

**The Church You Can Read about in the Bible  
Jesus' Promise to Build It  
"I Will Build My Church" (Mt. 16:18)**

**Intro: This year one of our themes is "The church you can read about in the Bible." In our first lesson we looked at what the church is, arriving at these conclusions:**

The church always identifies people...people who have been saved.

The saved are added to the church by the Lord.

The saved who assemble together are identified as the church of Christ in that place.

**Let's continue to think about the church that you can read about in the Bible by looking at the promise of Jesus to build His church.**

**A few months before His crucifixion, Jesus withdrew with his disciples from Galilee and spent time in the surrounding districts. Perhaps his goal was to concentrate on them and to avoid confrontations with the Pharisees who were now following him in Galilee. It was important now, as the time of the end was nearing, for Jesus to make clear to His disciples that He would die in Jerusalem. Their mistaken notions of an earthly kingdom must be corrected; and they must come to see that His kingdom would be spiritual and would be established through His death. They would only be able to accept these developments if they were deeply convicted that He was truly the Son of God. All of these important factors come together in the beautiful story of Mt. 16:13-20.**

*"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "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?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and 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. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ." (Mt. 16:13-20)*

**Though there is much to discuss in this text, we are primarily focusing on what the text teaches us about the church you can read about in the Bible.**

**What did Jesus mean when He said, "I will build my church?"**

*All over Palestine, people had built houses. Starting with an adequate foundation suitable to support the building, they would begin to lay clay*

*brick in place until the walls were formed. Then they would construct the beams for a thatch roof to be laid over the top.*  
*Jesus used this picture in figurative sense. In this case you have a builder, a foundation, and a house, so to speak. Note them:*

“I” refers to Jesus who in this passage is the builder or the stone mason.

“Will build” is the action of the metaphor. Jesus will establish or bring something into existence that does not exist.

“Upon this rock” refers to the foundation upon which Jesus would establish His church. Remember the children’s song: “the wise man built his house upon the rock” based on Mt. 7? So here the “rock” is the foundation of the house.

Since Jesus is the builder in this passage, He is not likely making Himself also the "foundation," but rather has something else in mind.

Some are convinced that the foundation is Peter, since his name means "rock." This is the basis for the Roman Catholic assertion that Peter was the first pope and head of the church on earth.

Some modern evangelical scholars likewise agree that the foundation or "rock" is Peter, but only in the sense that the church is founded upon His apostolic testimony. Certainly, none of us could deny that God's temple is built upon the foundation of the "apostles and prophets" for the Scriptures make that clear in other texts (Cf. Eph. 2:20).

However Matthew by changing the Greek word from *petros* (Peter) to *petra* may be cluing us in on the idea that the rock Jesus had in mind was not Peter, the man, but rather the truth that Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

“My church” is the thing built, the house or temple.

What Jesus is said to “build” is His assembly. The Greek word “ekklesia” is a collective noun picturing a group of people who are gathered or assembled.

These people belong to the Lord; thus Jesus called them “my church.”

*If then we were to take his figurative language and put it into literal language Jesus is saying “Having established that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God, as you Peter have confessed, I will gather to myself a group of people who belong to me.”*

*In what way would Jesus establish His deity and build His church? We find our first clue in the expression that follows:*

**“The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”**

*The gates of Hades.*

Hades is the term in the NT for the realm of death. In Greek mythology Hades was the god of the underworld and when one died he went to “Hades.” Thus it functioned in the language as a term for the underworld, the realm of the dead.

Hades is pictured here as a city that holds its inhabitants. Ancient cities were surrounded by walls and the passages in and out were through “gates.” The strength or weakness of a city was in its gates. So, Jesus refers to the “gates of Hades.” Thus, it is an expression suggesting the power of death.

***Shall not prevail***

These words picture a battle or contest.

The gates of Hades or the power of death is struggling or battling against something, trying to hold in or out some enemy or opponent. But what is it that the “gates of Hades” would not prevail against?

***Against it***

Here Jesus uses the feminine singular pronoun which has as its antecedent the church (which is also in Greek feminine singular). Hence Jesus reveals an exhilarating truth: The very powers of death itself would not prevail against the people who belong to the Lord. Neither Peter nor the rest the apostles could yet realize how this victory for the church could be assured. However we who read this text much later can clearly see how that would come to pass.

Jesus would die in order to offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins and purchase those who belong to him (Ac. 20:28).

Consequently he would enter the realm of Hades; but the power of Hades would not be strong enough to hold him in its power. Jesus would burst its gates and overcome death by His resurrection from the dead, proving to everyone that He was indeed the very Son of God (Rom. 1:4).

As a result of His victory, the victory of the church over death is also assured:

*“But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.” (1 Corinthians 15:23–24)*

***This is the climactic statement about Jesus in the first part of the Gospel of Matthew, the revelation of who Jesus was and what it meant for all who believed in Him. Jesus was showing his disciples that by His death and resurrection He would prove His deity and establish a group of people who belong to him, a people against whom the powers of death itself would not prevail.***

It is very interesting to note that Jesus gave his disciples an explanation of his intentions immediately:

*“From that time Jesus Christ 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.*  
(Matthew 16:21)

But what about Peter? What role would He have in Jesus' plan? If indeed it was Peter's confession that was the petra upon which Jesus would build His church, what role did Peter, the petros, have? The answer is to be found in the Lord's last statement to Peter:

**“I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven and whatsoever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Mt. 16:19)**

*I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*

Jesus would be establish as God's ruling king and have a people (the church) gathered around him as His subjects. He would rule over the kingdom from His throne in heaven.

However He would also have officers to make known His laws on earth. He would share His ruling authority with Peter by entrusting to him the "*keys of the kingdom.*"

“Keys” in ancient times were just as they are today symbols of authority from the king.

You might say that Jesus was using the imagery of Is. 22, in which a king entrusts His authority to His royal steward to carry out His will.

***Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound heaven...***

The last phrase tells us that the process of ruling (binding and loosing) would be shared with Peter, but in accord with what Jesus had already determined in heaven.

How? The implication is that Jesus would in some way make known to the apostles what He himself had already determined. Is this not a clear implication of the Holy Spirit's work?

*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.*  
(John 16:13–15)

***Since the language is addressed specifically to Peter, Jesus may be suggesting that he was being given the authority to open the door to the kingdom by revealing the conditions of entrance into the kingdom of heaven.***

So then Jesus is saying, “Through you Peter, I will reveal my law for those who are my subjects.”

However we should remember that the blessing Jesus pronounces is not only for Peter but ultimately for all the apostles. This is confirmed by the promise that all the apostles would rule in Jesus' kingdom (Mt. 19:28).

***If we take these phrases and put them together they tell a beautiful story of what Jesus was planning to do:***

I am about to die to purchase a group of people that belong to me. . However by my resurrection, I will prove that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God. Consequently, I will gather to myself a group of people who belong to me and I will rule over my people through you apostles who will reveal my law to them. To these I grant victory over even death itself. They shall rise to live with me eternally.

### **Application**

#### ***A few months later we see the perfect fulfillment of Jesus' words:***

He died on Calvary's cross to purchase the redemption of the people that would constitute his kingdom or assembly.

On the third day, He overcame death by His resurrection. By it He proved his deity; and the foundation for the kingdom was established.. Ascending to heaven, he took his seat at God's right hand as king over all.

He sent the Holy Spirit to reveal to his apostles what he wished for those who would be his people.

Peter arose to make known the will of the kingdom.

He revealed that Jesus had died to save all men; but that death could not hold him in its power. He was raised from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven to reign at the right hand of God as "Lord and Christ".

He told those who were not yet the Lord's people how they could belong to Him. "Repent and be baptized". Thousands responded and were gathered to the Lord (v. 47).

Jesus' words had been fulfilled: "I will build my church". That was only the beginning; for, whenever and wherever people are gathered to the Lord in this way, the church of Christ still exists!

Everytime someone is saved by faith, repentance, confession and baptism another person is added to the assembly of the Lord.

The people who worship here in this local assembly have been gathered to the Lord. We belong to him by being purchased by his blood.

We are joined together to follow the teaching of the apostles and we seek to tell others about how they can become a part of the church that Jesus built.

**Conclusion: You too can be a member of the church you can read about in the Bible. Surely you can see how important it is to be a part of the church that Jesus built. For now you understand that the church is simply all those who have been saved from sin by obedience to the teaching of the apostles and who continue to faithfully serve the Lord.**