

THE CHURCH - Matthew 16:18

What can we learn about the church based on the very first time that Jesus mentioned it?

The Church's...

I. **Builder** (“I will build my church...”)

Who is Jesus?

- Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16)
- Jesus is the Cornerstone (Mt. 21:42; 1 Peter 2:4-6)

Keeping it simple: The church exists because of Jesus – so keep Him front and center! (Family service, Holy Spirit Service, Casting out Demons Service, Blessing and Prosperity service...Where is the Worship Jesus Service?)

Transition: Jesus could have easily started the church as part of His personal, earthly ministry before returning to the Father! He could have been the one to give the first sermon, that gave birth to the church! BUT HE DIDN'T. Think about that. The very God-Man, empowered by the Holy Spirit, the promised Christ, the King, the great Teacher (who taught like no one had ever heard before) decided to say, “You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.”

II. **Beginning** (“I will build my church...”)

Do I understand the full implications of this? No. But I'm in good company, because I don't think Peter quite understood either. What is clear! Jesus is talking to Peter. Jesus delegates to Peter a certain level of authority and importance for the beginning of the Church. At the same time, there are 2 significant events in the life of Peter that clearly establish the **limits** of that authority and importance. The first happens immediately. He quickly understands that he does not have more authority than Jesus! “Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” That was enough to get him back in his proper place in relation to Jesus. Peter is no pope, with authority equal to or greater than Jesus. The second event happens in the upper room, moments before Jesus' trial and death. Here he learns, quite painfully, that he is not more important than the other disciples. “Peter answered Jesus, ‘Though **they all** fall away because of you, I will never fall away.’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’” So what does this have to do with Jesus' first words about the church? While Jesus is the cornerstone, I believe that Peter still is a stone that is necessary for the beginning of the church. We must acknowledge that Peter plays a fundamental, foundational role in the beginning of the church. Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone. So who is the rock? With humility, I propose that the immediate reference is Peter, but the ultimate reference is Jesus, the one whom Peter confesses in the previous verses, and the one whom Peter proclaims throughout the book of Acts. Jesus is the cornerstone. Peter is part of the foundation.

Who did Jesus use to build His Church?

- Peter, a sinful man, who was saved by a supernatural Gospel (Mt. 16:17-18a, 22-23; Ephesians 2:20) And brothers and sisters, if Jesus can use Peter, then that is great news for each one of us! Is it not! How true are the words of 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.
- Peter, a simple man, who proclaimed a supernatural Gospel (Acts 2:36-41; 4:11-12)

Keeping it simple: The church grows when the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed – so keep the Gospel front and center! (The gospel is quite simple. God is Holy and I am not. So I need to repent of my sin and believe in Jesus who died for my sin and rose again on the 3rd day. If you think that is offensive, imagine Peter saying “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom YOU crucified!” These are the exact people who actually participated (actively or passively) in the crucifixion of Jesus! Talk about calling out sin!

Transition: As the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed, people are saved! This is the means Jesus chose to bring life out of death, light out of darkness, and family out of strangers. The new reality of being "In Christ" is now what defines the community that surrounds Christ. It is the Christian bond or fellowship.

III. **Bond** ("I will build my church...")

Who does Jesus call to be part of His Church?

- The church is the gathering of those who have been called out of darkness into the light (1 Peter 2:9-10)
- The church is the gathering of those who belong to Jesus Christ (Mt. 16:18)

Keeping it simple: The church gathers to express the bond they have in Jesus – so keep the importance of true Christian fellowship front and center! Over the past year I have tried a little bit of everything, from virtual afternoon coffee and tea to preaching to a camera. Nothing compares to the gathering of God's people in order to tangibly express the bond we have in Christ! Brothers and sisters in Christ. The greatest expression of this bond will take place in heaven...and I don't know about you, but I don't want virtual heaven. I'm looking forward to the real deal. I say that to emphasize that our hearts greatest desire and goal should be to gather. So may we never let our hearts settle to the point of being comfortable with anything less. It's ok to be uncomfortable for a period of time, but the heart continues to long for that which is best.

Transition: Jesus brought us together for a purpose.

IV. **Battle** ("...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.")

Who does Jesus commission to engage in the spiritual battle surrounding His Church?

- Every believer must understand the seriousness of Christ's mission for the Church (Mt. 16:18-19)
The church is involved in serious matters – things of eternal consequence. Things that reach up into the realms of heaven and down into the depths of hell. The church is not involved in light, trivial matters. This is heavy. I want to show you this in Scripture. Mt. 18:18; Acts 5:3; Acts 8:20-21; Gal. 1:9; Eph. 6:10-13.
- Every believer must find comfort in the sufficiency of Christ's promise to the Church (Mt. 16:18; Hebrews 2:14-15) When was the last time you were attacked by a gate?!?! (Example of gate prevailing against me) Who is on the offence here? Where is the location of the battle? As a church, we declare war on death. If I can be quite open with you, over the past year, the world has tried to declare war on death....and quite frankly there is a huge sense of impotence and frustration. Not so for the church. Jesus promises the church's success because He himself took the initiative, went to the cross, and defeated sin and death! We must follow in His steps! We know the antidote to death. It is faith in Christ. Faith over fear. It is courage to obey Christ. Courage over comfort.

Keeping it simple: The church battles the realm of Satan, sin, and death in order to bring new life through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – so keep strategic (sphere of influence), aggressive (take the initiative), intentional (prepared for every opportunity) evangelism front and center!

Let me put it this way. The final part of this verse isn't really needed if you aren't engaged in the battle. Why would you need to be comforted if the gates of death and hell aren't even in sight? How do you storm gates that you don't come in contact with? Could it be that many churches are cruise liners instead of aircraft carriers? Could it be that many churches are fortresses protecting their own gates, instead of military outposts advancing upon the enemy gates? I understand that when we attack, the enemy doesn't just sit there. He attacks as well! So we need defense as well, but over the past 3 years I have been confronted with my personal need to engage in the battle with strategic, aggressive, intentional evangelism.

Conclusion:

- Consider the example of Paul's Calling – Acts 26:15-18
- Consider the example of Paul's Prayer Request – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3