

# Sermons on Matthew

## I Will Build My Church

*Matthew 16:18-20*

*Part 3*

*The Role and Authority of the Church*

*With Study Questions*

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And I also say to you that \_\_you are Peter, and \_\_on this rock I will build My church, and \_\_the gates of Hades shall not \_\_prevail against it. <sup>-19-</sup>  
\_\_And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth \_\_will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. \_" <sup>-20-</sup> \_\_Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ (Matthew 16:18-20).

## Prologue—The Focus Group Driven Church

It came to my attention, after I had already committed to the mission, that the pastors of the underground church in China were sporting ambivalence toward sitting under my instruction—some of them just didn't want me there. I was relieved to find that it wasn't me personally; it was having any pastor from the west.

You see, as the Chinese government became more and more tolerant of the gospel, the churches from America which made the initial inroads, were the ones most well-funded—the popular and televangelistic mega-churches.

These highly persecuted Chinese saints found themselves exposed to the prominent and illustrious churches of America—where worship is a show, church leaders are celebrities, success is by statistics, salvation is via the emotional walking of an aisle, evangelism is void of atonement, and the church is marketed utilizing the latest focus groups—unveiling and catering to a grotesque consumer mentality.

I am not quite sure if these Chinese brothers understood what was right in terms of the role, structure and guidelines of the church; but they seemed pretty confident that what they were observing coming out of the West was wrong—at least as they had understood the Scriptures.

## Our Four Questions

We are in the midst of answering four questions evoked by the above passage: What is the foundation of the church? What are the expectations of the church? What is the role of the church? And what is the authority of the church?

## **Foundation**

Previously we discussed the foundation of the church. We pursued understanding in what respect Peter was the rock, or foundation, on which Christ would build His church. In summary, the foundation of the church is Jesus, who is infallibly presented by the apostles and the prophets through the Scriptures. When the church loses this foundation, they lose Christ and, as Jesus taught, the house falls greatly (Matthew 7:27).

The trendy emphasis of interaction with the Christ in our hearts (which can easily be confused with a carnal contentment) rather than the Christ of the Scriptures poses a great threat to western evangelicalism.

## **Expectation**

We then discussed the expectation of the church. By expectation we did not mean its expectations in terms of function or behavior (something we will discuss today), but rather what we should expect Christ to accomplish through His church.

Our conclusion was that the church, by the authority of Christ, the preaching of the gospel, and the power of the Spirit, will be the means by which Christ reveals Himself, defeats all that is evil, and redeems the world. In other words, the church is the instrument which Jesus uses to change the world.

Popular 'end times' prognosticators and novelists have unwittingly undermined the optimistic attitude and actions Christian ought to have toward this fully-orbed redemption by presenting a brand of Christianity where the church waxes cold and the antichrist, rather than the Christ, exercises supreme authority and has his way with humanity throughout history.

## **An Important but Neglected Teaching**

I cannot emphasize strenuously enough how important the subject of Christ building His church is. The study of the church (what theologians call ecclesiology) is written of in great detail in the Scriptures but the foundation, expectation, role, and authority of the church is among the most neglected of subjects among today's Christians.

I truly hope we all come to realize that to neglect Christ's church and diminish its role and importance in the lives of Christians has disastrous effects upon both the individual and the culture.

## **How Christ Accomplishes His Mission**

This morning we will examine what the role and authority of the church is. Just how does the church accomplish what Christ has called it to accomplish? A better way to ask that might be, 'Just how does Christ accomplish His mission through the church?' What is the church called to be or do (or for that matter, not be or not do) in order to be the instrument of Christ's redemption? The section of the passage which kindles this question is verse 19.

**\_\_And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth \_\_will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19).**

## **The Role—The Keys**

What is the role of the church? In short, the role of the church is to take responsibility to properly handle the keys given to it by Christ. But what does this mean—the keys?

Jesus is teaching that the church, which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (i.e. the biblical Jesus), is given the keys (kleidas-- \_\_\_\_\_) of the kingdom of heaven. So if we're going to follow the metaphor, the church (and again, by 'church' we are speaking of those visible entities revealed in Scripture which have pastors, elders, deacons, etc.) is called to unlock its doors in such a way as to invite people to the kingdom of heaven. In short, the church is the outward and visible entity utilized by God to present Jesus to a fallen world.

## **A Church or a Synagogue of Satan?**

But in order to assure that the church is not placed on too high a pedestal, we must hasten to say that it is only to the extent that the church presents the Jesus of the Scriptures that they actually have these keys, since the Scriptures elsewhere reveal the keys to be held by Jesus Himself

(Revelation 1:18; 3:7)—remember the Stargate illustration<sup>1</sup>. Let us be aware that Jesus speaks of institutions which, at one time were the household of God, becoming synagogues of Satan (Revelation 3:9). Calvin puts it nicely:

**We know that there is no other way in which the gate of life is opened to us than by the word of God; and hence it follows that the key is placed, as it were, in the hands of the ministers of the word.<sup>2</sup>**

So how is this appropriated or applied? In the church's worship service:

- when we open the call to worship with the reading of the Scriptures, we are hearing the words of God's mouth (Psalm 138:4)
- when we confess our sins, we are agreeing with what God has said concerning us (Romans 3:9-18)
- when we call upon Jesus, we are acknowledging God's only provision to deliver us from our sin and just condemnation (John 14:6)
- when we sing, we are praising God for calling us out of the darkness into His glorious light (Psalm 13:6)
- when we recite our beliefs, we are corporately pledging our allegiance to His law and His truth and dependence upon His grace (2 Chronicles 5:13)
- when we take up our offering, we are "honoring the Lord with our possession" (Proverbs 3:9)
- when we pray, we are obediently bringing our requests to God and seeking His wisdom (Matthew 7:7; James 1:5)
- when the word is preached, the sense (or meaning) of the Scriptures is to be made clear (Nehemiah 8:8)
- when we partake in The Lord's Supper, it is that special means of grace—that sacrament—instituted by Christ Himself designed to bring our thoughts into remembrance of His body and blood broken and shed for sinners (Luke 22:19)
- and in the closing benediction is the good word God grants His people, that they may know that through Christ they have found favor in His eyes and go in peace (Numbers 6:24).

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<sup>1</sup> Years ago a sci-fi movie came out named Stargate followed by a television show. It was about this interstellar teleportation device found in pyramid in Egypt which lead to another planet or dimension. Upon entering the pyramid one would come into contact with the stargate which lead to the other dimension. Jesus said to "enter by the narrow gate" (Matthew 7:13) and by this we understand that gate to be Jesus Himself. Yet the pyramid (I speak as a man), in which the gate is found is Christ's church.

<sup>2</sup>Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels : Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System;Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

It is the church which obeys the instructions of God through the Scriptures that faithfully opens the kingdom of heaven. Churches are to make every effort to be what the Scriptures say a church should be.

### **A Loftier Estimation**

I would pray that God would grant us all a loftier estimation of the church through these teachings. For if it is true that the church provides that point of contact with God through Jesus, how much more diligent ought we to be, as pastors, elders and deacons in laboring to present the unadulterated gospel of Christ! And how much more diligent the congregant or member should be assembling with all reverence! And as those with a heartfelt concern for the lost to bring wayward souls to that oasis where living waters flow!

And friends, the responsibility is mutual. It is the pastor's responsibility to be an accurate and fearful steward of the grace entrusted to him (1 Thessalonians 2:4), and it is the responsibility of the congregant or member to turn away from the ear-ticklers (2 Timothy 4:3). It should grieve our hearts when the heretics fill the stadiums.

### **The Keys—A Summary**

In summary, the church which labors to present the Jesus of the Scriptures is opening the kingdom of heaven to men. All arrows of the church service, therefore, should be pointing in that direction—continually directing, as it were, our thoughts and hearts toward the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus—seeking to understand and proclaim the value of His person and work of redemption. Christians are to, as the author of Hebrews writes, fix **“our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2b).**

But what of this binding and loosing?

### **The Authority—Bind and Loose**

What kind of authority comes with these keys? Even though the church herself is not the mediator between man and God (and is only truly useful to the extent that it presents the true Christ of the Scriptures), the authority the church has been given to bind and loose should be held with the utmost gravity. Jesus taught that a person who does not properly

repent of church discipline is to be considered an unbeliever (Matthew 18:17).

Of course, only God truly knows (good Roman Catholics are convinced Luther is rotting in hell), but the modern methods of determining whether someone else is saved (usually if they prayed the sinner's prayer?) is an unbiblical and irresponsible way of caring for the souls of others. According to Jesus, our love and concern for the soul of another is rooted in whether they are a member in good standing of a Christian church; in light of this we are to understand binding and loosing.

## **Binding and Loosing**

The words "bind" and "loose", though metaphors, should be understood in their natural sense: to bind (deses--\_\_ \_\_) means to tie and is used to describe imprisonment or bound in chains (Acts 22:5); to loose (lyses--\_\_ \_\_) means to release or dissolve or to be set free from something (Luke 13:16). Jesus is saying that what the church ties up or imprisons on earth is imprisoned in heaven and what the church sets free on earth is set free in heaven.

But it goes even further than that.

The verb tenses used by Jesus demonstrate, in a very emphatic sense, how the church is God's instrument of redemption. Literally, Jesus says that "whatever you bind on earth, shall already have been bound in heaven" (perfect tense); as if the church is working out what God has already decreed to take place.

All this is to say that God has purposed to reveal Himself through churches which hold fast to the word of God (1 Corinthians 15:2); and that man's response to biblical Christianity as it is presented by faithful churches binds him in death or frees him unto life. In light of this the apostle Paul writes,

**Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us *\_*diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. <sup>-15-</sup> For we are to God the fragrance of Christ *\_*among those who are being saved and *\_*among those who are perishing. <sup>-16-</sup> *\_*To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life (2 Corinthians 2:14-16a).**

Paul, anticipating the bendings and perversions of Christ's church, continues:

**And \_\_who is sufficient for these things? <sup>-17-</sup> For we are not, as \_\_so many, \_\_peddling \_\_the word of God; but as \_\_of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:16b-17).**

It is difficult to find a more profound and poetic exposition of this doctrine than the one offered by Calvin who wrote,

**Christ therefore declares that, by the preaching of the Gospel, is revealed on the earth what will be the heavenly judgment of God, and that the certainty of life or death is not to be obtained from any other source. This is a great honor, that we are God's messengers to assure the world of its salvation. It is the highest honor conferred on the Gospel, that it is declared to be the *embassy of mutual reconciliation* between God and men, (\_2 Corinthians 5:20\_) In a word, it is a wonderful consolation to devout minds to know that the message of salvation brought to them by a poor mortal man is ratified before God. Meanwhile, let the ungodly ridicule, as they may think fit, the doctrine which is preached to them by the command of God, they will one day learn with what truth and seriousness God threatened them by the mouth of men. Finally, let pious teachers, resting on this assurance, encourage themselves and others to defend with boldness the life-giving grace of God, and yet let them not the less boldly thunder against the hardened despisers of their doctrine.<sup>3</sup>**

## **A Predominant Disposition Toward Church**

Friends, how does this passage speak to the predominant disposition held by many Christians regarding church membership being optional? By church membership (at least here), I'm not endorsing a specific program of church membership; I am speaking of a defined relationship between the members and elders of a specific church, the type of relationship necessarily implied in Hebrews where we read:

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<sup>3</sup>Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels : Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System;Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

**\_Obey those who \_\_rule over you, and be submissive, for \_\_they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).**

How would a Christian who rejects the notion, or downplays the importance, of church membership even begin to obey this imperative? Years ago when we as a church sought to obey this shepherding command of Christ (which is found so often in Scripture) by implementing a form of church membership, some seemingly mature Christians scoffed and left the membership forms prominently abandoned on my desk (in order that I might clearly see their indignant rebellion, I guess), then proceeded to leave the church.

There had been no hint or even suggestion that the elders in the church were seeking to, as Peter writes, “lord over” (1 Peter 5:3) the people in the church, so the only reasonable conclusion was that they were either ignorant of, or simply resented, the doctrine of church membership.

I do not present these somewhat negative reactions to the church to be negative. I present them to address a pandemic anemia flowing through the blood system of contemporary western Christianity. The church is viewed as, at best, a good idea and, at worst, expendable.

## **How God Ordinarily Saves**

Frankly I was shocked when I first read this portion of the Westminster Confession of Faith,<sup>4</sup> which states:

**The visible Church...is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (Acts 2:47)<sup>5</sup>**

Apart from the visible church (that is, churches which meet in local bodies with pastors, elders, deacons, etc.) there is no ordinary possibility of salvation! The word ‘ordinary’ added, no doubt, because we recognize extraordinary circumstances under which God may save souls through

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<sup>4</sup>—an elongated statement of faith heralded by many as the most accurate presentation of what the Bible says about the Christian faith.

<sup>5</sup>*The Westminster confession of faith*. 1996 (Chapter XXV, 2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Christ. But the extraordinary is to be left to God. When Christians purposefully move away from the ordinary to the unusual (or shall we say unbiblical), they engage in a very dangerous business.

I recently had some work done on my house where they had to remove a wall and hold the second story up with a temporary make-shift wall. I went out and looked at what was holding up my house—a bunch of two by fours somewhat haphazardly wedged between the ground and the beam. They did the job for a while. But nobody in their right mind would suggest they supplant the actual wall which the architect designed to permanently hold up the house; they would hardly hold up under a slight breeze, let alone floods and strong winds.

Christian conferences, bookstores, television and radio ministries, small groups, retreats, parachurch organizations and private disciplines may all serve well to sanctify God's people, but they are not the church. It is quite common for someone to explain away their lack of church attendance or membership by offering a litany of 'other' Christian behaviors in which they participate; but it is not the church.

So what is the unique role which the church plays?

Operating under the assumption that our first point was accurate—that the rock of the church is the biblical presentation of Christ—the role of the church is to proclaim (or herald, or preach) with authority both the blessings and curses of man's reaction to Christ.

But it is not merely a loudspeaker which, from a distance, indifferently spurts information (which is true of so many of the unusual and unbiblical means we spoke of earlier—not to mention the complete absence of church discipline which Jesus will speak of in chapter 18). The church is to operate in a very intimate, 'hands-on' sort of way. The authority of the words of Christ never ends:

**\_He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him— \_\_the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day (John 12:48).**

Here we have yet another example of Jesus equating Himself with His word—a word which He infallibly passed on to His apostles (John 14:26); the words which we have on our laps (our Bibles). So the church is to operate, without shrinking back, with the authority which the Scriptures present concerning the name, work, words and person of Jesus.

Christians must embrace and take the responsibility which is given to them as members of the church of Christ; that is the faithful handling of the

keys given to it by Christ—to present Christ crucified and risen to save the lost—for in so doing it functions to both bind and loose the souls of men.

### Questions for Study

1. Discuss your assessment of today's popular church mentality—it's strengths and weaknesses (page 2).
2. Review the foundation and expectations of the church (page 3).
3. Why is ecclesiology (the study of the church) important (page 4)?
4. In what respect does the church hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven (pages 4, 5)?
5. How does this raise your estimation of what the church should be (pages 5, 6)?
6. Discuss what should take place in church in order for it to fulfill this role (pages 5, 6).
7. How is the responsibility of what takes place in church mutual between those called to shepherd and those under their care (page 6)?

8. Is the church the mediator between man and God (page 7)?
9. How should the salvation or spiritual well-being of another person be determined (page 7)?
10. In what respect does the church bind and loose (pages 7-9)?
11. How does all this speak to the modern disposition of Christians toward church (pages 9, 10)?
12. Through what instrument or entity does God ordinarily save people (page 11)?
13. How has this teaching altered or expanded your understanding of the church?