

“I Will Build My Church – Part 4”
“The Definition and Purpose”
Mark 8:27-29; Matthew 16:13-20
(Preached at Trinity, October 26, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. For several Wednesday night sermons I’ve directed your attention to **Matt. 16:18**
 - A. I stressed that we shouldn’t see Peter as the rock upon which the church is built. The church rests upon no mere man. Rather, the church is built upon the true Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus alone is the bedrock upon which the church is built. It is upon this foundation that the church stands invincible and victorious until the end – “the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”
 - B. We are now narrowing our focus to the phrase, I will build My church
 1. This is a topic of great importance today. Few, very few today have an adequate understanding of the church. Because of this few today see the importance of the church and few today give the church a place of any particular significance in their lives.
 2. I decided to spend some time on this great topic.
2. Tonight, as we continue to focus our attention upon the church I want to ask the question: “What is the definition and purpose?” I’m afraid far too many today fail to understand why the church exists.
John Stott wrote: “The church lies at the very centre of the eternal purpose of God.”
- I. What is the definition of a church? When is a church a church?
 - A. False understandings –
 1. Some people hold that a church is a group of Christians meeting together.
 - a. One of the dictionary definitions of a church: “A body of Christians meeting in a particular building.” We meet in a building often referred to as “the church.” Does this building make us a church?
 - b. Some hold that the word church is simply plural for *Christian*. They say a church is simply a gathering of Christians and quote Matthew 18
Matthew 18:20 NAS - "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." - c. Does this mean that if two Christian couples happen to meet at Wal-Mart they are a church?
 2. Some hold that a church must be a 501c organization to be a church
 - a. Does the civil government’s approval make a church
 - b. In 1940 our church was constituted as a church. What exactly made us a church? We filed articles of incorporation with the State of Louisiana. Did this make us a church?

- c. As far as the IRS is concerned we are a non-profit organization. There are rules defining a 501c organization – does this make us a church?
- 3. Some say a church is a church if a group of Christians gather and call themselves a church.

This is often the case today with the home church movement

The Church of Laodicea was a group of people who met together; they considered themselves to be a church; they called themselves a church—and yet, they were a church that had become no church. Christ was on the outside. Jesus warned the Church of Ephesus:

Revelation 2:5 NAS - "Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent."

Was the Laodicean lampstand removed? Had they ceased being a church?

So what exactly is a church?

- B. The answer to the question, “What is a church” is very broad. So let me paint with some broad strokes:

- 1. A church is a local assembly led by elders.
 - Titus 1:5** – “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.”
 - Acts 14:23** – “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”
 - a. I’m not saying that a church that loses her pastor ceases to be a church. But I am saying that the pastoral ministry is essential to the work of the church.
 - b. This is because two of the requisites of a true church demand the pastoral ministry: preaching and the administration of the sacraments.
- 2. The church is the place where the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are administered.
 - The Belgic Confession: Article 29*
 - The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks:
 - The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; It makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; It practices church discipline for correcting faults. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head. By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church-- and no one ought to be separated from it.

- C The NT teaches an element of accountability in the establishment of a local church.

- 1. No where in the NT do we find a self-propagating church. This seems strange to us in our hyper-independent culture.
 - No where do we find a strictly independent church.
 - Michael Horton – “The body of Christ is most visibly expressed locally, but each local church reaches out to the wider assembly of churches in unity, love, and fellowship. In Christ’s body, the local church needs the other churches.”

2. In the early church elders were ordained under the authority of other elders
Titus 1:5 NAS - "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,"
1 Timothy 4:13-14 NAS - "Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."
 3. The early churches were autonomous, yet connected. We can see this with the Council of Jerusalem.
- D. The essence of a local church is a body of believers who have joined together in community for the purpose of worship and carrying out the commands of Christ.
1. There is a recognition of the headship of Christ. A church finds its authority and existence from above.
 2. There is a sense of commitment to a particular group of people – a group of people bound to one another as the body of Christ. This is the heart of church membership.
 3. What is a church? A church is a group of believers bound together in a common commitment. This commitment is expressed by way of covenant. In the 18th Century the *Charleston Association* stated:
 "A particular gospel church consists of a company of saints incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body, and meeting together in one place, for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their head, in all his institutions, to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit."
 4. In Cambridge, Massachusetts during the 17th Century John Cotton and Richard Mather stated as the model government of a local church: "this visible union cannot be established by mere 'faith,' for that is invisible; nor by a 'bare profession' of faith, for that does not make a person part of one particular church or another; nor by 'cohabitation' (i.e., living in the same community), for "atheists and Infidels may dwell together with believers"; nor by "baptism," since baptism by itself does not make a person a part of a particular church. What establishes the visible union of a group of believers into a church is that they make a covenant with each other to be the church"
 5. It is this oneness of a people in Christ, speaking with one mind according to the will of Christ that makes a local church. And it is this single voice on behalf of Christ that gives the church its particular authority.
- E. The NT Church seemed to be comprised of a particular people
 "I will build My Church" – this has both universal and local meanings
1. We find in the Church of Jerusalem that God was adding to the church those who were being saved.
Acts 2:47 NAS - "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."
 - a. It seems that they were being saved and then God was adding them to this church.

b. We can also see this with the Church of Corinth
1 Corinthians 12:18 NAS - "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired."

2. Most people choose a church like they choose a restaurant – something that pleases them. They don't consider that God places people in His churches and equips them for service.
3. Have you ever been amazed how God gives pastors and deacons and teachers and people gifted in all the other areas so that a local church can conduct its ministry?

II. What is the purpose and function of the church?

A. The ultimate purpose of the church, like everything is to display the glory of God.

1. All of creation declares His glory
2. But the church is His bride and He has adorned us with the beauty of holiness that He might put us on display.
3. But in particular God has called the church to serve him in three ways
 - a. To serve Him in worship
 - b. To serve Him in the work of the discipleship of believers
 - c. To serve Him in the work of the evangelization of the lost

B. The Church exists for the praise and worship of God.

1. Thus, the chief thing we do above all else is worship
2. And God has determined how He will be worshipped. In worship the church cannot go beyond God's revealed will.
3. As I stated last week, worship is one of the great unifying factors in the church. We come together as one and we worship Him together as one. This finds its greatest reality in the Lord's Supper. This is why church discipline results in removal from the Lord's Table.

C. The church was established for the evangelization of the lost

Matthew 28:18-20 – "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Acts 1:8 – "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

1. Every generation of Christians should see themselves as God's agents for spreading His Gospel. We should see ourselves as being "sent"
2. There are some who are sent by way of vocation
Romans 10:13-15 KJV - "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. ¹⁴ How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

Matthew Henry – “*They cannot preach except they be sent*, except they be both commissioned and in some measure qualified for their preaching work. How shall a man act as an ambassador, unless he have both his credentials and his instructions from the prince that sends him? This proves that to the regular ministry there must be a regular mission and ordination. It is God's prerogative to send ministers; he is the Lord of the harvest, and therefore to him we must *pray that he would send forth labourers*, Mt. 9:38. He only can qualify men for, and incline them to, the work of the ministry.”

3. But every believer should see himself as charged with the Gospel of Christ.

D. The Church was established for the care of the saints

1. We are charged with the material care of one another
 - a. We can see this in their care during the hardship of the times
Acts 2:44-45 – “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.”
 - b. We can see this in their care of the widows in **Acts 6 & 1Tim. 5**
2. More particularly, the church exist that the body of Christ might be built up spiritually
 - a. The church is vested with the duty of teaching the disciples of Christ - It is the pillar and ground of the truth.
 - b. Christ’s disciples must be taught
"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you”
 - c. The purpose of our teaching is that we might be conformed to Christ – that we might be holy.
 - d. The ministry was given as a gift to the church and charged with oversight over the soul of each member
 - e. We must also help one another in our Christian journey
Hebrews 10:24 – “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,”
1 Thessalonians 5:11 – “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”

Conclusion:

1. And so we find the definition and mission of the church.
2. Christ has raised up His church under His authority and power and vested in it the power to serve Him until the end of the age. Jesus is the focus and the design and end of the church. “I will build My Church”
He is building it for Himself and for His own glory.
3. Do you see the importance of the church? Do you see why it is essential for you to give yourself to it as the hub of your service to Christ? Do you see why the church is essential in your pursuit of holiness?