

Well, today, let me ask you a question.

You love Jesus, I know, yes?

Yes.

But do you love His church?

Yes.

That's a whole different situation.

That's a whole different question, right?

As I've looked back over my life, that's one thing I think I can say is that I love the Church of Jesus Christ.

I love the Bride of Christ in all its forms and fashions.

And let me describe some of them I've been a part of, and some of you will resonate with this.

I remember being part of a, the first church I can remember was in Derby, Kansas, outside of Wichita, and they would ring bells on Sunday morning.

Anybody ever been in a church that rang, that had a bell to ring?

Really cool thing.

I remember then going to my grandma's church in Wellington, Kansas, if you know where that is.

And it was a church of Christ, and there was none of this.

It was all acapella, because the piano was an evil instrument.

We all know that, right?

And I remember that.

I remember coming to faith in a church in White Plains, New York.

And it was an American Baptist church, very formal.

The pastor wore a robe.

And I never saw him preach out of the Bible.

He had his little black book that he read from, and he read scripture and all that.

But that's where I came to faith and was baptized there.

So that was a very high liturgical kind of church.

I remember going over, as I've mentioned before, to Leawood Baptist Church not too far from here, and they had a phenomenal youth group, and that's where I got fired up for the Lord and all of that.

I remember going off to college and going to the First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas, and they had a preacher from Scotland

And he used that Scottish accent, hard to understand sometimes, but he was a phenomenal, fiery preacher.

My wife and I met at Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, which was a church where a lot of professionals were, including the chair of the organ at Baylor University, and he played the pipe organ.

It was one of those churches.

And so,

From now, I remember going to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and getting involved in the church.

And that's where the Lord called me into ministry.

And that's a church where I got to know the pastor really well and worked through my call.

And that's where I got to serve as a summer missionary one summer and church planter there in Iowa.

I remember going to seminary and being part of Gambrell Street Baptist Church where the great Dr.

Joel Gregory preached, one of the most phenomenal preachers in the world.

and sitting under him for a while.

And then I remember going to DeQueen, Arkansas.

Anybody ever heard of DeQueen, Arkansas?

Really?

What's wrong with you?

You must be Hicks.

My son dropped in on me, Matt, and he was born in DeQueen, Arkansas.

Sorry, Matt.

And he lives in Arkansas now in the Rogers area.

But that church just loved on us.

I was the youth pastor and senior adult pastor and activity pastor.

And they just loved on us.

And the potlucks, oh my goodness, were wonderful.

And so warm fuzzies about that church in that little town of 4,500 people.

Then I went to St.

Louis, and we planted a church.

And so I remember meeting in a gym, Seckman Road Baptist Church.

And there was 20 of us, including Susan and three of our kids at that time, and me, 21 people total, meeting in a gym and planting a church.

And it goes on and on.

I can remember then when we first went up to Omaha, to Bellevue, Nebraska, and that new church, and meeting in a school, and meeting in a rented church building, and eventually seeing what God would do with that church and all its forms, and the apartment church we planted, and the senior retirement center church we planted there, and a Midtown campus church,

and then going overseas.

And so I've got to see, we'll put a picture up, I think, of Kawaligi.

And Matt, you went on one of these trips.

And so this was actually the second time we went, because the first time they didn't have a building, but they engaged in a capital campaign and built a massive building.

You can see it there.

So when I went back, like two years later, they had built the church building, and we praised God for that.

And so that's the stick church.

And what I'm getting at is I love all these different forms of church.

That's the stick church.

I went to, took a team to Argentina a few times and went one time on my own and we helped a garage church start, right?

A church that was led by lay people meeting in a garage.

And so that was a garage church.

And so I've got all these forms of church that I can remember in my ministry.

We did a partnership in London, and there it was in a old, historic building from the time of World War II, St.

Luke's Anglican Church, and we helped them do evangelism.

So it was the historic church.

What I'm getting at is I love the local church.

And I get it.

The local church is messed up.

Would you agree?

Because it's people like us, and we tend to mess things up.

And so I've been in churches that have split.

I've been in churches and heard about churches that went off doctrinally one way or the other, right?

Who became so pure that like nobody could ever hardly attend without being judged with all the legalism.

I've been in churches that went the other way and so woke that they didn't stand for anything at all anymore.

right?

I've been in churches where some of the young families just did stupid things, right?

I've been in churches where some of the seniors and older folks wanted to lock in a certain generation, their favorite, not generation, decade, maybe the 50s, maybe the 70s, maybe the 60s,

and lock it in and impose everything to be the same 50 years later for today's generation.

I've been in churches.

I could just go on and on and on, right?

Churches have problems because they're made-up of people and we're fallible.

But in saying all this, I still want to, my premise this morning is that the church of Jesus Christ is the hope of the world.

In spite of all this, it's the hope of the world.

And so that's what we're going to focus on today, but we've got to acknowledge the big lie.

And really, that's the title this morning, The Big Lie, right?

And the big lie is that it's okay to disregard the church, to do a runaround, to do anything and everything but the local church.

The big lie is God has another plan besides the church.

The local church is just one option and maybe you choose it and that's good for you, but maybe for me, I might choose something else.

And you've heard this, right?

The big lie.

I can worship God just as well at home alone or at the lake.

I don't need to be around people.

I can worship God alone.

The church is messed up.

It's full of hypocrites.

I don't need that in my life.

Or maybe I can give my time, attention, and money

to more need-meeting ministries in the inner city that feed people or clothe the homeless.

I'm going to invest myself there.

Why do I need the formal church?

Isn't it just man-made anyway?

And so we've heard this.

And so I don't think you guys feel that way or you wouldn't be here this morning, yes?

But if there's somebody here or online today that believes that, I want to change your mind.

I want to change your mind.

And I'm going to ask you to respond today.

In fact, at the end of my message today, I would want some people to come and pray for the church, for Knall Avenue Baptist Church, just to come up here during the last song and just pray.

And so that's an opportunity today.

But the passage today, if you have your scriptures, you can open up the book or turn it on digitally.

We're looking at a very famous passage.

You've heard this preached on many times, Matthew 16, 13-18.

And let me read it and then we're going to talk about it and apply this.

And I really want you to focus in because I believe and I've prayed for that God would have a word for you and a word for me this morning.

I mean, I get it.

Most of you have been in the church for many, many years.

I get it.

You love the church.

I get it.

But God has a word for you.

Maybe He's going to push back about something in your life.

Maybe He's going to affirm something in your life today.

Maybe He's going to challenge you and ask you to do something hard today.

So let's kind of focus in on this.

Verse 13 of Matthew 16.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' That was Jesus' favorite description of Himself, the Son of Man.

They replied, Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

But what about you?

he asked.

Who do you say I am?

We're going to look at two declarations here.

Here's the first one.

Some would say, This is the great confession.

To Simon Peter, Then Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The great confession.

If we take a timeout, can I ask you, have you ever made that confession in your life?

Maybe you have some doubts, some fears, some anxieties, maybe you don't understand everything, but have you ever made that proclamation, have you ever confessed to Christ, you are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

You are the one and only Savior.

Have you ever put your trust behind that statement?

Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but my Father in heaven, and I tell you that...

You are Peter, and on this rock, here's the second declaration, On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Now, I get it.

You and I, we've read this passage many times.

But the background of this is kind of interesting.

Susan and I took a group to Israel, I don't know, a few years ago.

And one of the areas we went to was up north.

This is about 120 miles north of Jerusalem.

So this is way up there.

And let's go ahead and put that slide up.

You make your way up there.

It's north of in Gedi where David was hiding out.

Keep going north.

It's almost near the border.

And it's like a rocky mountain.

And you can stand there and there's springs.

and water, but you look at it, and this is kind of what you see or you would see in the day.

Jesus took his disciples there, and he basically, in the context of looking at this cave, the temple that Herod built for Caesar Augustus was there.

The temple of Zeus, right, the Greek god.

Other temples were there.

The court of Pan, and that was really interesting.

Pan was the demon god of the day, represented by a goat.

That's where that come, you know, that view of Satan, a goat.

And it's really interesting.

And from deep in that cave, right, going back into that mountain, there was volcanic activity.

And from time to time, there was a rumbling coming from that cave.

Right?

So you can imagine what the people thought.

Oh, that's pan.

He's upset.

And in fact, that's where we get our English word panic from.

They panicked from this goat god letting out this anger.

And so there's all this going on, playing out, and Jesus uses this context to say, Who do people say that I am?

I mean, these people that worship all these different gods.

What are you hearing?

What do they say about me?

Am I just one more in the litany of gods, good and bad gods?

Am I nothing more than a prophet?

And so he's asking them to respond.

And he gives this answer, and it's a surprise.

It's not that he's going to establish his military kingdom right now, but that he's going to build his church.

And those disciples might have been surprised, some of them, Simon the Zealot who wanted Jesus to overthrow Rome, he was certainly surprised.

And Peter gives this amazing confession.

Now note that there's been other confessions of Christ in Scripture at this point.

Remember, Nathanael had confessed Christ as the Son of God in John 1.

The disciples had declared that He was God's Son after He stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, if you remember that.

Peter had given a confession of faith when, remember he was talking about, to be my disciple, you need to eat my flesh and drink my blood.

And some of the disciples said, that's all I want.

Not the 12, but the hundreds.

And they left.

And after they left Peter, and you can read about this in John 6, this was his sermon on the bread of life, Peter gave a confession of faith.

But basically, who else is there but you, Jesus?

Andrew had brought his brother Simon to Jesus in the very beginning on the basis of belief, John 1:41.

And so there have been other confessions of faith, but Peter nails it here.

And what was the response?

We read it in Scripture.

Jesus calls Peter a rock.

Well, he changes his name.

And you see, the Jewish men who were steeped in Old Testament teaching and theology, they would have recognized and understood that the rock is a symbol of God.

He is the rock.

His work is perfect.

That's way back in Deuteronomy 32.

The Lord is my rock and my fortress, Psalm 18.

And so Jesus says, You are petras, a stone, and upon this petra, a large rock, I will build my church.

See, Jesus had given Simon the new name Peter,

which means a stone, the Aramaic form of that is Cephas, which also means stone.

But isn't it true that anyone who acknowledges Jesus, anyone who is brave enough to make that confession, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, my Savior, is called a stone, a living stone.

That's what we read in 1 Peter 2:5.

We are living stones.

But the truth is that Jesus, and the only Jesus,

is the foundation rock, the cornerstone.

And the old prophets acknowledge this, Psalm 118, Isaiah 28.

Jesus Himself said this in Matthew 21, Peter and the other apostles.

Paul also stated that the foundation for the church is Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:11.

This foundation was laid by the apostles and the prophets as they preached Christ to the lost.

With all that as background, what can we say about the local church?

How can we push back on the big lie that all you need is Jesus, you really don't need the church?

You don't need those Christian people.

What can we know for certain about the church?

First thing is this, the local church is the plan for saving the world.

There's no plan B.

There is no backup strategy.

In this passage, we see that Jesus institutes the church, and it's a big, big deal.

Now, some of you might say, Wait, wait a minute.

I get that.

But Jesus is talking about the universal church, the church of all believers of all time, all nations, tribes, and tongues.

And yes, he is.

He's talking about the big C church, but understand this.

The word for church, ekklesia, you've heard that word before, it means called out ones.

It's used 114 times in Scripture, and more than 90 of those times, it refers to Knoll Avenue Baptist Church.

It refers to the little local church.

And you know churches weren't big back then.

You know churches didn't have buildings in the very beginning.

They met in homes and catacombs and outdoors.

He's referring to small groups of believers.

The apostles did, the writers of the New Testament.

That's the context for the epistles.

It's the small C church, and it's a big deal.

Because if we don't understand that, then we can begin to think, okay, I don't need the little church.

I'm a member of the universal church, the big C church.

That's all I need.

The little church is too messed up.

The little church is too divisive.

The little church is not doing the right things.

And really, the big C church, that could play out with Compassion International.

I can invest all my time and money with them.

Or another parachurch organization.

I don't need the local church.

They're too fallible.

They're too fickle.

Sometimes they're not friendly.

I can do without the local church.

But understand this, as we read the whole New Testament, we see how crucial the local body of Christ is.

We can't blow it off.

And there's no call in the New Testament, understand this, for Lone Rangers.

I laugh at my brother Robert, he lives in Chattanooga, and basically his philosophy is, Eh,

I don't go to church and I don't really do things socially because really, I don't like people, right?

And I laugh at that, and I don't think down deep it's entirely that way, but kind of.

And some people feel that way, right?

And then some who claim to be really strong believers are lone rangers.

I don't need you guys, I can do my ministry on my own.

I can be faithful on my own.

I don't need you people.

You're strange.

Maybe you don't agree with me.

I don't need you.

And that's unscriptural.

It's about we, not me.

I'm not saying you can't do ministry on your own.

I try to do some on my own, but it's not as powerful as the we.

What God has anointed is the we.

So as imperfect as the local church is,

She is part of the rest of the story.

Do you realize that in the end, the church will stand?

In Revelation 19, we can read this passage as we get to the book of, end of the Revelation.

And, Hallelujah, for our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come and

His bride has made herself ready.

You know, that's what we're supposed to be doing as a local church, make ourselves ready for Jesus.

Be set apart, be holy unto Him, be on mission for Him, being listening to Him, to make ourselves ready as the bride of Christ.

But I love that analogy, that bride

of Christ.

You see, the church is not just a man-made institution.

It's not.

It's commissioned.

It was organized.

It was founded by Jesus Christ Himself, and He calls us His bride.

And yet we take shots at the bride, don't we?

I wonder how much that upsets Jesus when we take shots, when we put down His bride.

I've done it before.

Can you imagine

If A groomsman, in fact, the best man at a wedding comes up to the groom and says, man, I'm really proud of you, and it's going to be a great day, but you know, your bride

I, not really sold on her.

You sure she's the right one?

Yeah, I think she, and he describes what he doesn't like.

Can you imagine what that groom would do?

You don't insult the bride of the groom.

Susan is my bride.

of many, many years.

We're going to be on an anniversary cruise in a couple of weeks.

I'm excited.

And Susan, my bride who doesn't like me to call her out in public, is an amazing bride.

She's beautiful.

She's very smart and intelligent.

She's hardworking.

Can I hear an amen from her oldest son?

She was a phenomenal, wait, no, a phenomenal mother.

a phenomenal grandmother, a phenomenal gifted instrumentalist and piano player, and phenomenal in so many ways, and so friendly and loving.

But get this, my bride ain't perfect.

Right?

She's got her stuff just like this ornery husband has this stuff.

Neither one of us is perfect.

But get this, she's my bride, and you don't say anything bad about my bride, right?

to the local church.

The church is the bride of Jesus Christ.

Let's build up his bride.

Let's talk about his bride in a good way.

Let's rejoice in being the bride of Christ.

And no, she's not going to be perfect.

The bride of Christ is going to have some problems and struggles and some things go wrong.

The bride of Christ is not always going to understand everything that God allows to happen, but she is still the bride of Jesus.

So the local church is the plan for saving the world.

We can't go around it.

Here's the second thing.

The local church is a church only when it proclaims Jesus.

Remember, the rock is not Peter.

Old Testament, the rock is God.

According to Jesus, He's the cornerstone, He's the rock.

According to Peter, Jesus is the rock.

According to Paul, Jesus is the cornerstone, the rock.

The local church is the church only when it proclaims Jesus.

The church carries the mandate to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.

And you say, Well, of course, of course.

Tell me something I don't know.

Every church proclaims Jesus.

No, they don't.

Have you ever been in a church that did not proclaim Jesus, that it was a nice service, that talked about nice things, but there was never the crux of repent and believe to be saved?

There was never a desperation that you need a savior.

I've been in churches like that.

See, we're only the bride of Christ in a true church.

If we

have the mandate and our main message is proclaiming Jesus.

If our main program is Jesus, if our events are Jesus, if everything we do is about proclaiming the gospel, we're a true church.

One thing I want you to do as time goes on is evaluate this church.

Is this church proclaiming Jesus?

Is this church sharing the gospel?

Is this church a church that Jesus would be proud of because His bride is bragging on Him and sharing Him?

I want you to evaluate the church calendar.

I want you to evaluate the events.

Are they events that are not just for us,
but for them.

You see, the church is one of the few institutions on earth that exists for people outside of it.

That's called the Great Commission.

That is the gospel.

We have events coming up, right?

Vacation Bible School is being announced.

What a great opportunity to do something, not just for the children here, but for those children.

What an opportunity to invite, to bring,

to invest in people so you have the authority to invite them for that special week, to roll up your sleeves, to help out, to give, whatever it is, but to proclaim Jesus.

What about the church programs?

What about the core classes on Sunday morning, the children's Sunday school classes?

Is Jesus being lifted up so He can draw all people to Himself?

That's my question.

So that's the ruthless evaluation of any church.

Is that church lifting up Jesus in everything they do so that He, by Spirit, control people to Himself?

Is that your story?

Is there a time where Jesus had drawn you to Himself and you've trusted Him, right?

That's the gospel.

That's the response.

It's a personal thing.

And as you represent this church, how are you doing it?

I mean, people can argue with you about what you say, but they can't argue about what they see, what they see in your life.

So let's represent the Lord and this church well.

here's the last thing.

Not only is the local church a church when it proclaims Jesus, but also the church will triumph in the end.

Yeah, we know this, right?

But some have doubts.

Peter,

On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome others.

You see, some people think that the church, the local church, is going to pass away and it's only going to be the big C church in the end.

That hard times will come, tribulation, persecution will come.

That people's love for God will grow cold, some will, that's what scripture says.

and that the local church will pass away, it will dissolve.

So what's the point?

What's the point in trying to envision a new day for Noll Avenue Baptist Church?

What's the point in reaching people for Christ and bringing in young families?

What's the point?

Well, the point is it's not going to pass away.

There will be the local church up until the very end.

The gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Hades, as you probably know, is not technically hell.

Hades in scripture is the place of the dead.

Hades, just kind of like Sheol, had two compartments, right?

There was paradise, Abraham's bosom, for the righteous.

And then there was that place of the dead in Sheol, or Hades, for the unrighteous.

And many scholars and theologians think that when Jesus was

crucified on that cross, placed in the tomb, that actually He descended and He released the paradise portion of Sheol, or Hades, and those Old Testament saints are now with the Lord, present with Him, not given the new bodies yet, but present with Him.

And so, it's not necessarily hell, but those who have

loved God will be present with him and those who have not will remain in Hades until the end times in Revelation 20 when there will be the great white throne and then, as we know, the Antichrist, you know, the beast, the false prophet, and the dragon of Satan will be thrown into the fiery, for it's that lake of fire.

But what about these gates?

Well, gates are defensive objects, right?

You've heard this preached before.

The gates of hell will not storm us.

We're to storm the gates of hell, yes?

Like, whatever you do tomorrow and next week, in some way or another, you can storm the gates of hell.

Some of you who are prayer warriors, you can certainly storm the gates of hell this week as you pray and intercede for this church and the kingdom of God and your neighbors and whoever God leads you to pray for.

You can storm the gates of hell, right?

The church can storm the gates of hell by what they do in the community to reach out.

But the gates are defensive things.

But it's more than that.

In ancient times, the city gates were what?

They were where the elders sat.

The city gates was the town council.

It was like the mayor's office.

So the gates are a symbol of authority.

And I think part of what Jesus was saying here is,

The gates of hell, they have no power.

They have no authority over you.

The gate of Satan, the gate of the demons, the gate of sin, it has no power over you, and it will never, ever overcome the church.

That's what Jesus said, these gates.

The church wins because God wins.

All I'm saying is at the end of my life, I want to be on the winning team.

How about you?

At the end of my life, I want to be known as somebody who loved the bride of Christ in all of her imperfections.

I want to be known as somebody who didn't just attend when he wanted to, but faithfully encouraged the fellowship of the church by being there.

I want to be known as somebody who prayed for the church.

I want to be known as somebody who rolled up my sleeves and served the local church, who gave financially to the local church, who invited people to the imperfect local church anyway.

I want to be known as someone who loves the church.

Tom Rainer, who was the president of Lifeway, wrote this, and maybe you've read this at one point or another.

It's called I Am a Church Member.

I'm going to read just a little excerpt.

I'm a church member.

I will seek to be a source of unity in the church.

I know there are no perfect pastors, staff, or other church members, but neither am I.

Can I hear an amen?

Okay.

Neither am I.

I will not be a source of gossip or dissension.

I'm a church member.

I will not let my church be about my preferences and desires that is self-serving.

I am in this church to serve others and to serve Christ.

My Savior went to the cross for me.

I can deal with any inconveniences and matters that are just not my preference or style.

I am a church member.

Let me ask you, are you all in?

Not for the big C, I get it, but the little C.

Are you all in?

Will you pray daily?

Will you attend faithfully?

Will you give generously?

Will you serve with all the effort that you can?

Will you reach out?

How about this one?

Will you ask forgiveness from someone?

Will you grant forgiveness to someone?

A person, a class, a group?

Now, I'm going to be preaching on what true biblical forgiveness is on May the 17th, but for this sake right now, I know stuff has gone on in this church and there's been heartache and some hurt, some confusion, but what are you going to do about it?

You remember that forgiveness is not feeling good about something.

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

How can you forget?

Forgiveness is not being best friends with someone.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you necessarily reconcile right now if they're not willing to.

Forgiveness, biblically, is giving the person or the people to God, letting Him be the one who will judge.

letting Him be the one who will be the avenger, taking them off your hook, putting them on God's.

Who's willing to forgive?

Who's willing to ask for forgiveness?

I'm praying for that.

Closing, Mother Teresa, right?

You got to have a Mother Teresa quote.

Here's what she said.

People are often unreasonable and self-centered.

Forgive them anyway.

If you're kind, people may accuse you of ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you're honest, people may cheat you.

Be honest anyway.

If you find happiness, people may be jealous.

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may not be ever enough, but give your best anyway.

For you see, in the end, it is between you and God.

It was never between you and them anyway.

So think about this week, what you can do to be a reconciler.

Think about

how you can be proud of your church.