

Matthew Ch28, Ch16, Ch18 - Members Of The Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Before Ralph comes up to preach, you can see the references there on the screen.! So we're going to begin with Matthew chapter 28 and verse 16.

! And that's on page 1000 of the Church Bible. Matthew chapter 28 and verse 16. And we're going to read from verse 16 to 20.

And verse 13.

And verse 13.

[4 : 28] Good morning, everyone. It's good to see you.

And so on and so on and so on.

And so as we're looking over the next three weeks to answer this question of what is the church, we can think of it organically or institutionally.

So we can look at the flesh or we can look at the bones of the church. And people these days, they love talking organically, don't they? You know, flesh is soft and it's yielding and it's pretty.

But the thing is, flesh without bones isn't very pleasant to look at at all. Okay. So this morning, we're going to start looking at the institutional bones of the church to give us some shape over the next few weeks.

[5 : 54] But if you're more eager to hear about the organic images of the church, the church's body, the church's family, that's coming. Okay. So I'm saying we're going to work through this.

There's a lot to the church. But we're going to open the ears, the eyes of our hearts to see through the word what Jesus has to say about his kingdom and the church.

And this morning, we're going to be looking at the gospel of Matthew. So let's just pray as we open up the word again and hear what God has to say. Our Father, you love us immensely and you have given us all that we need for life and godliness.

And I thank you, Father, that you have given us one another. We cannot and should not live the Christian life alone, but we should do it together as your gathering, as your church, as your people. So help us now this morning to hear from you and to be a blessing one to another. Amen. So please do keep your Bibles open.

[7 : 04] We'll be looking at each of those sections together. Let me start with a question. It's always a good way to start a sermon. Who would you put in charge of the church?

Well, Jesus, of course. Thank you for listening to today's sermon. I'll dismiss you all early. It's the obvious answer, isn't it? But when we ask a slightly different version of that question, because all Christians would agree that Jesus is the head of the church.

If we ask the question, who on earth should be in charge of the church? Christians begin to come up with quite different answers. All Christians say that Jesus is the head of the church and he is in charge.

But when asked about who on earth Jesus has given authority to, you get these different ideas. For the Roman Catholic Church, it's ultimately the Pope who is in charge and he holds the church together.

For Anglicanism or the Church of Ireland, it's the bishops connected together that hold the church. Presbyterians, well, they rule the church by bringing elders from different churches together to meet and make decisions.

[8 : 21] And many independent evangelical and Pentecostal churches, well, they go for the one man rule or the group of elders as the rulers of their individual church.

That brings us to this church, which is a Baptist church. Now you have Baptist and congregational churches where the church is ruled by ordinary members and led by elders.

Who on earth is in charge of the church creates no little controversy and discussion. But this morning I want to show from the scriptures as we look at the Bible that it is the ordinary members of a local church that Jesus puts in charge.

Ordinary members, extraordinarily gifted by the Spirit for that task. So let's look again at Matthew chapter 28 and verses 16 to 20.

Well-known words. These are the parting words of King Jesus to the apostles. The marching orders. Verse 18. Look at verse 18.

[9 : 35] All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus. He is the King of kings. Jesus is the ruler over heaven and earth.

And he commands his apostles to go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything that he has commanded.

And surely he will be with them always to the very end of the age. This is the great commission of King Jesus.

Jesus gives the church his name. Jesus gives the church his mission. And that is to share the gospel. Go and spread the good news.

Baptize Christians into the faith. But Jesus left. Actually, soon after he said these words at the end of Matthew.

[10 : 37] You've probably noticed Jesus isn't here with us this morning face to face. He's not physically here in Carragoline Baptist Church on a Sunday morning.

So Jesus must give some means for his church to keep being the church in the world and through the centuries.

Because it's been 2,000 years. So how does the church keep being the church through all the world, through all this time?

We're going to do a lot of flicking. We're going to go back to Matthew chapter 16. So let's go and look at Matthew 16, chapter 16, page 983, if you're using the church Bible.

And from verse 13. I'm going to jump down to verse 15, right in the middle there. Jesus asks his 12 disciples, Who do you say I am?

[11 : 45] And Peter, who's often a spokesperson, on behalf of the disciples, on behalf of the 12, he says, You are the Christ.

Or you are the Messiah. That is the King. The Son of the Living God. Verse 16. And in verse 17, Jesus basically says, Peter, you're right.

That's exactly who I am. The Messiah. The King. The Son of the Living God. And look at verse 18. And Jesus then tells Peter that Jesus will build his church on him and his confession.

That's a church that's going to knock down the gates of hell, the gates of Hades, as it moves forward. Jesus is going to build his church on Peter and his confession.

We spoke about the different views that churches take on the idea of who rules the church on earth. And these verses have created no little debate or controversy about these verses.

[12 : 55] And they're often made to use, they're often used to make the case for the idea of having a pope or for having a succession of bishops to rule the church.

But this morning, I want to focus on two things from these verses that are in focus for building the church. Two things I think are clear.

And those two things are a right confession and a right confessor. A right confession and a right confessor. We can say that the church is built on the confession, the speaking, clearly, of the right gospel by people who love Jesus, the right confessors.

Let me say that again. We can say that the church is built on the confession of the right gospel by people who love Jesus. And Peter confesses that Jesus is king.

Jesus is Messiah. Back in verse 16. That is a true confession. Jesus is God's promised king. He is God, the son, eternal.

[14 : 08] So when Jesus talks about the church in verse 18, he said it is defined by the rock of this true confession, the rock of the gospel.

What we say about Jesus matters. It must be true. It must be the gospel. That is the rock and foundation of the church.

And the church is also defined by the rock of a true confessor. Peter knows and loves Jesus.

Jesus, in verse 17, says that he is blessed, a sign of his relationship to Jesus. Peter is a Christian. He is a follower called by Jesus to carry Jesus' name, to represent Jesus.

Jesus. And Peter truly believes and truly lives by his confession of Jesus, even as he fails and sins many times.

[15:11] He is still a true confessor. And so we come to verse 19. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is the one who holds the keys. He is the I here. And he holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Because as we saw at the end of Matthew, all authority in heaven and earth is given to Jesus.

He is the king. And he can decide, because he's the king, in his absence, who gets to hold the keys. Who has the keys of the kingdom?

Jesus gets to decide who's in charge of the church. It's Jesus who decides, not us. We need to listen to Jesus. The idea of holding and using keys, it's not a complicated idea.

But let's think about it a little. You see, I'm a kingdom owner. Don't know if you realize that. Admittedly, it's a really small kingdom and one that the bank currently has an interest in.

[16:17] But 14 Heatherfields is, in a sense, our little kingdom. And I have to say our kingdom because Cherry, of course, is co-regent of our house and home.

It's king and queen, Ralph and Cherry, 14 Heatherfields. Now, the first house that we ruled was actually 20 Drum and Ore on the upper Kilmoney Road, which is the other side of the town from where we live now.

And it's the time, kids, remember when we had the yellow car? Yeah, the yellow car time when we were living over on 20 Drum and Ore. And back in 2009, we had to go away for five months.

But we wanted our kingdom, our little house, looked after. So, in our infinite wisdom, we left in the hands of two college students.

And we entrusted literal keys for the house to these two young lads. And guess what? They got to decide on our behalf who got in, who enjoyed the pleasures and the protections of the kingdom, who got the fridge, who got the Wi-Fi, who got the beds, and who, in turn, was kept out.

[17:34] We left some instructions, we checked in with them a few times, but you know what? They had the keys. We did stop short of making them taking a loyalty oath to us as king and queen.

But for those five months, those two students had the authority to represent us at 20 Drum and Ore on the upper Kilmoney Road.

Back to verse 19. Jesus leaves a set of keys with Peter, the representative of the disciples.

It's a singular you. I will, Jesus, I will give you, that's Peter, the keys. And then Jesus says, whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven.

So having the keys of the kingdom on earth authorizes the holder to pronounce a judgment on heaven's behalf.

[18:44] There's a connection between what is said on earth is reflected in heaven or the other way, what heaven's view is actually reflected on earth because Jesus is in charge.

You can say the what or who is in or out here on earth. The what or who of the gospel is in or out on those two based on the heavenly verdict.

Whatever is bound and loosed on our pronouncements is a reflection of what heaven would say. So what does that mean? If somebody says something or a church says something, we have to ask, is this a true confession of the gospel?

Are these gospel words? Are they in keeping with what Jesus has said? We have to ask, is this person a true confessor?

Are they living in a way that rightly represents Jesus? These are the kinds of questions for whoever holds the keys, for whoever is in charge.

[19:57] and I realize my slides, yeah, sorry, let me keep trying. We need to move very slowly here.

Jesus has ultimate authority and then gives exercise of some of that authority on earth to those that hold the keys.

And I just want to be super clear on this this morning. holding and using the keys does not give the holder of the keys the power to define the gospel or to make someone a Christian or not.

That is really important to understand. Holding the keys does not give us authority over the gospel or over people's eternal state or souls. Our citizenship in the kingdom of God is not given or taken by any earthly power or any earthly exercise of the keys.

We are not physically born into the kingdom of God. We are not baptized as babies into the kingdom of God. We do not purchase it for one million dollars as a golden visa.

[21 : 07] It is a spiritual citizenship that God gifts to each one of us through faith and grace alone. One by one people are born again by the spirit into his kingdom.

The good news of Jesus, that news, that gospel, that comes from Jesus. And the ultimate declaration of who is in the kingdom comes from King Jesus on judgment day.

The scriptures tell us, and they're on the slide up above, so you don't necessarily need to turn to it in your Bibles. 2 Timothy 2.19 says this, Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm.

Sealed with this inscription, the Lord knows those who are his. And Romans chapter 14 and verse 4 says, Who are you to judge someone else's servant?

To their own master, servants stand or fall? And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. So no man or woman or pope or pastor or synod or local church can pass ultimate judgment on the state of someone's soul.

[22 : 29] But using the keys, it's similar to how a judge makes a ruling. If you think about a judge, the judge doesn't write the law, we don't create the gospel, and a judge does not actually make someone innocent or guilty.

That's a reality apart from the verdict. A judge simply declares a verdict. And the true and final verdict always rests in the hands of Jesus.

Will not the judge of all the earth do right? But someone must be in charge of the church on earth and have authority from Jesus to render a verdict on the gospel, the confession, and who is a true confessor.

Because this is a kingdom, if we think about it, this is a kingdom whose citizens are spread out through all the other kingdoms of the world.

Didn't we get the marching orders, the end of Matthew, going to all the world? It wasn't a kingdom that would sustain Jerusalem in the temple courts defined by nice neat boundary walls.

[23 : 51] Jesus' kingdom on earth has no physical boundary, no border. Christians go everywhere with the gospel.

And they make other Christians through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus brings them to faith and they're brought into the church. But a kingdom with no border has a problem.

Anyone can claim to be a citizen. And anyone can claim that this is the true gospel. Imposters, false teachers, they can all say thus says the Lord and claim I'm a true follower and so the right use of the keys is how the world knows ultimately who represents Jesus.

So we're going to turn now to Matthew 18, a couple of pages on. This is the second place, Matthew 18 and verse 15 where Jesus mentions his church and the use of the keys.

Matthew 18 is where Jesus shows who holds the keys and uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The who gives a verdict so that the world knows who represents Jesus.

[25 : 19] Verse 15, it starts with a sin issue. A brother that is a Christian in a church family has sinned against someone.

It is a sin that is open in some way because in verse 16 witnesses can be brought if needed. So it's an open sin. It's a sin that is persistent and it's unrepented because the brother chooses not to listen to his brothers and sisters within the church family.

It is a sin that is serious as it brings into question the person's claim of being a Christian. So it's public, it's persistent, it's serious.

Let's look at verses 17 to 18. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. And if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

[26 : 37] What's the final court of appeal on earth? Who has authority to pass such a judgment? Well it finally rests with the church.

Who's the church? Well I think from here it's clear that it's people who can gather in person, who knows the brother or sister and can pass a verdict as needed.

And in this case the church passes a verdict that says we can no longer affirm your claim to be a Christian. That's what it means to treat someone as a pagan.

There's someone of another religion or a tax collector, someone who the world would classify as a sinner even. We can no longer validate your claim to be a Christian.

We can no longer affirm that because of how you are living in unrepentant, persistent, public and serious sin.

[27 : 44] Jesus says here that the binding and loosing on earth, verse 18, the use of the keys, is entrusted to members of a church, those that can gather together and pass a verdict.

We know from here and elsewhere in the New Testament that is ordinary members of the family, ordinary church members that are involved in the use of these keys, local church members exercising the authority of Jesus in matters of belief and practice.

Jesus says bring it to the church. Bring such matters of persistent, public and serious sin to the family if needed. Bring it to the church.

Why? For the sake of the gospel. For the sake of the glorious name of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us that we have his spirit among us as the church and we hold the keys of the kingdom.

The you in verse 18 is now a plural you. Chapter 16 it was a singular you. Chapter 18 it's now a plural you.

[29 : 08] And I think verses 19 and 20 make this even clearer of who is exercising the keys. Again truly I tell you if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for it will be done for them by my father in heaven for where two or three gather in my name there I am with them.

It's where two or three or more are gathered. Jesus is among them by his spirit as they use the keys to give a verdict.

A gathered church in Jesus' name can use the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This is profound deeply profound.

These are weighty matters as we think of the skeleton the institutional skeleton of the church. And it's profound because what qualifies you or what qualifies me as ordinary members to rule Christ's church.

Nothing. Nothing except the truth that Jesus has called you, that Jesus has saved you, that Jesus has made you a new creation in him.

[30 : 34] We are qualified simply by being born again and by being given his spirit within us, the spirit among the church.

Each one of us who are members of the church knows the Lord directly. The spirit is given to the whole church, all its members, not just its leaders.

It's not like old Israel where you were physically born into it, whether you believed or not, and had that mixed community. The new covenant community, the church is a community filled with people who know the Lord and have the spirit.

That's why it's so important as we bring people into the church that they confess Jesus and that they love Jesus. And that's not a super high barrier by the way, that's who Jesus accepts, who Jesus has called, and everyone that Jesus accepts, the church accepts.

We are all the prophets and the priests and the kings in Christ. 1 Corinthians chapter 6, I mean, people say, well, I don't read about membership in the Bible.

[31 : 56] Where do you see the word membership? And that's a good argument. Don't see it. But yet every single page, I would argue, of the New Testament requires it and supports it and points to it.

Because the one another that we see in the scriptures is simply not possible without people in this community, this covenanting together, this care and support.

Here's an encouragement that Paul gives the church in Corinth who weren't sure whether they could weigh in on matters. Do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world?

And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases here on earth now? Do you not know that we will judge angels?

How much more the things of this life? It's the confidence that Christ has put in his people through his spirit to be able to keep his gospel and to keep one another in the faith.

[33 : 08] What does this look like? So let's get practical. We've read a lot of scripture. Maybe it's kicked off a few questions. Maybe you're thinking of different things about the church or churches you've been in.

So let me talk a little bit about what this looks like in practice in a church like ours. In Karageline Baptist Church, we affirm the gospel and we help one another to stay true to the Lord. It's not that complicated in some ways. We affirm the gospel and we help one another to stay true to the Lord as we exercise the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

And the Bible gives us lots of images of how the church works organically as I've said. And Johnny will show us over the next couple of weeks about the image of the body and the family over the next two Sundays.

So again, there's more about the church than what has been said this morning. But institutionally as a kingdom, we exercise the keys as a church.

[34 : 10] I'm just going to put up a slide there with some examples, but let me just highlight a few of them. So some examples of what it means to be members of the kingdom, some examples of the organizational skeleton of the church.

So the members of this church welcome in new members. That's the who of the gospel. We welcome them in as fellow members.

We recognize their confession. We recognize them as a true confessor. The members of this church maintain a statement of faith, the what of the gospel.

It's another way that we exercise the keys. We pass judgment on what is the gospel. The members of this church recognize and affirm its own leaders.

It's an incredible responsibility that we call faithful men who hold to and live out in an exemplary fashion the deep truths of the gospel as our elders.

[35 : 14] I'm going to give one example. The members back in February 2019, we debated and voted on a proposal to add this to our statement of faith at a members meeting in February 2019.

Let me read it out. Humanity, number four, we have about a dozen or so parts to our statement of faith. We believe in the creation of humanity, male and female, by God and in the image of God, equal in value and complementary in role, the creation ordinance of marriage as a lifelong exclusive union between one man and one woman.

This one flesh union establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women. And a number of scripture references are given.

Why did we do this as members of the church? Because God's good design for humanity, his creation of us as men and women, is a gospel shaping issue.

An issue that in the past all Christian churches would have assumed. They wouldn't have written this down in this form, but now must be something explicitly said to ensure that our confession of the gospel is in keeping with what the Bible says.

[36 : 41] Now, what does this mean for you this morning as you listen to this teaching, this sermon on the church and membership?

firstly, if you aren't a Christian this morning, Jesus is calling you to himself. Jesus is the king who lays down his life for his subjects.

And so Jesus calls you to turn away from living for yourself, to repent of your sin, and to put your trust in him.

Don't delay. pray and ask for the forgiveness of your sins today. If you're a member of this church, Christ has saved you, and he has brought you into membership to keep you, and to keep his gospel.

And you and I have this job together as members of ensuring that the gospel remains clear and at the center of all that we do as a church.

[37 : 51] And I need you, and you need me, and we need one another to keep the gospel. Are you growing closer to the members of the church?

Are you fulfilling your role as holders of the keys that Christ has given? Or as a member, do you leave it to others when it is Jesus that has called you?

If you're a Christian and you're not a member, can I simply ask why not? I ask to prompt some reflection on what Jesus says through his word.

For some of you, the idea of membership and authority and keys and all this talk might be very new. So if you are a new Christian or a young Christian or something you've not considered, Jesus says that you're to be baptized and to become a member of a local church.

And you are welcome, I would say, even as a child, if you know and love the Lord and you can understand these things, as a child or even as a new Christian, to be a member of the church here

in Carragoline.

[39 : 09] Maybe you've thought about membership before, it's just not something for me. I've thought about it, it's just, you know. But what makes it something for others and then not something for you?

How do we end up with those categories? It's worth coming again to the Lord and bringing to him whatever it is that keeps you from fully linking arms with the other Christians in this church.

For some, I know it is previous hurts, it is bad experiences of church life, maybe even within this church, that would hold you back.

You're still happy to attend, confident to fellowship, to receive pastoral care, to give to the church financially, and even to say, well, this is my church.

church. I understand that it can be hard to have confidence to become a member of a local church.

And what I would say is whatever your situation, if you're a young Christian, a new Christian, a Christian that's thought about this before and just said, not for me, Christ has called you to be under the care and the oversight of a local church for your sake, for the sake of others, and for the sake of the gospel.

[40 : 37] We are not called to put up boundaries. We're not called to stay outside on our terms. It's his church. The gospel is lived out in community with others.

To be a member of the church is to stand with others, saved by grace, and to affirm one another's profession of faith, and to have insurance together as we link arms.

That's where Jesus wants you to be, assured in the faith, linking arms with others. There's much more to the church than what we looked at this morning, so I pray that we can hear the words of Jesus clearly over these coming weeks, and see his good design in this world to provide embassies on earth for his kingdom through local churches that are full of members who preserve, protect, and proclaim the gospel together.

Let's pray. King Jesus, you thankfully rule over the heavens and the whole earth.

Nothing is hidden from your sight. You know all our hearts, and we are laid bare before you, what you say in your word, and by your Holy Spirit every time.

[42 : 04] Father, I pray that our hearts would be lifted up towards you this morning, that we would love you more, that we would have a godly jealousy for your name, for your kingdom, for your gospel, that we would have a deeper and wider and more generous love for one another.

And Father, that the bonds of Christian love and unity would be strengthened in Carragoline Baptist Church.

We need one another to hold those keys, to keep the gospel, to pass it on, and to help one another to stay the course.

Oh Jesus, you are gracious and kind. Father, you have given us your only Son, and you have poured out your Spirit into our lives.

You have given us everything that we need for life and godliness, and we thank you for that. All glory be to you. Amen. Amen. It said,