

Matthew 16:18b The Meaning of "Church"

Alright, we are continuing in Matthew 16:13-20, been in it for quite some time. But, as I told you before, it is a section of Scripture that is the heart of the gospel and the heart of understanding correctly about the Christian faith.

In verses 13 through 20 of chapter 16, we have The Public Opinion of Jesus. As they came into the parts of Caesarea, Philippi, as He comes over the crest of the Valley, He says to the disciples, "Whom do men say me the Son of Man to be?" So, they give the opinion, "Some say that you are John the Baptist. Some say that you are Elijah. Others say that you are Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." So, He says pointedly to them, "But you yourselves." There is an extra pronoun inserted there to show that He is especially pointing them out. "But you yourselves who do you say me to be?" And Simon Peter answered for the group. Obviously, they had been talking about this, without getting too far into the technicals, so we can get to our message for today. In the Gospel of Mark, his account was that Jesus was continually asking the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" from the crest of the Valley, all the way up to the city of Caesarea, Philippi. So, there was a discussion going on here, obviously. And then at the end of the discussion He says, "Okay, so who do you say that I am? Who do you say me to be?" And Peter says, "You yourself are the Christ," that is, the anointing of God in human form. That is what **Χριστός** (Christos) means: *anointed*. "You are the Christ, the Son," the person put in place of inheritance, "the Son of the living God." A person appointed and ordained to receive everything from the living God.

So, He confirms this, Jesus does, in verse 17. Jesus answered and said unto him, "Blessed are you Simon bar Jonah." So, He pronounces a blessing upon him for his confession, "You have answered correctly and the reason why you are blessed is because, first of all, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you." *Flesh and blood* is a phrase denoting *the human being* or *the human functions*, which would be opinion, beliefs, conviction. "Human opinion didn't tell this to you. Human beliefs didn't tell this to you. Human convictions didn't tell this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Two things about revelation from heaven that we spoke of:

- 1) In I Corinthians 2:6-16 Paul says it is impossible for the human being in their natural human ability to understand the things of Christ. It takes the revelation of God's Spirit. If God's Spirit does not reveal it, a person cannot come to know it.
- 2) But that also, secondly, goes for salvation. Salvation is also revealed from heaven and is also an act of God from out of heaven. A person can't get saved based on their own merits and their own works, but rather by the work of God Himself. We saw from John 1:13 that those who are born of the Spirit of God are not by the will of the bloodline, or the will of the flesh, or the will of man, but rather are born from above, from out of heaven, a spiritual birth. We studied Paul's spiritual birth that was an intervention, an interruption, that came from out of heaven and he was born of the Spirit of God.

So, people who are born from God out of heaven, according to Paul in II Corinthians 5:17, they become a new creation. You are a new person. The Spirit of God is born in your life and it comes from heaven, it comes from God, it is not from man. Then after that, all revelation comes from God as well.

We started verse 18 last week. **Jesus said, "I also say to you that you yourself** (notice the additional pronoun there for emphasis) **are Peter (πέτρος petros in the Greek) and upon this πέτρα** petra (different Greek word, πέτρα petra) **this rock I will build my church.** Or, as it is literally translated, **I will build my assembly.** We'll get into that in a moment.

So, we discussed the three approaches to this text that people believe:

(1) Jesus said you are Peter πέτρος (petros) and upon this rock this πέτρα (petra) meaning Peter. Well, Peter is πέτρος (petros) and he said upon this rock is πέτρα (petra), so that is not Peter.

(2) Some people think that πέτρα (petra) represents the confession that Peter made, that everybody who makes the confession that Peter made the Lord will build his church upon that. Well πέτρα (petra) is never used for *confession*.

(3) Then there's others that hold that πέτρα (petra) is reference to *Christ*. That upon this rock, that is Christ himself, I will build my church. Not Peter. Not the confession. But Christ Himself. And as we saw last week, indeed that is the answer to the text.

πέτρος (petros) is found 162 times in the New Testament and it is all in reference to Peter, πέτρος (petros). But πέτρα (petra), when it is used in reference to a person in the New Testament, every single time it refers to Jesus Christ, it never refers to Peter. In fact, we showed you last week, that even in Peter's writings, Peter called Jesus πέτρα (petra). So, Peter is not the rock, Jesus is the rock.

And, of course, the near demonstrative that we took, the word *this*. All these little words are really important. *This rock*, the near demonstrative, Jesus is pointing to Himself. The far demonstrative is Jesus would be pointing to Peter, *that rock*. But no, Jesus is pointing to Himself. "You yourself are πέτρος (petros) and upon this," pointing to Himself, "πέτρα (petra)," meaning Himself, "I will build my church."

We also saw two things we left off with last week. Jesus said, "I will build." He didn't commission anybody else to build His church for Him. He didn't commission us to build his church for Him. He said He will build the church. And notice He says, "My church," or, "My assembly." It is the Lord's church. He is the head of the church. He is the head of the body of Christ, always has been and always will be. He has not left the church in our hands to run it for Him.

But notice, for this morning, I want you to notice this word *church*, which we have literally translated as *assembly*. There is a difference. If I'm ever technical it is because there is a very important reason why.

So, Jesus said, "Upon this rock," meaning *Himself*, "I will build My assembly and the gates of Hades will not prevail or overpower it." The word for *assembly*, which is translated *church* in all of the major translations, is the Greek word **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia). You have probably heard it many, many times. But the word **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) in the Greek language is not the word for *church*. It is not used for *church*. **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) means *a gathering or an assembly of people*. You say, "Well, wouldn't that be a church?" It can be but that is not what it means.

It came from its original use when someone tacked a notice up down in the middle of the city, announcing that a city meeting is about to take place, and all are invited to come. The people who come to that gathering are called an **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia). They are an assembly of people. In fact, this word **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) is used throughout the book of Acts for an assembly of people who came against Paul and wanted to riot; and Luke used the word **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) to show this mob coming up, this assembly of people coming up, in order to persecute Paul. It means *assembly*, as simple as that.

Why make a big deal out of it? Well, the word **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) is only found here in Matthew 16:18 and in Matthew 18:17. Just two places, two verses that have the word **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) in it, and it is not found anywhere else in any of the three gospels. None. Which is an interesting note if we are going to emphasize what we call the church today, which was not emphasized in the ministry of Jesus.

The English word *church* - we have a sign out front that says the Sisquoc Community Church - that word *church* comes from the Greek word **κυριακός** (kuriakos). **κύριος** (kurios) means *Lord*. **κυριακός** (kuriakos) means *belonging to the Lord, something that belongs to the Lord*.

For instance, in I Corinthians 11:20, Paul says, "When you gather together, do you not gather to celebrate the Lord's supper?" The word *Lord's* is **κυριακόν** (kuriakon) denoting what kind of supper it is. It is a supper that belongs to the Lord.

In Revelation 1:10, John in his writings says that he was caught up in the spirit and was inspired by the Spirit on the Lord's day. That word **κυριακη** (kuriakē) is from **κυριακός** (kuriakos), which means *belonging to the Lord*.

Some good research, by the way, from Dr. Tim Hegg, a Jewish scholar. He traced this word **κυριακός** (kuriakos) back to the third and fourth centuries when the word was first applied to a church building. That's a long time ago and it went a long time before anybody used the word *church*. They use the word *assembly*. Wherever Christians were gathered together, they use the word *assembly*, not *church* as we know it today. This church building was **κυριακός** (kuriakos) because it belonged to the Lord. It was a sacred place, so they called it **κυριακός** (kuriakos).

Eusebius, the Greek church historian - lived about from 260 to 340 A.D., back in the fourth century - notes that Christians were given permission to start building churches, **κυριακα** (kuriaka) is what it was called. They could start building these church buildings that has their name on it, back about the fourth century.

We have been exposed to the political use of the word *church*. Our English word *church* actually comes from the old Roman Catholic system, where they called themselves *the church*, the representative of God on earth. They called themselves the **κυριακός** (kuriakos), the church. And it is interesting, as various transcribers and translators down through the years, even Martin Luther who was told by the Roman Catholic Church. He used the word *assembly* in his German and Latin translations and the Roman Catholic Church told him not to use the word *assembly* but to use the word *church* as a translation of the word **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia); because they were the church. Anytime that you see the word *church* in Scripture they wanted everybody to realize you're talking about the Roman Catholic Church, nobody else is the church. But, of course, he use the word *assembly*. The major translations have picked up on it over the years and have kept the word *church*, but the word *church* **ἐκκλησία** (ekklēsia) always means *assembly*.

In fact, when we get into it in Matthew chapter 18, where Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst," He is talking about the assembly. It could be just two people. And I have looked back over the years and realized that some of the best fellowship I've ever had, some of the best church that I ever had, is over meal in a restaurant with a brother or sister in the Lord, or sitting with a group of people and discussing the things of the Lord outside of a formal setting, where the Spirit of God just moves and ministers. There doesn't have to be a program. There doesn't have to be singing, even though many people say, "There has to be singing. You've got to have worship. You've got to have singing." And I point out to people, that you notice in all of Paul's travels and all of his messages and speeches and as Luke presents in the book of Acts, all Paul's meetings, that he never had singing. He just sat down with everybody and started talking. He didn't have singing. Even in his epistles, in his letters to the various - what we call *churches*, but they are *assemblies*. These were assemblies of places. They didn't have human organizations, nonprofit organizations, like they have today. The church of today is not the church that is mentioned in the Bible. It is assembly. The church that we have today is something that has been started by man, way back with the Roman Catholic Church and it has continued on as man continues his control over people. I think we need Martin Luther back again for another Protestant Reformation, only against the Protestants, because we are doing the exact same thing that Martin Luther presented against.

So, it has been politicized. Misused. Make people feel like if you are not a member of a church, a church organization, that you're really disobeying God's Word. But just so you know, God's Word does not ever use the word *church*, it uses the word *assembly*.

He goes on to say, **I will build my assembly and the gates of Hades (or hell) will not prevail (or overpower) against it.**

First of all, the word *Hades*, you've probably heard that often. In fact, it's translated *hell* in most translations. *Hades* literally means *the place of unseen spirits*. That is, there are spirits that have left their bodies, they cannot be seen now because they are spirits, but they have died

and their living spirits have gone to Hades, which we know from Luke chapter 16 is in the heart of the earth.

Remember the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man wound up in Hades in torment and Lazarus was over in Abraham's bosom. There are different compartments in Hades. Hades is the place of unseen spirits. It is the place of the dead. It represents death, equivalent to the Hebrew word SHEOL, which means *the grave*.

So, *Hades* does not mean *hell*. Hell, if you read through the book of Revelation, hell is the lake of fire in which everybody and everything that is anti-Christ will be thrown into, including Satan and the demons will be cast into the lake of fire. That place is called *hell*. Hades is not hell. It is a place of torment, but it is a steppingstone place before there.

Now, in Hades when Jesus died on the cross and He went into the lower parts of the earth, He actually announced the victory for those who were over on Abraham's side, and released the captives is what He did. In Matthew chapter 27 it tells us that many of the Old Testament saints were seen walking through the streets of Jerusalem after the resurrection of Christ. Why? Because He went into the lower parts of the earth, He announced the victory had been won, He raised them from out of Hades, but not the people who were in torment. They are still there. They are waiting for their final judgment in Revelation chapter 20. So, the gates of Hades, this place of death.

But notice he uses the word *gates*. Gates has two purposes to it. It protects people - closed, locked, gates protect people from enemies coming in from the outside. And it also prevents people from leaving. And so, what he's telling them is that death shall not have strength against God's people. Once you die, these gates will not close you in, they will not hold you, they will not prevail against you; because once you die you go to be with Christ. Paul says, "To be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord." So, Hades will not hold me. The gates of Hades will not close me in and have the power to overtake or overpower as the literal translation tells us. Jesus defeated death on the cross. That's why Hades cannot hold us.

In Hebrews 2:14 it says, "Therefore then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood," so, the children of God are partakers of flesh and blood, they are human, "He also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil." So, He actually came and took on human flesh to be like us, but also to die death, and then defeat death, and the one who has the power of death, who is Satan the devil. Victory.

In Revelation 1:18 Jesus says, "I am He that is alive and was dead and behold I am living forevermore, Amen. And I have the keys of hell, Hades, and of death." Jesus has the keys. The gates will not be locked for His people. Death cannot hold us in.

In I Corinthians 15:54-57 Paul says, "One day this corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal shall put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" So, Paul says, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where

is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So, Jesus defeated death at the cross so that Hades will not hold us. So, he's telling Peter and He is telling the rest of the disciples, "You are **πέτρος** (petros) and upon this **πέτρα** (petra), Me, will be the foundation where I will build My assembly." Not a church organization, but an assembly. God's assembly, all over the world, no matter how many people it is, and that Hades itself will not have power to overcome it. Hades will not hold us in. Once we die, we go be with the Lord, our spirit does, our physical bodies go in the grave, later to be raised up and changed. So, the two promises built on Christ and the gates of Hades will not have the power to prevail against it.

Next week, we are going to take verses 19 and 20, *binding and loosing*. You might have heard that doctrine, or heard those terms used. But Jesus said, "The third promise is, I will give you the keys of the kingdom and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven." What in the world does that mean? So, we are going to dig into that next week and the get that straightened out.

Alright, let's close with prayer.