

Weekly Reflection – “The Church Builder”

Matthew 16:13-20

In the Greek New Testament, the word translated “church” is “ekklesia.” It means, “an assembly, or a gathering of people around an idea. This is not a religious word, for example in Acts 19 it is used three times in reference to a mob and a legal court. Over the years people began to think of church as a place that you went to for religious services. Our English word “church” comes not from the Greek “ekklesia” but from the German word “kirche,” which meant “a sacred place where you gather for religious purposes.” That shift in thinking changed the fundamental way people related to the church. Throughout the Dark and Middle Ages people went to church; it was place you attended or an event you sat through, rather than as a movement you were part of. And so, the church became an institution that essentially provided services for people and was controlled by powerful people who used it to serve their own interests.

But then something awesome happened. God raised up a group of people called the Reformers. One of the main ones for the English-speaking world was William Tyndale. Tyndale came to the conviction that Christianity was essentially a movement, and that if people were going to be devoted to the movement, they had to understand the message, and so his life’s work was to produce the first translation of the Bible into common English. And every time he came to this word ekklesia he translated it “congregation” instead of church, because he was trying to emphasize that the church was not a place you went to, but a movement you belonged to. Well, that infuriated church leaders because it undercut their authority. Eventually Tyndale was tried as a heretic, hanged and burned at the stake. But this is what the church is, a group of people called out around an idea or a movement.

What are we called out for, what is it that the church is gathered around, what is this movement?

“Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16 ESV) “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.” (Matthew 16:18 ESV) The church at its inception was a movement built around conviction that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. A group of people called out around the gospel of Jesus, who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing. A movement of disciple makers.

I hope you see the connection between what we have talked about the past four weeks and who the church really is? We spent four weeks talking about, getting to know the baby in the manger. He is Jesus, God is salvation. He is Lord, master and owner, Lord of lords and King of kings. He is Christ, the Anointed One, Ultimate Prophet, Ultimate Priest, and Ultimate King. Jesus is the God-Man, 100% divine and 100% man. The church is built on the truth that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God.

The danger of the church in every age is to cease being a movement and become instead a place people simply attend. For you, “Is the church a place you attend, or is it a movement you are personally part of?”

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

Caesarea Philippi was a Roman city built within the borders of Israel up on a hill overlooking the entire Jordan valley. Caesarea Philippi was a place known for pagan worship, for darkness, a place where they would participate in some unspeakable hedonistic practices. One of the main natural features of it is this

huge rock face wall where the Romans had built temple after temple after temple to god after god after god. That is the place where Jesus reveals His plan to build a church, to call out a people around who He is. This is where Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, **"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."**

Then Jesus does what Jesus often does, He gets personal. He said to them, **"But who do you say that I am?"** That's the way Jesus works, He gets personal, "who do you say that I am? I know what your friends think, I know what your family thinks, I know what your mom and dad think, I know what people say on social media, but I'm asking you. What do you think, what do you believe, what are your convictions?" So how you answer this question is huge, it determines if you're part of the church or not

Jesus goes to a place that is dark, a place that is broken, a place filled with evil and worship to false gods. And He says this is who I am, and this is what I am going to do. I am going to build my church, and the gates of hell won't stop it.

This wording, "shall not prevail against it," or "will not overcome it," may paint in our mind a picture that is not quite accurate. In the past when I would read this it was the picture of the gates of hell attacking the church, but the gates of hell won't be able to destroy the church. But we must remember that gates are not an offensive weapon. Gates are defense, they are meant to keep people out. It's not that the church is retreating in fear and the gates of hell are beating the church back. It's that the church is advancing against the gates. It's a completely different perspective.

The church is not on defense the church is on offense. Proactive and not reactive. When the church is playing defense, it is focused on stopping something but when the church is playing offense it's focused on advancing something. Defense is all about preventing, offense is about advancing. Yes, we protect the ball but it's so we can advance the ball. When the church is playing defense, the church tends to be known for what it is against. If the church is playing offense it is known for what it is for. Maybe you grew up in a church where it was all about what was not ok, what you were against. Just constant defense, isolate yourself from the world, neutrality, and you kind of missed what the church was for.

- And what the church is for is where the power is.
- I know it's easy to feel overwhelmed.
- Watch the news, hear people say it's never been this bad.
- Hear Jesus say, "I will build My church and the gates of hell won't stop Me."

Jesus is building His church

Don't miss the obvious, Jesus is doing the building. We are not building it for Jesus. And don't miss that it is Jesus' church. Jesus is not building our church. So, what part do you and I play in Jesus building His church? **"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."** (1 Peter 2:4-5 ESV) Jesus is the foundation, the bedrock, the cornerstone that the church is built upon. Born again disciples of Jesus are living stones that Jesus uses to build His church. This leads to another question, "How does Jesus use us to build His church?"

"Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'" (Luke 24:45-49 ESV) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea

and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”” (Acts 1:8 ESV) It seems pretty clear from these passages that the way Jesus will use us to build His church is by filling us with His Holy Spirit so we will be witnesses to the world of who He is and what He has done.

What is your plan at the center of your life? What is the plan that drives the decisions you make? Everyone has to live by some sort of a plan. We may not be conscious of the plan in every action we make. Or maybe not even aware that we have a plan, but I believe that at the center of everything there is a plan or objective. Something is driving the way you are living. What I’m getting at is, is the plan or objective that is driving the way you’re living, to be a Holy Spirit filled witness for Jesus? To help people see the glory of God? To be the light of Jesus in a dark world?