

SERMON GUIDE

Ecclesia: What is the Church?

Matthew 16:18-20



SERMON NOTES

The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written over the course of over 1,500 years, with 40 different authors, in 3 different languages, on 3 different continents, all telling one central story. There is no other book, work of literature, or ancient texts like it. That central storyline of the whole Bible is God's plan of redemption for sinful humanity through Jesus Christ. That's the story. And there are 6 acts or scenes to this story. Wherever you find yourself in the Bible, you find yourself somewhere in that story.

Here are those scenes or acts of the story:

- Creation - The Triune God (Father, Son, and Spirit) create the universe and everything in it
- Fall - Man, the crown jewel of creation, made for relationship with God rebels and sins against Him
- Israel - God establishes a covenant with Abraham to build a covenant people out of the fallen world
- Jesus - The promised Redeemer and Messiah out of Israel that reconciles people of every nation to God
- Church - The redeemed in Christ form a new covenant people, and live for Him and His purposes in the world
- Consumation/New Creation - Christ will return to make all things new, raise the dead, establish rule on earth as it is in Heaven forever (eternity)

This is the story Scripture tells. There are 6 acts that make up the story and we are living in the 5th act. We are the Church. The Ecclesia. We, the redeemed people of God, have a purpose and role in God's work of redemption and we await the day in which Christ returns. We are living in the story. Just as Adam lived in the story. Ruth lived in the story. The Magi lived in the story. We are part of the story. We live in the age of The Church. It began after the resurrection of Jesus and the book of Acts captures the birth and spread of the church as the gospel went forth. The letters of Paul in the New Testament instruct the church and believers how to live as the covenant people of God.

Why is this so important? Because as we laid out last week, we are not free to create our own guidelines for what it means to be a Christian. We don't get to set the terms of what God expects from us as believers who make up His church. The expressive individualism of our day leads us to think it's all about our own personal devotion to God, but if we are saved, then we belong to God. He calls the shots. And He has revealed in His Word His expectations and desires for us. We're not free to make the lake our church. We are not free agents that bounce around consuming religious goods and services. We are the church. Today we are going to look at what this means.

Exposition

Matthew 16:18-20 – 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.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell not one that he was the Christ.

Our passage today is one of Jesus' most famous statements. It is a response to Peter. In vs 13-17 of Matthew 16, Jesus asks His disciples who people say that He is. He is about 2 years into public ministry and there has been plenty of time for people to see or hear about the things Jesus has been saying and doing. There's been plenty of time for public opinion to form about Him. So He asks His disciples what people are saying about Him. Who are they saying they think He is?

They answer Him that some folks claim He is a prophet, some even think He is a prophet of old back in the flesh: Elijah, Jeremiah, maybe even John the Baptist. But Jesus turns the question to them and asks them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answers first. Peter always answers first. His reply? "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is an astonishing answer. So astonishing that Jesus tells him there is no way flesh and blood revealed that to Peter. Nobody could have told Peter that. Rather it was God Almighty that revealed that to Peter. Why? Because it was a divine mystery, hidden and not known, until now. Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ. And Jesus affirms his answer.

But after affirming Peter's answer, Jesus goes on to say some vitally important things.

First, He tells Peter that on "this rock," that is, his confession or statement of truth, Jesus will build His church. The Roman Catholics have used this passage to justify the creation of the Pope and his authority. For them, the rock isn't the proclamation Peter makes, but Peter. So Peter is considered the

first Pope. This is revisionist history. That's not what Jesus is declaring. Peter isn't the one Jesus will build His church. The truth of the gospel is what Jesus will build His church on. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God is the rock the church is built on.

Now, notice here the word "church" is used. Jesus will build His ecclesia. His people. Jesus' people are built on the confession and belief that He is the Christ and Son of God. And catch the phrase Jesus uses, I love it: MY church. Jesus calls the church "my church." The church belongs to Jesus. He is the Chief Shepherd. We are His people. The Church belongs to Him. This, by the way, is one of the big reasons we are not free to just make the rules up as we go. The church isn't ours. We belong to Him.

The ecclesia (the church, the people of God) are Jesus', we are His, and He is committing to building us on the confession that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. By the way, Jesus tells us that the gates of Hell will not prevail against us (the church). Hell can't, and won't, win. The gates of Hell can't hold back the Church. Think of the early Christians under Roman persecution, or the early Reformers that were persecuted, or missionaries that have gone to hostile lands, or even persecution that has come from the scorn of our secular culture. Why have they endured? Because Jesus keeps His promise: 'I will build My church.' And that includes you. It includes you in all that you face and endure in this life.

Let me take a moment to highlight something about the church. We need to understand some categories about the ecclesia.

1. Universal and local church

Universal Church - all true believers across all times and places (Abraham, David, Peter, Augustine, Lottie Moon, Brett Perkins). These are true believers from all places and all eras of time. That's the universal church. It transcends geographical, cultural, and denominational boundaries. All who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and have saving faith in Christ are a part. The universal church emphasizes the global and eternal scope of Christ's work in the world. Because of the universal church, we can call fellow believers in China, Africa, South America, and across town brothers and sisters in Christ. When we recite the apostle's creed, we say "the holy universal church." This is what we're talking about. And we say "the communion of saints," we are referring to the fellowship we share in Christ with others in Christ, regardless of whether they are in the room with us or across the world or in Heaven.

Local Church - is a specific gathering of believers in a particular place who meet for worship, discipleship, fellowship, and mission. It represents a visible expression of the universal church. These are believers who are committed to a particular body for mutual edification and accountability. It has structure, leaders (elders/pastors), ordinances (baptism and communion), and discipline. All of these are things we will talk about in this series. The mission of the local church is to proclaim the gospel locally and globally while growing in holiness and Christlikeness. The local church is where the universal church manifests in practice. So that is the distinction between the universal church and the local church. Before I move on, I just want you to consider this: You are not an accident. If you are in Christ, you belong to a community that spans history and geography, called by Jesus Himself. Your life is woven into God's redemptive plan. When you walk through seasons of doubt, remember: you are part of His Church, a people against whom even Hell cannot prevail.

2. Visible and invisible church

Visible church - consists of all who outwardly profess faith in Christ and participate in the church's activities. This includes true believers and false professors (Matthew 13:24-30). Visible participation doesn't guarantee true faith or salvation. Judas was one of the twelve but wasn't one of the saved. There are many who profess Christ who don't belong to Him (Matthew 7, many will say to me...). The visible church preaches the Word, baptizes, takes Communion, and calls all to faith and repentance.

Invisible church - this includes all those who are truly saved (which is only known by God). It is a subset of the visible church, encompassing only genuine believers. So within every local church/visible church, there is the invisible church (those that truly belong to Him). They cannot be fully seen on earth but will be revealed in glory.

The invisible church is composed solely of those regenerated by the Spirit. And this reminds us that true faith is a matter of the heart, not just external actions. Something that is really good to consider is that the invisible church on earth reflects the ultimate fulfillment of the universal church in Heaven. The visible church often includes a larger number than the invisible church. This encourages discernment between genuine faith and mere outward profession.

Jesus says He will build "His" church. The gates of Hell will not prevail against it. He did not leave behind a business or a gadget or a product, but a church.

Second, notice that Jesus says He will give you (Peter and the apostles, the leaders of the church) 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. This is a really important, yet never discussed teaching. The church, and particularly the leaders, are given the keys of the kingdom. What is bound on earth is bound in Heaven. Whatever is loosed on earth is loosed in Heaven. What does that mean? The keys in the ancient world represented authority or control. Having the keys to the kingdom represents authority to grant or deny access to the Kingdom. But in what way? The church, and its leaders, are entrusted with the message of the gospel and administering discipline within the church. This doesn't mean like school principals or wardens of a jail. It means when baptized professors of Christ act to the contrary, they are called to repent. If they don't, there are implications within the body. Eventually, and we'll get into this in next week's message, they are treated as unbelievers if they fail to repent. They are not invited to communion. They are not able to lead.

Binding and loosing happens. What is that? This phrase was used by rabbis to denote authority to declare something permissible (loose) or forbidden (bind). Jesus applies this principle to the church's spiritual authority. Should you be sleeping with your girlfriend? No. They bind that. Can you drink alcohol responsibly and avoid drunkenness? Yes. We loose that. Binding and loosing is what those with the keys do, and this is not done on a whim. It is done according to the will of God. The Greek verbs in this text suggest that what is bound and loosed on earth reflects what has already been bound and loosed in Heaven. Meaning, the church is aligning itself with Heaven's will, not determining it independently. Catch this: this is what the church does. This is the way Jesus builds His church in the world that Satan has no chance to stop. This is why professing Christians are to be a part of a local church, a visible church. Whether they are actually the invisible church, only God knows. But every local church aims to be pure and holy and live out the commands of Christ, who is the head.

Close

As we begin to wrap up today, I want to emphasize the importance of recognizing yourself as belonging to a people. We, as individual Christians, are by default a part of a people. It is the underlying assumption of the New Testament. Christians are in churches. They are a part of the universal church, but healthy Christians are in local churches. And we as the church are under Christ, our head. We are the body. He is our head.

If you are not a part of the local, visible church, then how are you connected to those verses? The Christian life and being a member of the church are hand-in-hand. But I want to finish this morning with an emphasis on that very last part of Ephesians 5:25. Jesus loves His Church. That's something that's so crucial to understand. Jesus loves you. But most of the language in the Scriptures of Jesus loving us is connected to Jesus loving His Church.

And how much does Jesus love the Church? He gave Himself up for her. He came and redeemed her. He lived the life she was supposed to live, but didn't. He bore the judgement she deserved, but was spared. He gave the redemption she was not owed, but was given. Christ did all this for His bride through His holy and righteous life, His sacrificial death on the cross, and His resurrection on the third day. All of this because He loves His Church.



THE TJC WEEKEND RECAP PODCAST



- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



- **REVIEW**

- Read Matthew 16:18-20 and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different translation.
- Additional Scripture
 - John 17:20-23
 - 2 Corinthians 11:28
 - Ephesians 1:22-23
 - Ephesians 4:15-16
 - Ephesians 5:23-25
 - Colossians 1:18
 - Colossians 2:19
 - 2 Timothy 2:19
- What big takeaways did you have from the sermon?
 - What did this teach you about God?
 - What did this teach you about man?
 - What did this teach you about salvation?

- **DISCUSS**

- What is the storyline of the Bible and how does the church fit into it?
- What is the significance of Peter's confession in verse 16 as it relates to Jesus' words in verse 18?
- What are the keys to the kingdom in verse 19?
- What is the difference between the universal and local church?
- What is the difference between the visible and invisible church?
- What is a practical step you can take as a result of this sermon?

- **MEMORIZE**

- **John 6:37 – All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**

LOOK AHEAD



- **BUILD UP:** How will you be built up this week? We have several discipleship opportunities for you to participate in.
 - **Life Groups** are a time and place to connect and learn to better follow Jesus together while abiding in Him. Life Groups are the primary means of disciple-making at TJC. Our groups focus on connecting, learning, following, and abiding. Groups meet weekly on various days/times across Wilson County. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **MDWK** is a time of education and growth in order to build up the Journey Church body. We offer a handful of intentionally chosen classes that cover a broad range of topics and are taught by quality teachers from within our congregation. Classes are at 6:30p every Wednesday. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Women** seeks to equip women to be rooted in the Word of God and bold in their faith. Our events and small groups focus on letting the gospel shape all spheres of our lives. Gather is the first Saturday of every month. Contact Laura DiLeonardi (laura@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Men** exists to equip men to show Jesus as incomparably glorious in every sphere of their lives. The men's ministry meets on the 2nd Saturday of every month at 8:00a in the student center. Contact Morgan Cates (morgan@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Students** is passionate to see every parent equipped, every leader developed, and every student disciplined into baptized, self-feeding, disciple making followers of Jesus who are letting the gospel shape every sphere of their lives. Our student ministry meets on Wednesday nights from 6:00p-7:30p for MDWK worship and Sunday mornings at 8:30a and 10:00a for small group. Contact Larry Davis (larry@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Kids** believes that the Gospel saves, sanctifies, gathers and sends. It is our desire to see our kids understand that the Gospel truly does change everything and we will do this primarily by teaching our kids to love Jesus, showing them they can have fun in the process, and making sure they stay safe. Contact Nick Judd (nick@tjclive.com) for more information.
 - **TJC Young Adults** exists to equip young adults ages 18 to 29 in becoming passionate followers of Jesus who enter their life in Christ. We do this through intentional relationships, fellowship, and worship centered around the gospel. The Fount meets Tuesdays at 7:00p. Contact Hunter Christian (hunter@tjclive.com) for more information.
- **SEND OUT:** How do you plan to be sent out to engage the world around you? We have several opportunities for local and international missions.
 - **For the City:** Acts 1:8 calls us to be engaged where we live and among the nations. The people of TJC seek to bring truth, grace, and hope to Lebanon and the surrounding area by mobilizing the church to be salt and light, not only for the city, but for your city. Take

part in faithfully and obediently using your gifts to declare God's glory among those who are hopeless living among you today. Contact Jeff Long (jeff@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **For the Nations:** At TJC we exist to show Jesus as incomparably glorious to Lebanon and beyond. We are ambitious and passionate about strategically taking an active role in finishing the Great Commission as we actively pursue the unreached peoples of the world by mobilizing the entire church to pray, send, go and welcome international friends among us. Contact Shawn Casto (shawn@tjclive.com) for more information.

- **PRAYER**

- **Pray over any request from your group members.**
- **Pray for our staff:** Laurie DiCicco (Kids Ministry Director)
- **Pray for our replanters:** Christ's Fellowship
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Central Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
 - Southeast Asia Team departing on March 7, 2025
 - Europe Team departing on March 21, 2025
 - Southeast Asia Team #2 departing on April 25, 2025
- **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
- **Pray for the unreached.** Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>