 - His enemies did their best to explain away the empty tomb, but there He stood - His followers are more energized than ever.
 - Days later, just before the Lord ascended and returned to heaven, He told His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:4-5](#)).
 - On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and transformed that small group of followers— of about 120 women/men - they began to do what Jesus said they would do when the Spirit of God came upon them. Boldly and courageously, they became His witnesses in Jerusalem ([Acts 1:8](#), [Acts 1:15](#); [Acts 2:5-11](#)).
 - Their witness spread quickly.

- Soon followers of Jesus emerged by hundreds/thousands of new believers.
- What was happening? **Jesus was building His church** as He had promised!

- The apostle Peter stood up and delivered a powerful message to the multitudes of Jerusalem, introducing them to the Messiah Jesus.
 - Jesus used Peter's message to reach those first believers in Jerusalem on the day the church began.
 - [41 So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.](#)*
Acts 2:41
 - They received Peter's message = they recognized the truth for what it was and believed it.
 - That's how a person becomes a Christian.
 - That's how the church is built:
You hear of Christ's death for your sins and believe.
 - Then they took action and were baptized into Christ
 - About three thousand people. **WOW!**

- There was simplicity.
 - There were no traditions, programs, marketing, splinter groups, corruption - **NO EROSION**.
 - Instead, over 3000 people living with the Spirit of God living within them and directing their steps – Apostles are teaching, miracle working, leading...
 - So what did that look like?
 - [42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.](#)*
Acts 2:42
 - You can't have a church if you take away any of the four essentials!
 - You can have more than these four, but you cannot have less and still be a church.
 - If you have more they must never contradict or obscure the importance of these four.
 - **When they do, you can count on erosion occurring!**

PROJECT:

- The Holy Spirit is at work, the Gospel is being proclaimed and Jesus continues to build His church!

- Did it work?

⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47

- Growth was off-the-chart even in a time of persecution.

⁴ But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

Acts 4:4

¹⁴ Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers— multitudes of both men and women.

Acts 5:14

⁷ So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:7

⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Acts 16:5

- The growth was incredible!
 - In spite of intense opposition and persecution
 - Christ continued to build His church.
 - F.F. Bruce calls this phenomenon “*the spreading flame.*”
 - No matter how hard he tried the adversary could not stop it, hinder it or overpower it!

ACTION:

Considering everything we have discussed this morning, **“How are we doing with His Church?”**

- Church these is our predecessors!
 - This is where we had our beginning
 - What have we done with their church – His church?
 - What are we doing now with His church?
 - How much like those who became Christians in the beginning are we?