

## It's Still HIS Church

Matthew 16:13-19

We should not be surprised that Jesus was the first person in the Bible to speak the word **church**. The historical setting, recorded in Matthew 16, marks the occasion of Jesus and His disciples in Caesarea Philippi, enjoying what we might call a men's retreat. In that moment, Jesus asked them an important question.

16:13) When Jesus came to the region 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; still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

15) *"But you,"* He asked them, *"who do you say that I am?"*

16) Simon Peter answered, *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

17) And Jesus responded, *"Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven."*

18) *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it."*

19) *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven."*

At this event early in Jesus' ministry, He established **The Truth About the Church.**

**Truth #1 = The church is people.** *Ecclesia* = "**called out ones**". We need to be reminded of what we already know: the church is not this building. This building is only a location. This structure is the place where the church gathers for worship, education, discipleship, and fellowship. We need to settle the conviction that the church is people.

**Truth #2 = The Church belongs to Jesus.** *"I will build MY church."* We don't build the church – HE does. It's His church, not ours. The New Testament is clear on this: Jesus died for the church. He is head over the church. He equips His church with leaders. He organizes His church for ministry. I have come here this morning to remind us that IT'S STILL HIS CHURCH!

Matthew 16 records some of the most significant words Jesus ever spoke. In these significant words, Jesus used three symbols: rock, forces, and keys. Let's examine these symbols and the context in which they are contained.

### 1. Rock defines the foundation of the Church.

*"You are Peter = petros = pebble stone."* Since Jesus will build his church upon a rock, some church belief systems affirm that the church is built upon Peter, the man. The view of the Roman Catholic church, for example, elevates Peter as the first head of the church and his successor, the Pope, is the direct representative of Jesus Christ on Earth today. We reject that interpretation. And here's why.

Had Jesus intended for the church to be built on Peter, the person, he would have used the same word twice – *"You are petros and upon petros, I will build my church."*

Instead, Jesus declared, ***“Upon this petra = rock slab, I will build my church.***

The church is not built in petros – a pebble stone, but *petra* – rock slab, bedrock.

So if HIS church is to be built on *petra*, what is that bedrock truth upon which the church is to be built? Go back to Jesus’ question: *Who do you say that I am, Petros?* ***“Jesus, you are the one and only Messiah, the one and only son of the one and only living God.”***

***Petra can only mean the conviction that Jesus is the one and only Messiah.*** We sing: *“On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”* The Apostle Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 3:11 — *“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* Peter himself, writing in his first epistle, 1 Peter 2:7-8, no doubt remembering this encounter, would affirm Jesus as the chief cornerstone. Jesus is building his church on the foundation that He is the Messiah — not just sent from God, not just a part of God, not just a representative of God — Jesus was and is the son of the living God. Upon that foundation the church exists. That’s why the church must not be built on a pastor, or a program, or a project. When they falter or fail, then the church fails. JESUS NEVER FAILS!

*“Upon this petra I will build My church, and the pyle of Hades will not overpower the church I will build.”* Rock defines the foundation of the church.

## **2. Forces determine the future of the church.**

***“Forces” is often translated “gates.”*** A gate gives access to or opens to release. In the Roman world in which the New Testament was written, armies attacked the city gates. A city’s strength or power localized at the point of the city gates. ***“Hades”, or “hell”, is the place of the dead.*** Right here is the only time in the Bible were “gates” or “forces” and “Hell” are connected. Jesus promised to build HIS church upon the bedrock conviction that He is the one and only Messiah, so that not even the most powerful forces of Hell would overpower HIS church. If you read further in Matthew 16, Jesus would announce to His disciples how he would go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and rise from the dead on the third day. But though He would die, the church would live on. One by one, the disciples themselves would die, all of them as martyrs for their faith, but the church would live on. Generation after generation has come and gone, but His church lives on. Here’s the future of His church – in the end – we win. We are already on the winning side!

Someone has said, *“The church is like a nail — the harder you hit it, the deeper you drive it into the hearts of men and the soul of society.”* Jesus never said that His church would face no opposition. **Jesus promised that His church will survive!** Many of you have heard Perry Sanders preach one of his favorite sermons from this text – *Shattering the Gates of Hell*. Bro. Perry believed, and I concur, that the church can move against even the forces of hell. Jesus never intended that HIS church be passive, withdrawn, or defensive. Jesus intends for HIS church to be active, strategic, forward-moving. The church continues to have many enemies, including the strategies Satan and all its forces. And the church’s last-standing enemy is death itself. But when death is finally dead, the church will be there to conduct its funeral. Nothing can destroy HIS church built on the right foundation.

*“Upon this petra I will build my church and the pyle of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.”* Rock defines the foundation of the church. Forces confirm the future of the church.

### 3. Keys declare the function of the church.

**Keys carry only one purpose – to lock or unlock.** Jesus has given to us – the church - the keys to the kingdom. **These keys unlock the truth that Jesus is the only way to heaven.** Jesus declared in John 3:3 that unless a person is born again, they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. No one gets to heaven without an encounter with Jesus. Our function, then, as His church, is to share Jesus and the truth of His salvation with those who are spiritually lost and personally unchurched. **The church exists for those yet to be reached.** If we don't keep that as our function, then those who are spiritually lost and personally unchurched, remain that way for eternity. Listen to the qualifier -- "*Whatever we bind on earth is already bound in heaven.* If we don't unlock the hearts of lost and unchurched people on earth, then their hearts remain locked in eternity. But, praise God, "*whatever we loose (unlock) on earth is already loosed (unlocked) in heaven.*"

So many churches have lost their sense of mission and purpose. So many churches are dysfunctional, in the sense that they have forgotten what their function is. It's real easy for any church to turn inward instead of reaching outward. It's real easy for any church to exist for its members than to evangelize its community. It's real easy for any church to forget that it exists for the sake of those yet to be reached. The result is that many churches have more fashion than passion — keepers of the aquarium instead of fishers of men. Eva Hart survived the Titanic. There were 20 lifeboats on the Titanic. Eva Hart was on lifeboat #14 – the only one of the 20 lifeboats that looked for survivors. Lifeboat #14 risked their own survival to save those perishing. All other lifeboats of the Titanic rowed away from the sinking ship into safety and comfort to save themselves.

Here's the danger: As the church, we can become so comfortable and complacent, so traditional and trivial, that we forget why we exist. We exist for the sole purpose of reaching those who are spiritually lost and personally unchurched. It's one thing to build on the right foundation and embrace the right future. However, we must never lose or replace our function.

**Jesus is Boss of the Church.** God blessed Vicki and me with three wonderful children – two sons and a daughter right in between those boys. When our oldest son Aaron was a preschooler, he loved to dress up on Sunday morning in a suit and tie. One Sunday morning I bent down to help him put on his tie. He looked me right in the eye and asked, "*Dad, who's boss of the church?*" I responded, "*Well, that's an interesting question. Who do you think is boss of the church?*" He asserted himself, "*Why dad, don't you know that Jesus is boss of the church?*" And before I could respond, he added a qualifier: "*Sometimes people try to be boss of the church, but only Jesus is boss of the church!*"

First Baptist Lafayette – It's Still HIS Church!

