

Matthew 16:13-20 - “I Will Build My Church” – Jan. 28, 2024

1. Alice in Wonderland
 - a. Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?
 - b. The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.
 - c. Alice: I don't much care where.
 - d. The Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.
2. Sometimes it seems like the church overall is directionless and lacking identity
 - a. What is the church?
 - b. What is its ultimate foundation?
 - c. Where is it going? What does the future of the church look like?
 - d. What kind of authority does the church have? How is it to operate?
3. I think these types of questions sometimes lack clear answers
 - a. Worse, perhaps sometimes these questions aren't even being asked and people just go to church on auto pilot, never really engaging with what they're doing
 - b. The lack of engagement has tended to be worse for men than it has been for women
 - c. Feminine expressions of personal holiness have come to be seen as normal for both genders which means softness has been prized over courage or clear headedness
 - i. There is of course a sense in which all Christians, male or female, need to be soft in heart and yield to God
 - ii. But overdone, softness can turn into a kind of empathy which prizes victimhood, sees sin as a disorder instead of rebellion from the heart, the

gospel as therapy instead of as blood-bought redemption, and Christ as life coach instead of as head-crusher of the serpent and Lord of the cosmos

- d. In 2005, David Murrow wrote a provocative book addressing the masculinity problem in the church, called “Why Men Hate Going to Church”
 - e. From 2020-2022 church gatherings were largely seen as nonessential by the state, and many Christian leaders agreed with this evaluation – is this reasonable?
 - f. Some other questions we may ask
 - i. Why has church architecture changed so radically over the centuries?
 - 1. Glory and beauty have turned into mere utility
 - ii. Do we share Herman Melville’s view that the pulpit rules the world?
 - iii. Why have pulpits been replaced with music stands?
 - iv. To what degree has style replaced substance?
4. Today’s passage answers some of the most foundational issues of church life
- a. In this exchange, Christ reveals
 - i. What the church is
 - ii. What its foundation is
 - iii. What its future trajectory looks like
 - iv. How it is to operate
5. V.13 – “13 *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*
- a. In the narrative so far we’ve seen how the details of the story matter

- b. Jesus goes to a Jewish region to perform a miracle that demonstrates one thing, and then He moves to a Gentile region to perform the same miracle that demonstrates something a bit different
- c. Now He moves to Caesarea Philippi – also significant
 - i. This city was named by Herod the Great's son Philip
 - ii. He named it to honour Caesar Augustus, but since another city was already name Caesarea, he added his own name to the end
 - iii. The city is about 25 miles north of Galilee and is the place where Jeroboam introduced idolatry into the nation of Israel by sacrificing to Baal (1 Kings 12:25-33)
 - iv. The Greeks turned this into a shrine to the worship of Pan
 - v. The Romans turned this place into a centre of worship for Caesar and the state
 - vi. Caesarea Philippi has some very interesting physical features
 - 1. A large rock towers above with small niches in it that were filled with shrines to these Greek pagan gods
 - 2. In the rock there was a large gaping hole that opened up to a spring that fed the Jordan River
 - 3. There was an earthquake that shut the hole and sent the water out of the ground from other places
 - 4. The ancient Greeks believed that this open hole was the gateway to Hades, and that the river underneath was the River Styx
 - a. This was a portal to the underworld of the gods

5. In a very literal sense, Christ walks His disciples right up to the open jaws of Hell, to the place where slipping on a stone could send one stumbling into the underworld of death and dark spirits
- vii. This setting is absolutely perfect and fitting for what is about to happen next
6. VV.14-17 – *“And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*
 - a. Peter is rightly known for his hit-and-miss track record
 - i. His impulsive and zealous nature mean that sometimes he gets rebuked by Christ
 - ii. But we’ve also seen glimmers of growth and maturity mixed in with doubt and unbelief, like when he meets Christ on the water
 - iii. On this test, however, he gets an A+
 - b. Jesus’s question is for the whole group and they throw out a number of answers
 - i. John the Baptist is a possibility to the crowds because some may not yet know about his death, and others may have thought as Herod did that Jesus was a resurrected John the Baptist
 - ii. Elijah also makes sense because Malachi had predicted his return (4:5)

- iii. Jeremiah seems like an odd guess at first, but he stands out as one of the most prominent prophets and there were some Jewish traditions that Jeremiah would return at the time of the Messiah
- iv. One last guess is kind of generic, suggesting he may just be one of prophets without any specific detail
 - 1. This is an interesting point to note because it is kind of lazy; it's just a broad guess
 - 2. But notice how close this is to what so many people continue to do in our own time
 - a. Call Him a great teacher or a prophet but won't recognize Him as the Incarnate God
 - b. Of course, if Jesus was a prophet but not God the Son, then He's not really a prophet or a great teacher either, since He'd be a liar
 - c. By His own confession, He is the Second Person of the Trinity; not only the Son of God but also God the Son
- c. Peter acts as a spokesman for the group here and answers correctly
- d. You can almost sense Jesus's joy here when He replies to Peter
- e. In v. 17 it's not so much that Jesus is putting a blessing on Peter, but rather noting that Peter has already been blessed by having his eyes opened to the truth
- f. The naming here involves several turns of phrase
 - i. Peter is also known as Simon and Cephas in the Bible

- ii. Here Christ calls him “Simon Bar-Jonah” which means “Simon, the son of John”
- iii. Jesus is drawing attention to Peter’s very frail humanity by noting that he’s just a fisherman whose dad’s name is John
 - 1. In himself he’s nobody significant, and yet the Father has opened Peter’s eyes in order to use him in a significant way
- iv. Peter’s confession is not native to who he is as a person, but is a gift of grace, just like it is for all Christians who are able to confess Jesus is Lord
 - 1. We are all sons of Adam, with feet of clay
 - 2. Unless or until our blinders fall off, we have no natural ability to see Christ for who He is – seeing Christ is a gift of God’s mercy and grace
- g. But the play on words and location moves on here in Christ’s reply
- 7. V.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.”*
 - a. This has been a hotly debated text in church history
 - b. Roman Catholics have used it to defend their position that Peter acted as the first pope and that his office is foundational to the church
 - c. There’s three views of what “this rock” means
 - i. Peter himself
 - ii. Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ
 - iii. Jesus Himself

- d. Option iii is least likely, and while the confession that Jesus is the Christ is foundational for the church, I don't think that's the view here either
- e. If it weren't for RC abuse of this verse, I think everyone would have a pretty easy time acknowledging that Jesus is talking about Peter himself
- f. Peter, or *petros* is another word for rock
 - i. Christ is calling Peter a rock here, and this is fitting
 - ii. Peter is not by himself in this task, but he is singled out as the representative of the apostles because he served as the spokesman here
 - iii. There's a theme that ties together
 1. Daniel 2:34, 35 – Christ is the rock that hurtles to earth, shattering the old empires and growing into a mountain; more rock is being added after the first one demolishes the old order
 2. Here – Christ declares Peter to be a rock on which the church is built
 3. Ephesians 2:20 – the household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and that Christ was the cornerstone
 4. 1 Peter 2:5 – Peter himself calls believers living stones in this new temple that God is building; the Christian church
 5. 1 Corinthians 3:16 – speaks of our bodies in reference to this new temple reality
 6. The picture is that God is building a rock solid new covenant people; a new and better temple; the Christian church

- a. Christ is the cornerstone, and Peter is the first stone among the apostles to add to this foundation
 - i. The foundational work of the Apostles is unique in history
 - ii. You only build one foundation, and this is why these men possessed certain gifts and abilities that were unique to them and their time
- b. Since this time God has continued on this temple project, living stone by living stone, cutting and shaping as needed
- iv. And all of this is happening in Caesarea Philippi, where there is a giant rock which is a monument to many forms of idolatry which have built up over the ages
- g. Christ takes Peter and the others right up to the yawning mouth of Hades, to the belly of idolatry, right up to the gate of hell, and tells him at that very spot that this is where He is planting His flag
 - i. Peter is going to be a foundation rock planted at the gates of hell
 - ii. And amazingly, the church that is going to be built on this rock is going to conquer, according to the promise of Christ Himself!
 - iii. Evil and death; hell and Hades will not prevail, even on its own home turf
- h. God has irreversibly planted His kingdom on earth, and it is now a permanent feature of creation
- i. The disciples standing here and listening to Jesus could look back and see how this has already unfolded

- i. Matthew 2 – birth of Jesus under Herod and the slaughter of the infants
while Rachel wept
- ii. Jesus is going to suffer many things and be rejected and die
 - 1. They can't see that He'll be raised again because they're so
consumed by His death
 - 2. How will the kingdom carry on?
- iii. The disciples will be scattered, darkness covers, and jeering happens at the
gates of hell
 - 1. But the stone is rolled away and the promise moves on
- iv. Paul get imprisoned in Rome and the spread of the gospel will stop
 - 1. But this imprisonment is for the advancement of the gospel
 - 2. Paul sees this as an opportunity – the Romans can't get away now!
- v. Paul presses on at the end of his ministry to mentor young pastors because
Christ will build His church!
- vi. Unknown saints and martyrs (1 Peter 4:12 – fiery trials/Nero)
 - 1. Gaping mouth of hell spewing death and suffering, attempting to
swallow the church
 - 2. But the promise carries on because the gates of hell cannot prevail
- vii. Polycarp – “away with the atheists”
- viii. Roman persecution under Diocletian (A.D. 303) – the gates of hell let out
another attack
 - 1. Constantine (Edict of Milan A.D. 313; Council of Nicea A.D. 325)
- ix. Prague – Hus -> Luther

1. The gates of hell will not prevail
 2. The darkness will not put out the light
 3. Bucer – “*the church is an anvil which has worn out many hammers*”
- x. Indifference – 1730’s (“good old days”/nostalgia)
1. Grandchildren of the Puritans were complacent and indifferent
 2. Unconverted ministers
 3. William Tennent – Log College for ministers in eastern Pennsylvania
 - a. Moved across Delaware River – Princeton
- xi. 1920s looked like liberalism was going to conquer the entire church
1. The gates of hell were belching out theological liberalism and indifference
 2. Machen moved back across the river – Westminster
 3. Jesus is building His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail
- xii. In our own day, hell is once again belching out death in the form of statism, feminism, sexual confusion, a literal love of death for seniors and babies, and we are once again confronted with a test of the courage our convictions
1. Jesus has promised to build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it
 2. This promise has proven itself so many times through history that we ought never to lose heart or waver

3. The church has grown and expanded and grown stronger with every opponent those foul gates have sent our way
 4. Matthew Henry – *“The church may be foiled in particular encounters, but in the main battle it shall come off more than a conqueror”*
- xiii. God is a story telling God and He loves cliff-hangers
1. He loves to stack the deck against Himself and then come out victorious in the most unlikely ways
 2. Schlossberg – *“The Bible can be interpreted as a string of God's triumphs disguised as disasters.”*
 - a. This is how church history has operated as well
 3. Chesterton – *“The one perfectly divine thing, the one glimpse of God's paradise given on earth, is to fight a losing battle - and not lose it.”*
- xiv. When we face our own battles in our own day and wonder how the church will continue to be built up, we need to remember this promise from Christ, and we need to notice something else about the picture He paints
- xv. Many people read that the gates of hell will not prevail and assume this means that hell will not succeed in completely wiping out the church
1. It is true that the church will not be wiped out, but Jesus is promising something much bigger than that
 2. He's not promising to merely keep a remnant or to maintain the church on life support; He's promising to *build* His church

- xvi. *“Jesus promised us that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the Church. It is not often noted that the gates of Hades are not an offensive weapon. Hades is being besieged by the Church; it is not the other way around. We need to learn to see that biblical worship of God is a powerful battering ram, and each Lord's Day we have the privilege of taking another swing.”* (A Primer on Worship and Reformation, p. 32)
- xvii. This helps us gain a clearer focus on the church’s mission
- xviii. This view of a church that is being built up through history is not just isolated to this verse
1. It is consistent with the kingdom parables that Jesus has given
 2. It is consistent with Daniel’s vision of a rock turning into a mountain
 3. It is consistent with Peter and Paul’s imagery of living stones being layered on to this true and better temple
- xix. It is also consistent with God’s favourite Bible verse, Psalm 110:1 which has the Father telling the Son to sit at His right hand until all His enemies have been made His footstool
1. Ancient kings who conquered would seal their victory by having a defeated king prostrate himself while the victor would put his foot to the throat of the conquered
 2. Psalm 110:1 says this is happening while Jesus is Ascended to the Father

- a. In other words, Christ does this through the ministry of His church in world history
- 3. This verse is used more often than any other in the NT (Psalm 2 is 2nd); it must shape our view of history and of the church's place in the world
 - a. The objection sometimes comes that it doesn't look this way
 - b. But we need to be zealous to be exegeting Scripture and not news headlines
 - i. What did North America look like to Machen?
 - ii. What did Europe look like to Hus?
 - iii. What did the Roman Empire look like to Polycarp?
 - iv. What did the world look like to Abraham when God promised offspring like the stars of the sky and yet Abraham was childless?
 - 1. We need to look with the eyes of faith
 - 2. We need to interpret our circumstances through the lens of Scripture rather than interpreting Scripture through the lens of our circumstances
- 4. The neglect of this dominion mandate to subdue creation to the glory of God is, I think, a very chief contributor to the softness, idleness, lack of direction, and lethargy of the church

5. Man was made for dominion, and the fact that we've had two generations that can only imagine the church in neutral at best, but more likely in retreat is a self-fulfilling prophecy that makes men passive
 - a. Where is the passion to fight sin, to conquer the flesh, and to work for the glory of God if we have no vision of how it could really make a difference anyway?
- xx. The picture here has Christ building His church and running a siege on the gates of hell; after all, that's where Peter made His confession that Jesus is Lord!
- xxi. This means that holiness is warfare; the Christian life is warfare; making love is warfare, the education of children is warfare, doing business is warfare, music is warfare, culture building is warfare, laughter is warfare, and most importantly here; worship is warfare
- xxii. We are dealing with glory all around us
- xxiii. The defeat of hell and the growth of the church are promised by Jesus Himself
 1. This means we can engage and worship and live like happy warriors
 2. The joy is just as real as the warfare
 3. Christians have no more right to be shrill and angry or joyless than they do being passive or indifferent
- xxiv. But all of this will be done according to Christ's design

1. Remember, it's His church, not ours
 2. It must operate according to His plans and not ours
 3. The shallow goofy stuff that gets a pass far too often is completely off the table when we think about what Christ is saying here
 4. We're not pelting the gates of hell with spit balls and Jesus is my boyfriend songs
 5. We're swinging a weapons-grade battering ram when we are engaged in the potent worship of the living God who is Lord of all
 - a. 2 Corinthians 4:17 – *“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,”*
 - b. Glory is heavy, and so we must treat it according to orders
8. VV. 19, 20 – *“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 no one that he was the Christ.”*
- a. It is Christ's kingdom, and it is Christ's church that is central to that kingdom, but as He prepares for His Ascension back to the Father, He hands the keys to the apostles
 - b. These are the foundational men that Ephesians 2 spoke of
 - c. These are the men who are responsible for shepherding this church in the new covenant era as the last remnants of the old covenant wind down
 - d. These are the men who have to oversee a council about how to make things work with Jews and Gentiles together in one church

- e. These are the men who author Scripture so that their foundational authority lives with us still
- f. Christ is not saying that heaven will bend to whatever they say; a more literal translation would say “*whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven...*”
 - i. That is to say that they have been given authority to bind and loose, to forbid and to pardon according to what is in heaven
- g. the apostles do this in a unique, foundational manner
 - i. they minister in a transitional period of history, so their callings and giftings are unique as they announce and record the Word of God
 - ii. but by analogy, the church is still in the same kind of business today
 - 1. when ministers afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, they are echoing this ministry of binding and loosing
 - 2. when the Law is read in corporate worship to remind us of our sin and of our duties to God, and when the assurance of pardon is offered to remind us of the free grace of God, we are echoing this ministry
 - iii. this is all under the lordship of Christ
 - 1. elders and churches are capable of error
 - 2. what we have here is not *absolute* authority for the church, but *genuine* authority under the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ
- h. Jesus ends by telling the disciples to keep things quiet

- i. It is not yet time for things to come to their final head and so Christ ensures

9. APPLICATION

- a. The initial questions have been clarified

- i. What is the church?

- 1. It is the assembly of all those that God has called out of the world and joined to Christ

- ii. What is the church's ultimate foundation?

- 1. Christ is the cornerstone and He expands this foundation through the unique ministries of the prophets and apostles

- iii. Where is it going? What does the future of the church look like?

- 1. The church is being built up by Christ through history; it is storming the gates of hell and is Christ's weapon for destroying His enemies on earth. We are to fill the earth with the glory of the Lord as we await His return to judge, consummate, and finalize all things.

- iv. What kind of authority does the church have? How is it to operate?

- 1. We are under the authority of Christ, and He exercises that authority to us through the Scriptures His apostles left us, and through the Shepherds appointed by each church who sit under those Scriptures

- b. When we consider how our own age has pushed out this classical vision, it's not hard to understand some of the practical changes we've seen in architecture, pulpits, entertainment, etc.
 - i. When we lose sight of whose church this is and what its mission is, the vacuum will naturally be filled with our own ideas
 - ii. We turn in on ourselves and joyless pragmatism, impotent music, and story time starts to replace potent, heavy, reverent, joyful worship that sees its mission and is sure to hit its target
- c. Christ building His church has special application for men
 - i. After all, man and woman are designed to mirror Christ's mission for the church
 - ii. The dominion mandate is given to Adam and again to Noah
 - 1. Men are designed to take hold of creation for God's glory because they are to image Christ
 - iii. Christian dominion includes worship, family life, work, laughter, sports, and anything where we can press the lordship of Christ
 - iv. For us fathers this means that working hard to provide for our families is non-negotiable
 - 1. And the most important way we provide for our families is to bring them to the Lord daily
 - 2. Family worship is a non-negotiable for fathers if we want to see our children and grandchildren in the church that Jesus is building

- a. If you are a father, this means leading in Scripture and prayer, preferably at a meal time or at bed time when the family is all together
 - b. We use Tabletalk and go around the table all sharing one thing we learned or were reminded of
 - c. Dads with younger kids can find an age-appropriate devotional with the stories of the Bible in it so that children know the content of the Bible well enough that they'll piece it together as they grow older
 - d. There's not a one-size fits all here, but family worship is essential
3. If you're a grandpa, you can use your opportunities to model godliness and lead your grandchildren to the Lord
4. If you're a young man, you can start to discipline yourself now
- a. Family worship won't suddenly come naturally if you aren't practicing these things now
 - b. Be in the Word now!
 - c. I'm thankful for a seemingly growing mindset among young men to get active and to be masculine
 - d. But this needs to move beyond being red pill'd into being genuinely strong and masculine the way Christ is
 - e. You need to train to be the kind of husband that Christ is
 - i. Notice He's not barking orders from a distance

- ii. He's promising to be intimately involved in leading and building His church
- iii. Dominion belongs to Christ, but He does it with His bride at His side; that is how we are to operate
- iv. The kind of masculinity that serves itself, expects a warm meal and a warm body to sleep with is no masculinity; a real man shows His love by bleeding and taking time to see his bride reach her full potential
- v. He helps himself by caring for her, so she can play her role in his dominion
 - 1. This is exactly the picture here
 - 2. Women take time because the church takes time
 - 3. This is a glorious investment and not a waste
- vi. Dominion isn't bravado; it's obedience to the Lord
- v. But regardless of your age and your station, if you are a man, you are mirroring Christ in His dominion
 - 1. Being on mission and promoting a serious yet joyful advance for yourself and those around you is an absolute necessity
 - 2. You are sinning if you are not modelling the mission of Christ in your life
- d. There are plenty of applications more broadly for the church here

- i. We are intentional about lots of Scripture reading in our services
- ii. About covenant renewal and law and assurance and making sure children are in the service with us
- iii. This is all good, but it doesn't accomplish much if we're just going through the motions; we need to understand the mission we're on
- iv. When we think about a potential future building and education, are we thinking only of pragmatic things, or can we see the importance of mission and excellence and glory when we see Christ's vision of the church marching through history?
- e. Christ is building His church. Each Lord's Day we are taking another swing at the gates of hell. One day all heaven is going to break loose and every last pocket of resistance will be conquered. Are your actions consistent with this outcome?

10. CHARGE

- a. *We have found ourselves in a time where the consequences of ideas are reaching their logical conclusions. The God-forsaken unbelieving philosophies of the 1920s, 1940s, and 1960s are no longer constrained by outwardly Christian customs. This means our age is lost. Unbelieving ideas are creating a chaotic hellscape on earth. Our age is looking for a compelling story to explain history and fill it with meaning. There are thousands of idolatrous stories, and one true one. We have a God-Man who came to overcome and redeem. He came to repair the ruins, to restore paradise, to remarry heaven and earth, God and creation, and to put His conquering foot on the neck of every last enemy. At this point in history He is carrying this work on through the building of the Christian church.*

This truth gives us a mission and orients us towards a target. Christ enchants history with the mission of the church to storm the gates of hell and win. While others try in vain to re-enchanted their meaningless lives with old pagan myths, Chesterton reminds us that when “Neo-pagans...set out to do everything the old pagans did, the final thing the old pagans did was to be Christened.”

11. BENEDICTION

- a. Romans 16:20 (Paul’s words to the church) – *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”*