

BUILDING THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION. What on earth is God doing? There's no question that our nation and culture are in crisis. Fear of death has so gripped our nation that the government is increasing its control over us. Racial turmoil is constantly in the news. The government itself is in turmoil and chaos and madness.

Now, as Christians we believe that God is in control of all things, and nothing happens apart from His specific decree. So, what on earth is God doing?

Last week we took a quick overview from eternity past to eternity future. Before creation God chose a people for His own name, writing their names in the Lamb's book of life. Mankind fell in sin, and spiritually died. God sent His own Son become a man, Jesus Christ, and live and die for the sake of His chosen people. In eternity to come there will be no death or disease, no grief or suffering, no sin or temptation.

But what in the world is God doing right now, today? The answer is not a mystery, and it's not hidden. It's in plain sight, right there in the pages of Scripture. There are many places that we could turn, but I want to look at [Matthew 16:13-19](#) this morning, because I believe that it best encapsulates what God is doing.

Let's read that text and pray.

[Matthew 16:13-19](#) (ESV) — 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" **14** And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." **15** He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" **16** Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." **17** And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

› PRAY!

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Jesus asked His disciples the most important question there is:

[Matthew 16:13 \(ESV\)](#) — 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

This is the most important question we can ever ask someone; their answer is the most important answer they will ever give. Who is Jesus Christ? A fictional character invented by the church? The Baby in the Manger? The One who just loves everyone no matter what? The Savior? The Lord of Glory? What we say and believe matters, because what we believe determines what we think and how we live, and our eternal destiny.

The public has all sorts of answers.

[Matthew 16:14 \(ESV\)](#) — 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

People arrived at these conclusions based on their own imaginations, or what seemed right, or according to their upbringing or religious background. It’s fair to say that most of them were sincere, but they were sincerely wrong. Jesus’ identity is not subject to human opinion. The people got it wrong.

Jesus then asks His disciples:

[Matthew 16:15 \(ESV\)](#) — 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Peter, true to his own nature, is quick to answer.

WHAT DID PETER KNOW?

He answered that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

This is exactly right.

Jesus the Christ is the Anointed One, the Messiah, whom God had promised to send to be Savior and Lord. He would save His people from their sins, and rule over them.

Jesus the Son of the Living God is God Himself in human flesh. This is why the Pharisees sought to kill Him: when He called God His Father, He made Himself equal with God:

John 5:18 ESV

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Peter's Christology was brief, but absolutely accurate. Peter knew this and believed it, and because of it was saved from His sins.

But, HOW did Peter know this?

HOW DID PETER KNOW IT?

Matthew 16:17 (ESV) — 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Peter didn't figure it out on his own. He didn't look back at the past two years with Jesus, add up Jesus' marvelous teaching and amazing miracles, and come to a conclusion. Other than the resurrection, the most convincing experience the disciples ever had was the transfiguration, where Jesus was shown in His glory. Peter even cites the transfiguration in [Second Peter 1](#),

2 Peter 1:16 ESV

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

But the transfiguration hadn't yet happened.

Peter didn't get it from other people. He wasn't influenced by the theories of the multitudes that clamored after Jesus. He didn't think back to his discussions with the other disciples.

The Father revealed it to him. Jesus knows what Peter didn't know: God the Father had revealed it to Peter, perhaps even in that very moment. His knowledge was a gift from God. It was so certain that it was equal to faith. Peter didn't just know this idea, as one of many ideas. He knew that it was absolutely and unshakably true. Peter certainly had his doubts and failures over the course of his life, but he never again doubted who Jesus Christ is.

THIS KNOWLEDGE IS PROFOUND

[Matthew 16:18](#) (ESV) — 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Peter was not named Peter all his life. He was named Simon. His father was Jonah, and so Simon is Simon bar-Jonah, Simon son of Jonah. His brother Andrew was Andrew son of Jonah. That's how names worked in that time. In [John 6:42](#) the Lord is called Jesus, son of Joseph (that's what the people thought).

This is the moment when the name Peter was given to Simon. He is called Peter earlier in Matthew, because he was known as Peter to the church. But this is the moment when he became known as Peter. Why the name Peter?

Peter is the word *petros*, which means a rock, a stone, a piece of gravel. It means the kind of stone you might build a wall with, or skip across a pond. By the way, when Linda and I first met in our early teen years, I so impressed her by throwing rocks into a lake that a few years later she married me. Just sayin'.

You are Peter, Jesus says, **and on this rock I will build My church**. The word "rock" is NOT the word *petros*, but the word *petra*, which means rock itself, rock as a substance, bedrock, solid rock, a massive mountain or mountain range of rock. Here it is not a reference to Peter, but to Peter's answer to Jesus' question.

What is the rock? The truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus says He will build His church on that truth. He is the Christ, the One whom God sent to be Savior and Lord. He is the Son of the Living God, God Himself in human flesh. HIS church, which is the only church that matters, is built on this truth.

Any church that denies this solid foundation is not a church; any so-called Christian who denies these truths is not a Christian at all.

The implications of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of the Living God are critical. As Savior, Jesus comes to save sinners from the judgment of God which they so richly deserve. As Lord, Jesus has the first and final say in everything, and especially as regards His people. As God Himself in human flesh, Jesus bears the sovereign authority of God Himself, and cannot be set aside or dismissed or made to support anyone's pet theories.

Many so-called churches and Christians deny that Jesus came to save condemned sinners. They deny His Lordship. They deny His deity. They are faithless, apostate, and anti-Christ. If Jesus is not Savior, Lord, and God Himself, then we ought to burn our Bibles.

But because Jesus Christ IS Savior, and Lord, and God Himself, then we must trust Him as Savior, obey Him as Lord, and worship Him as God.

Well, that's the introduction to the sermon! Let's get to the heart of this statement.

I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

The words I really want to focus on are these: **I will build My church.**

Jesus is PERSONALLY building His church

When He ascended to heaven, He didn't delegate the building of His church to anyone: not Peter, not the apostles, not pastors or elders, and not the church itself. HE HIMSELF is doing the work.

Jesus is PURPOSEFULLY building His church

He is building His church NUMERICALLY.

There are at least twelve statements in the book of Acts about the church growing numerically. Not one of them says that it was because Peter did this, or John did that, or because of some human effort. Instead, [Acts 13:48](#) explains that "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Our job is not to add anyone, but to proclaim the Gospel, as clearly as we can. There is no trick. There is no secret. Just tell others what the Word of God says. Trust Him to keep His promise.

Jesus is building His church SPIRITUALLY. The Word of God is the raw material necessary for spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit, following Jesus' instructions, is the worker who brings about spiritual growth. My task as a pastor is to teach the Word of God clearly and plainly. The result of that teaching is not up to me, but to the Lord. Whether you understand and believe, or reject and deny, is not in my hands, or even yours, but the hands of God.

Jesus is building His church ACCORDING TO HIS OWN DESIGN. Leadership in the church is always through elders, some of who have specialized teaching roles as pastors. It's that simple. All in the church are gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve others.

Jesus builds His church according to His own PURPOSE. His aim is to make us a holy, blameless Bride for Himself ([Ephesians 5:27](#)). Our task on earth is to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light ([First Peter 2:9](#)), which we do by living faithfully and obediently. Our job throughout eternity will be to worship and acknowledge His glory ([Revelation 5:12](#)).

What all of this means is that we have no right to redefine the church according to our idea of how many people should attend.

We have no right to create our own spiritual disciplines.

We have no right to create our own structure and leadership.

We have no right to create a church to satisfy our own desires.

THE CHURCH BELONGS TO JESUS CHRIST

The church is His. It belongs to Him. The invisible, universal church, made up of all who are in Christ, belongs to Him. The visible, local church, made up of those who truly confess Christ and, often, those who are false converts, belongs to Him as well. (The more faithfully the Word is taught, and the more faithfully the church follows the Word of God, the fewer false converts there will be.)

The invisible, universal church does not belong to us. Neither does the visible, local church. Community of Believers and One Hope Fellowship belong to Jesus Christ. He is our Savior, Lord, and God. We owe Him our love, faith, obedience, and worship.

I will build My church, Jesus says, and because of that, there is hope.

THE CHURCH CANNOT FAIL

[Matthew 16:18](#) (ESV) — 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, **and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

A battle has raged in the spiritual realm since Lucifer decided that God was in his chair. He and his comrades in rebellion were thrown out of heaven, cursed and condemned, and in utter terror await their judgment. While they wait, they seek to cause as much destruction as possible in God's creation, especially among mankind.

As a result, homosexuality is rampant in our world. Abortion murders millions of children every year. The media feeds on hatred and fear. Those who despise law and order are being given the protection of law and order as they commit acts of destruction and violence. People are so afraid of death that they have willingly given up meaningful connections to others. It's not the fault of the virus; it's that the culture lives so much for the moment that people live in terror of what is to come.

What does this mean for the invisible, universal church, and the visible, local church? Does it mean that the gates of hell are finally prevailing over the church? Absolutely not. Jesus promised that the gates of hell would NEVER prevail over His church. Is He the Savior? Is He Lord? Is He God in human flesh? Yes, yes, yes! And so He never lies and He never fails. He is continuing to build His church, and He will do so until He is completely satisfied, and then He will return for us.

BRINGING IT HOME

Next week we're going to talk about the way Jesus prunes and cultivates His church and His people.

In the meantime, let me urge you to do a few things.

If you have not been in the Word of God every day, start. Read one or two or three chapters a day. Pick a book like Ephesians, and read it every day until you've read it thirty times.

If you have not been in prayer every day, start. Use the Lord's Prayer as a basic guide. Seek the Lord. Lean on Him. Call out to Him. Voice your trust in Him. Watch for the signs that He is at work in the souls of those around you.

And, since we are talking about Jesus building His church, remain committed to our church. Deepen your love for your brothers and sisters. Pray for their spiritual growth and faith and strength during these hard times. Don't worry so much about whether they are sick, and instead petition the Lord to deepen their faith in Him. If circumstances keep you away, then find a way to communicate with those whom the Lord has given you as brothers and sisters. Pray for me as I study and preach, that the pressures of the culture would have no effect on me, and that I would declare the Word of God boldly, as I ought to do.

Let's pray.