

What is the Church?
Matthew 16:13-20
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 18, 2021

I told you last week, we're at a break between studies here at Grace. We're right in between two sermon series, because we just finished one and we haven't started the next one yet. So we're taking this time to talk about an important issue, and that is the church, the body of Christ. Because everyone seems to be asking right now, what is the church? What do we mean when we say that word? Is it just a building? Is it just a piece of property? Or is it more than that? And to answer that, we're going to look at Matthew 16 today, which I just want to read to you before we begin, so if you would read Matthew 16, starting in verse 13, with me. There the Word of God says this, it says,

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 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." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

We're going to stop the reading there. I read that passage to you because this is the first time the word "church" appears in the Bible. This is the first time that it's ever seen. As most of you know, you can't turn to one part of the Bible to learn everything you want to know about the church, because the idea kind of develops as you go along. But this is the first time you see it in print on the lips of Jesus. And just to explain what you're seeing here, if we were to give it a definition, the word church is the people of God for this age. I think that's a simple way to define it. The church is the people of God for this age. Because if you think about it, there's always been a people of God in history. There's always been a kingdom, but the kingdom has shown itself differently at different times.

So what I mean is, God didn't give you the same commandments he gave to Adam and Eve, right? I think we all know that. But he didn't tell you to name the animals and care for the garden and walk with him by the cool of the day, and that sort of thing. Because they were the people of God for that age. They were the people of God for that moment of time. So they had a very distinct role in human history. You see the same thing happening with Noah as well, in the day that he lived, because he built an ark at a time when some scholars say it had never rained before. He was building a boat because he was the people of God for that age. You see the same thing happening with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel. You see it happening with Samson and Gideon and Deborah, the judges. You see it happening with the kings and the prophets. And now you see the same thing happening with us.

The church is the people of God for this point in history. You have a long legacy that traces back all the way to Adam. Because you serve the same God that he did, you serve the same Lord, you just do it in a different way. You have a special calling from God, which is what Jesus is referring to here in the Gospel of Matthew, which is significant because Matthew has been called the gospel of the kingdom, because the word kingdom is repeated 50 times in this gospel, more than any other one. And it does it to say that this is what the kingdom looks like now. It looks like Jesus Christ ruling in the hearts and minds of people. It looks like him taking charge, which ties in with this passage, because Jesus asked the question here, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" In other words, "Do they say I'm a king or not? Do they think I'm Lord?"

In fact, just to give you some more background for this, in verse 13, if you look in your Bibles, it says that Jesus asked this question in a place called Caesarea Philippi, which was located about 50 kilometers north of the Sea of Galilee, on the farthest outskirts of Israel. It was about as far north as you could go and still be in the land. And the idea here is that he did that so he could take the disciples aside and prepare them for what was to come. If you look down in verse 21, this is what's going to come. It says,

From that time, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

So that's the setting of this discussion. That's the tone of it. Jesus is about to die. The end is near. So he wants to help the disciples prepare for that. And in order to do that, he asked them the question, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" It's a pretty sober passage we're looking at today. In verse 14, they answer in this way, it says,

"Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

And without going into details, and all this here, all these guys are considered to be messengers of the Messiah. They're the forerunners to announce him, but they're not the Messiah himself. That's what the crowds say about Jesus. That's what they think about him. He's just a prophet and nothing more. So Jesus asked them the question another way in verse 15, "But who do you say that I am?" In the original language, that can be translated, "But *you*, who do you say that I am?" In other words, Jesus says, "Okay, that's what the crowds are saying about me. But what do you say? Okay, that's what the people who don't know me are proclaiming. But you know me. You guys have watched me day and night. You've been traveling with me for years now. You're my closest friends. What do you say?"

If he were with us today, standing in this tent, Jesus might say, "Well, you've grown up in church. You've read your Bible. You've heard a million sermons. You've got theological podcasts coming out of your ears. So tell me, Who do you say that I am?" Forget about everybody else for a minute. What about the people in here? I mean, you really see the importance of this, when you remember that the clock is ticking. Time is running out. Jesus only has a few days to live. And so what he wants to know here is, are you guys going to follow me then? Are you guys going to be my disciples when I'm hanging on the cross and everyone else has run away?

It's been said that the church has always sailed on stormy waters. And that's what you see here. Because this is a stormy time in the life of Jesus. This is a very difficult time, pretty soon, he's going to be betrayed and arrested and tried. He's going to be beaten and flogged and crucified, unjustly, I might add. I mean, all of that's against the law. So he wants to get the disciples ready for that by asking them, what are they going to say in that moment. And I point that out to you to say, this is how the church began. This is how it got started. In a place like this, in a setting of suffering and death. It didn't take place in a nice building. It didn't start in a nice conference room with pens and coffee and all the latest comforts. It started on a cross. It starts with Jesus talking about the worst thing imaginable.

And it seems to be such a tendency to trivialize some of this today. Because some people say you should come to church just to have a party. You should come just to have a good time. But the problem with that is that that's not what Jesus is talking about here. There's nothing fun about this. There's no party going on here. He's killing their party right now. He's putting water on it. Or other people say you should come to church to make you happy. You should come to get your felt needs met. But that's not what this is talking about either. Because Jesus is asking them, what are you going to do when your felt needs are not met? What are you going to do when the whole world comes crashing down?

I mean, this is such a scary passage for us to talk about today because we've gotten so far from this. I mean, let's face it, the modern church has become pragmatic. It's become so business-like in the way it operates, because it just wants to please people and entertain them with a dog and pony show. It wants to wow them and woo them

and win them over with fun and games. It takes a survey to see what people would like to see. It wants to take a poll to find out what they want, so we can give it to them. They want a circus? We give them a circus. They want another type of coffee? We give them another type of coffee. But friends, you need to remember what this is saying. Jesus is saying the church is not about what we want. It's about what God wants. It's not here to please us. It's here to please Him. And if people don't like that, they can leave.

I read a passage like this and it always blows my mind that there's not a long apology from Jesus afterwards. He's very straight with them, and he doesn't hold back. Jesus says here, if you don't want to follow me then, you don't follow me at all. If you want to be my disciple and take a hit when I'm on a cross, and you shouldn't even come here, because that's what I've come to do. That's where all of this is heading. They've seen him feed the 5000. They've seen a walk on water. They've seen him stop a storm. They've seen him do all these miracles, and this is what it's going to culminate in. All that other stuff was fun; this won't be. It reminds you that this is where the church is here to remember today.

You know, in 1989, a professor from Notre Dame published a book called *The Democratization of American Christianity*, in which he said that while democracy has done a lot of good for North America, one of the problems is that it's caused a lot of confusion in the church, because it's given us the impression that we all need to be heard when we come here. We all need to give our opinion. When that's not true, because the only opinion that matters at the end of the day is God's, and this is what he's looking for in a church. I remember talking to an old man several years ago who told me that he didn't have to go to church because he didn't need someone telling him what to do. I know you guys have never met anybody like that in your entire life. So I told him, Well, Jesus did that. I mean, Jesus went to church, or he went to temple anyway. Do you think you're better than him? So the apostles went as well. So did the early church leaders. They were there every Sunday. So who do you think you are? You need to go to church. And you need to do it so you can listen to God, which is what we're going to talk about this morning. Because this morning, I want to show you some characteristics of a church in this passage, or of the church.

So if you're taking notes, I want you to see this is the first time the word church ever appears in the Bible. And when we see it, the Lord Jesus gives us several characteristics of the church, his church, the true church, and what it's supposed to be. And we're going to do it because this is a subject that's caused a lot of confusion. Because even though the church has been around for centuries, the whole idea has been around for a very long time. There's so many opinions out there about it, right? Everyone's got their own ideas. In fact, some of you are new to us. And you've told me that you've been looking for a church. And this is what you're wrestling with. Which one do I go to? There's one on every corner. I mean, which church do I attend? There's one in every street. So do I look for one with a nice building and nice people in a nice parking lot? We have nice people. It's all we've got in that list. Do you want one with a good youth program, children's program and music program? Do you want one with a trendy name and a trendy website and a trendy pastor who sits on a barstool at the edge of the stage and gives pep talks? The largest church in North America right now does that. It has 40,000 people a week who go to the Houston Astrodome in Texas to listen to a man do nothing but give pep talks. Is that what you're supposed to be looking for?

That's what we're going to talk about this morning. And we're going to do it from the lips of Jesus here and look at four characteristics of the type of church you should be looking for. The first one is this. It has a common confession. The first characteristic of the type of church you should be looking for is that it has a common confession, which means it believes the same thing about Jesus. It all has the same doctrine about him. It may not believe the same thing about everything, but it does about the main things. There's unity here. And if you look in verse 14 it says this, Jesus said, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah" and these guys. So he said to them

"But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Just to explain what you're reading here, Peter says, whereas the crowd say Jesus is John the Baptist or Elijah, and they're all mixed up on that, they've all got a different opinion, we're not. There's no ambiguity here for us. We say he is the Christ. And to show you what he means by that, in verse 16, there are 10 words in the original Greek, and four of them are the definite article so you could translate it this way. Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the god the living one." In other words, you're the man, Jesus. You're it. When it comes to salvation, you're all that there is. As another passage says, you are the way, the truth, and the life, and you are the light of the world. So there's not many lights, there's one light. There's not many saviors, there's one Savior. John six verse 35 says, "You are the bread of life." And John 10 says, "You are the door." So if you want to go to heaven, there's not many doors. There's only one. Jesus is all you need.

And the point here is that while this is a short confession, it contains all you need to be saved because it says salvation is found in Christ alone. The Jews lived in a very religious environment. The Romans had their gods. The Jews had their own kind of twisted version of the true God. There was religion everywhere. Everybody had an opinion. There were podcasts coming at you from all over the place back then, their own version of it. There were blogs everywhere. And Peter says, let's sweep it all aside for a moment and let's just talk. It's only about Jesus. He says, you are the Christ, or the Messiah. You're the Anointed One of Israel. You're the one that Prophets spoke about. He says you are the Son of God, which means you're one with God Himself. The two are the same. This is not son with a lowercase s, this is Son with a capital S. You are God's son from eternity past. In the beginning was the Word, that's the point.

And look at Jesus' reaction to this. You might think he would rebuke Peter for this, calling him God. But he says in verse 17, he says,

"Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

So Jesus doesn't rebuke Peter; he blesses him for it. He says this in an interesting way, as well, because this was the only time that Peter's full name is ever given to us in the Bible, because the word "bar" means "son" in Aramaic. So Simon Barjona means, Simon, son of Jonah, and Jesus uses that to say, "You're right in saying I'm the son of God, Peter, because just like You're the son of Jonah, I'm the Son of God. Just like you have the same nature as your earthly father, I have the same nature as my Heavenly Father. And not only that, but flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. You didn't come up with this on your own, the Lord gave it to you. And millions of people will say this after you, Peter. Multitudes will repeat your words and be saved. But it all started with you."

The church started right here with this confession: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. I heard a pastor recently say, you shouldn't leave a church over people when people weren't the reason you came there in the first place. You come to church for Jesus. And that's it. People are just a secondary thing. It's so sad when you read this, because there's so many people that don't understand this anymore. There's so many "Christians" who don't get it. And I put the word "Christians" in quotation marks, because you ask them their testimony, and they give you everything but this. You ask them how they came to know the Lord, and they talk about their family, they talk about the weather, they talk about all the good things they've done, but they never mention him. He's never in the conversation.

So for example, let me just read one of these testimonies to you. This is one that I made up years ago for our leaders in training at a previous church, but listen to what this says. It says, "I grew up in a Christian home, where my parents took me to church every Sunday. We also attended on Wednesday nights, went to Vacation Bible School, summer camps, and I even went to a Christian High School. When I was six years old, at a revival service, a preacher told us that anyone who wants to be saved needs to come down front and he would pray for them. I felt compelled to come, and I did. He prayed with me that night, and I received Jesus into my heart. Throughout my teenage years, I went away from the Lord, but seeing my best friend die of cancer brought me

back. As I was leaving the hospital one afternoon, a song came on the radio, which said that God is love, and I knew he had a better plan for me. I also knew that I needed to get right with him. So the next week at church, I rededicated my life. Since then, I've been blessed to be involved in many activities in the churches we have attended. I've taught Sunday school, sung in the choir, memorized scripture, and even served as a church treasurer. In 2009, I felt a strong call to find a new church when we moved to this community. And when we drove by and saw the sign for you guys, we knew this was the place for us. We look forward to being part of the work here."

When I read that to our leaders in training, they all figured out that I wrote it, but I did it to get this point across. If you look back in Matthew 16, I want you to tell me, where do you see Peter's words in there? Where do you see that person say that "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God," or anything like that? It's not in there. I know because I wrote it. It's all about me. It's all about what I did. I grew up in a Christian home, I went to Vacation Bible School. Some of you might say this morning, I got baptized as a child, I went through confirmation I, I, I, me, me, me, me. And that's the wrong way to look at this. In fact, that's a good way to be lost. Because your testimony is supposed to be all about Jesus. Your confession is supposed to be all about him.

Just to show you this, I want to read another testimony to you just to compare. This is a real one that one of the members of a church I was at years ago gave me to read with their permission. But listen to this. It says, "One of the most important things I've learned is that God has known that I could not live up to his law." It's a very different way to start a testimony, right? He said, "I learned that it isn't what he gave it for. He gave it to show me that I was a sinner. It allows me to see my sin clearly. It's not enough just to know a Bible verse; it needs to be personal. I had to learn that the Bible is talking about me, not everybody else. It's hard for me to see because I'm not better than anyone else. I'm in no position to look down on anybody. In fact, from reading the Bible, I've learned that I was the worst sinner of all. But that's what the gospel is about. Over 2000 years ago, the word Jesus Christ became flesh. He was born of a virgin, lived a life without sin, and sacrificed himself in my place. When Jesus was on the cross, he was paying the penalty for my sin. If the wages of sin is death, and I've broken his law, then I deserve those wages. But instead, Jesus paid my fine in his blood. At the cross, a legal transaction took place. His righteousness was credited to my account. So God can forgive me. And that's the good news of the gospel that I'm putting my faith in."

Can we all say amen to that? That was good, wasn't it? He didn't talk about himself in there. He wasn't bragging about himself. Matter of fact, he was putting himself down, "I'm a sinner, I'm the worst person in the room." And he did it so he could exalt Jesus Christ. That's what a testimony's about. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, God, God, God, it's all about him. And that's the right way to look at this. There's far too much boasting in ourselves going on in churches today. There's far too much talking about us. What have we done? You know what you did to get saved? You messed up. That's it! You failed, God did the rest. And you come to church to celebrate. That's what we're looking for in a church. That's what you want to find when you come here.

In fact, I know some of you are applying to join our church this morning. And you're filling out the membership application right now, which is great. We really appreciate that. But I just want you to know, as you're doing that, that we're not looking for you to recite the London Baptist confession. If you do that, that's fine. I prefer it in the 1600s version. Don't do it any later than that, please. And we're not looking for you to summarize Louis Berkhof's Systematic Theology. We just want to know you're a Christian. We just want to hear you talk about Christ. Because every testimony is a theology lesson. Every testimony is an opportunity for you to put him on display. If someone asks you why you're a Christian, the last person you should talk about is yourself. Talk about the Lord. Which brings us to another thing to point out in this passage, another characteristic of a church, or the type of church you should be looking for.

The first one is that it has a common confession. Everyone believes the same thing about Christ. But secondly, to add to this, the church has an undying duration as well. A second characteristic of the type of church you should

look for is that it has an undying duration, which means it never dies. The church never quits and gives up. It hangs in there no matter what. And if you look in verse 18, the Lord goes on to say this here, and he says this:

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

This is where you see the word “church” for the first time in this passage. And so it’d probably be good to talk about that a little bit. It’s the word *ekklisia*, which means “the called out ones”. It’s a compound word from *ek*, which means “out of,” and *klisia*, which means “called”, because the church is the people who have been called out of darkness and into light. That’s a much better name than Israel, by the way. Israel means “he struggles with God”. How would you like to be called that for all your history? Because that’s what they did. They fought with God constantly. There were a pain in his side. The Lord’s given you a better name than that. The word church means you’re someone has been called out of something awful. When you were born, you weren’t born into this thing. People were born into physical Israel, not spiritual Israel, but physical Israel. You weren’t born that way. You had to be called in, brought in from the outside. And it’s interesting how Jesus puts this here because right before that, he says,

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.

If you read through the New Testament, you’ll know Jesus was a very powerful communicator. He did a good job of using his environment when he spoke. So for example, in John four, when he was talking to the woman at the well, he mentioned living water because they’re standing right beside water. And when he was in Matthew 13, when he was doing the parable of the sower, he’s sitting around sowers and farmland and that sort of thing. Well, here he mentions Peter being a rock because he was standing right next to a mountain. On the outskirts of Caesarea Philippi, there was a huge rock named Mount Hermon. That was actually bigger than our Mount Cheam. Mount Cheam stands at 2000 meters; Mount Hermon was at 3000. And the text says that as they stood there at the foot of this mountain, Jesus refers to it. And he says, Peter, just as this city will be built at the foot of this mountain, the church will be built on you. Just as the city of Caesarea Philippi rests on its shoulders, so the church rests on yours. And not only that, this is also another play on words, because Peter’s name means rock, *Petrus*.

And it goes without saying that this has been greatly misunderstood throughout the years, because it’s been taken to mean that Peter was the first pope. He was the first super apostle. But if you look down in verse 21, just to kind of shoot that in the foot a little bit, it says,

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things... Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But He turned to him and said, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interest, but man’s.”

I don’t know about you, but that doesn’t sound very much like a pope, does it? Peter might have had a desire to get proud here, to get puffed up and arrogant, over what Jesus was saying over his importance in the early church. And so right here, the Lord knocks him down a notch. And he takes him from being called a rock to being called Satan. He says, Peter, don’t get too proud about this.

The whole idea here is that Peter is going to be the first one to evangelize the Gentiles. That’s what this is talking about. He’s the first one to bring them into the church, in his sermon in Acts two and in other things he did in the book of Acts. The church will be built on his confession that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And I want you to notice quickly what Jesus says at the end of this, because he says,

“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

Hades is another word for death. It's a word for the unseen world where people go when they die. And Jesus uses that expression here to say that the church will never experience that. It's never going to die. As one early church historian said, "Although you hit the church with many hammers, it'll break them all." It'll crush every one. You can just keep hitting and hitting and hitting, and the church keeps going. Another author said, "Where Satan builds his chapel, the Lord always has a church, and the church always defeats the chapel."

Which is something we need to hear because a lot of people are scared for the church today, aren't they? They're afraid of what's going to happen to it. You guys know what I'm talking about? Because they say, Oh, no. Can you believe who they put in Parliament? Can you believe who's running this country? He's going to run it into the ground. He's going to make it impossible for us to be Christians. Have you guys heard that before? We all have. Can you believe the laws they're passing? Can you believe the things they're doing? How are we going to last through this? I remember when I first moved to Canada, I moved right before Donald Trump was elected president. And I told them I was moving to Canada and a lot of people laughed and said haha, yeah, right. We're all moving to Canada. I said, No, I'm serious. I'm actually I've got the paperwork right here. I'm going to. But they said that because they're scared. People get nervous over these things.

But to put it in perspective, can you imagine being a Christian in other times? Can you imagine being a Christian in the Middle Ages? When they said you can't read your Bible, under pain of death? It was a capital offense back then. They would kill you for doing that. Can you imagine being a believer when they told you to pray to dead saints and follow the Pope, take the mass or they'll cut your head off? That's what Christians have done before us. And I'm here to tell you that if the church can survive that, it can survive this. If the church can make it through all that, it's going to make it through anything we're facing today.

And you need to find a church that has this sort of confidence. We need to find a place that doesn't lose its head under hard times. You talk to a lot of Christians today, they're losing their mind over these things. They're going crazy. And a lot of them are going crazy because their churches are going that way. They're losing all sense of perspective. But you don't need to do that. The church is going to stand the test of time.

Which brings us to another point in this discussion. And I'm going to go through this one quickly. Another characteristic of a church, and that is that it has a powerful possession as well. So the church has a common confession, and has an undying duration. And a third characteristic of the type of church you should be looking for, it has a powerful possession, which means it has something that's strong because it can bring you into the presence of God. And if you look down in the passage, in what we just read, Jesus says,

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

This is an amazing thing to read. But what Jesus is doing here, as he's going on, as he's saying, Peter, in light of this amazing thing you've said, I'm going to give you some things, and the first one is a set of keys. He calls it the keys of the kingdom. We've all heard of this before. It sounds mysterious, but it simply means that he will open up heaven to you now. He will give you access to it, because that's what a key does. When you have a key, it opens up things that are locked. Before, heaven was locked to you, Peter. Before, heaven was closed. You couldn't get there. Try as hard as you might, you couldn't make it in. But now you can with this testimony, because you have the key. When you trusted in Christ, everything changed for you. The moment you believed in him, the doors were opened wide, and the Father was waiting to receive you in.

And in saying that I need to point out this is another part of this passage that's been greatly misunderstood, has been very twisted. All this stuff in here has been twisted. To show you just how interested the devil is in the church, you can just read what some people have taught on this kind of stuff. But some have twisted this to say that the church decides who gets into heaven. You guys have all seen the painting of Peter standing at the pearly gates saying you're in, you're out, you're in, you're out. You know, you get in, you don't. That's not what this is

saying. Because nowhere in Scripture does it give that power to a human being. That power belongs to God alone. When you go to heaven, the only person standing there to let you in or out will be God. This doesn't tell us to pray to Peter either; that's not the point. This just means that Peter knows how to get to heaven. With this kind of statement that he's made, he knows how to get in. You do it with Christ alone. This should greatly encourage you.

But you know, I have a lot of keys. In my house, I have a key to my home, I have a key to my car, I have a key to the bank. But there's going to be a day that will come when I won't need them anymore because I'm going to die. A day is going to come when I won't be able to use them, because you can't take it with you. And on that day, the only thing that is going to help you is this: You need a key to heaven to kingdom. You need something that'll bring you into the presence of God.

That's the whole reason you come to church, isn't it? You guys don't come to church because it's comfortable. You don't come because it's fun. You don't come for the party. You go because you want to know how to get to heaven. You come for eternal things. You don't come here to hang out with your friends. You don't come here to be with your buddies. You don't come here to check something off on your religious diagram. You come here so you can get right with God. This is why the frivolous atmosphere of some churches is so dangerous, because there's nothing frivolous about this. There's nothing trivial about what he's saying here. This is a soul crushing thing here. You get this wrong, and you'll go to hell. Get this right and you go to heaven. That's how serious it is. And you want to be around Christians who see it that way as well. There's just a seriousness about it.

In fact, we often lose sight of this because we forget how hard people in the past tried to get into heaven. But I was doing some looking this up this week, and in the 16th century the Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de Leon sacrificed everything in a search for the fountain of youth, and he never found it. He went to Florida, walked around, and died trying to find a way into heaven. He never discovered it. In the third century BC, the first emperor of China did that when his advisors told him to drink mercury. Imagine that. They said it would help him live forever. He didn't. He died early. Even today, people spend 1000s of dollars on cryogenics, the science of freezing your brains, so you can wake up 1000 years from now and live all over again. As if this life was that wonderful to begin with, you want to do it again.

But I'm here to tell you, you don't have to do that as a Christian. You don't have to go around looking for how to get there. You know how to get there. Jesus is the key. It's what the church is all about. We're here to show the key to others. Which brings us to the final point, because the question is okay, if you have all this now, what are you supposed to do with it? If you have the keys of the kingdom, and you know how to be saved, and you know how to go to heaven? Well, are you supposed to keep it all for yourself? Are you supposed to hide it under a bushel? Do you put it under a lamp? What do you do with this wonderful treasure?

And that brings us to the final characteristic of the church in the passage. And that is that the church has a prominent profession as well. It has a common confession. It has an undying duration. The church has a powerful possession, and it has a prominent profession, which means it's the church's job to give people the keys. It's our job to show people the good news. And if you look down in verse 19, The Lord says this, in another one of these kind of enigmatic passages, he says,

“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.” Then he warned the disciples that they should tell no one that he was the Christ.

I already told you that Jesus was a master at using his environment when he preached because he liked to use illustrations from all around them. And here he's doing that with a saying of the rabbis. Because the rabbis in the first century said that to bind something was to say it was forbidden and to loosen it was to say it was permitted. So this was a reference to the Law. This whole idea of binding and loosing is a reference to the Jewish law. If you

look over in Matthew chapter 18. And you look in verse 18 of that passage, the famous passage on church discipline, Matthew 18, verse 18, says,

“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.”

Jesus is saying that they are to say that if you do this, according to the Word of God, if you church discipline people, according to the law and what it says, it will be affirmed in heaven. That's the same kind of idea as what he's saying here. In other words, this is a phrase that refers to evangelism. It doesn't refer to the fact that the church can make up the law like the catholic church did in the Middle Ages, where we make people take the mass and do the sacraments and all that stuff, or we kill them. That's not what this is referring to. This is referring to the fact that the church has a command in Scripture to go out and share the good news.

And the way it works is this, we need to give people the law, and then we give them the keys. We tell them about their sin, we tell them about their wickedness, and then we tell them what God has done to forgive it. Because if you don't start with that, it's all useless, right? If you don't give them the law, people don't know what they've done wrong. Because if you go up to someone and say, Hey, would you like to go to heaven? What are they going to say? They're going to say, yeah, I'm already going there. All I have to do is die. Right? Or if you go to someone and say, Hey, would you like to be saved? What are they going to say? Saved from what? What's the danger? Is something going to fall on me? Well, yeah, something's gonna fall on you, the wrath of God's gonna fall on you. But that's what you have to tell them. They don't know that. This idea of binding and loosing is a reference to that. Most people today think they're going to heaven because they're nice and sweet and pay their taxes. They think they're going to be saved because they're a pretty good person. They only shout at their wife and kids on Saturday nights. That's not the case. They're on their way to hell. And it's your job to point that out to them. You need to bind and loose in that way. Which is not an easy thing to do. So Jesus says this in verse 19, just to give you encouragement in this, he says,

“And whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

And that means that Peter, if you speak the truth accurately, if you teach what the Word of God says about the gospel and the law, then whatever you bind on earth will have already been bound in heaven. In other words, Heaven will be with you in this. You're trying to point them to heaven. But if you do it the right way, Heaven will be with you. You'll never be alone. It's been said that God plus one equals a majority. And that's what you have in this, you will always have a majority if you teach the Word of God. It doesn't always feel that way. I've talked to some of our brothers and sisters that have done street evangelism. And they'll tell you, you often feel like nobody's listening to you when you do that. You often think nobody cares. Some of you evangelize family members, you feel that way, right? You've evangelized your kids, relatives. At times you think you're all alone. Jesus says, You're not alone when you do that, and God is with you. All of Heaven is. And you need to remember that today.

Next week, we're going to talk about another aspect of the church. And that is, why this is necessary. We're going to talk about why this is important. But for this week, this was pointed out earlier by someone to me, if you look down in verse 24, Jesus said this to His disciples, if they didn't get what he said earlier, he said,

“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his father with his angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.”

Jesus says, This is why you need to do this. This is why it's so important. Because if you don't, people are going to lose their souls. They're gonna lose everything. We live in a world that's full of people today that have everything but their souls, right? They got cars, they got houses, they got boats, they got money, they got friends, and they don't have a soul. They're gonna have nothing to take with them when they die. It's all empty. It's all frivolous, in vain. And it's the job of the church, we are put on this earth, to remind them of something better than that. There is a world to come. In fact, there's a world this passage says that Jesus is going to be ruling over. And if they don't know Jesus now, you're not going to want to know Him then. If you're ignorant of all this then, you're going to be in a bad place then. And the church has been put on this earth, to point people back to that. Listen, friends, the church is the people of God for this age. But it's a people that is growing. We're a people that's supposed to be getting bigger every day. We're as saints for this season, but we're not as saints that are part of an exclusive club. We want to gather people in. So will you do that today?

You know, when I was looking at all this material, I came across a testimony this week of D. L. Moody, and I was really moved by it because it was so simple. But he says that when he was a shoe seller in Boston, a member of a nearby church came to his store and simply wept in front of him over his sins. Moody doesn't even remember much of what the guy said, because it was almost incoherent because he was simply just weeping over the fact that I was lost. And he said, that had an impact on me. Because I thought, Man, if a man would weep over my sins like that, shouldn't I go home and do the same? And he gave his life to Christ that night. But friends, I tell you that story, because that's the job of the church. We're here to weep over people's sins. We're here to have compassion on them, and do all the other things we talked about this morning. So will you do that today and make it a priority? Come back next week, and we're going to say some more words about the church as well. But for now, let me close us in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to help us in this awesome task.

Heavenly Father, when we read things like this, we all have to put our hands on our mouth and say, who is adequate for these things? This is amazing stuff. This is heavenly stuff, things that are far beyond us. And yet you've given this into our hands. Lord, thank you for making us a part of the church. Thank you for these words you've recorded from yourself to the Apostle Peter 2000 years ago, to remind us of our high calling as Christians. So many times we feel like we're in a low place. We feel so defeated, and yet we're not defeated. The church has a calling that'll last until the end of time. And we pray, Lord, that You would show us that here in this place. Thank you, Lord, for the work you're doing here at Grace Fellowship. And thank you for the other churches that are faithful among us, around us, that are preaching the gospel, Lord. These are dark times in Canada. They're dark times all over the world. And yet we have a God of light and a God of goodness, and we go out and proclaim that today. Lord, would you give us grace as we do so, and would Christ be glorified in this place. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.