

The Church's Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Now, in May of 1824, in Vienna, Beethoven conducted the first performance of his ninth symphony, the Choral Symphony.

And at this stage in his life, he was almost completely deaf, and at the end of the performance, the leader of the orchestra had to go up to him and physically turn him around so that he could see the entire crowd on their feet, giving him a standing ovation for this symphony that in the opinion of many, though possibly not my family, is one of the greatest pieces of music that was ever written that was almost within months of the formation of this congregation.

In June of that year, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was established in Great Britain.

And perhaps more importantly, in the first half of the 19th century, Glasgow became an industrialized city building ships and locomotives and enormous industry.

And the population tripled from a quarter of a million to three quarters of a million. My historian will correct all these facts at the end, I'm sure.

[1 : 5 0] There's a fairly famous painting or an etching of Glasgow in the first quarter of the 18th century, within a few years perhaps of the formation of this congregation.

And it's by a person called J. H. Clarke, and it depicts Glasgow from the south. And the southern part is full of fields and so on and almost completely devoid of any building.

And then across the river, there's a portrayal of Glasgow with enormous plumes of smoke going up from almost every part of the city.

And that would have been perhaps what was to the fore in the formation of this congregation. Now, 200 years of celebration is a celebration of the faithfulness of God.

The faithfulness of God to His covenant and the faithfulness of God to His promise to the church. And I want to look briefly at this passage.

[3 : 0 7] I can't possibly comment on all of it. It's a passage that's a turning point in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. We read in this passage that from this point forward, Jesus began to tell His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and to be crucified and on the third day be raised again.

He had not spoken this way openly to His disciples until this occasion there in Caesarea Philippi, way up in the north. And it's at this point that He asks His disciples as to His identity.

Who do people say that I am? I am. It's a most pertinent question, and it's a question that we could almost ask any person on the face of the planet.

Who is Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus Christ? And Jesus Christ is a historical figure that every person on the planet has to reckon with. And in the disciples' time, some of them thought that He was John the Baptist, raised from the dead.

And some of them thought that He was Elijah because Elijah had disappeared into heaven without dying, and there was, as remains to this day, the empty seat of Passover waiting for Elijah to return.

[4 : 30] Others thought that He was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But then He asks Peter and the disciples, who do you say that I am? And it is Peter, Simon Peter, who says, in the most glorious fashion, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

It's Peter's finest moment. It's going to be followed by one of Peter's lowest moments, but at that point, it's one of his finest moments.

You are the Christ, the Messiah, the fulfillment of all of the promises of the Old Testament that God would send a Redeemer, a Savior, this Messianic figure, the Son of the living God.

But it is a glorious affirmation that He is the Lord. He's not just a preacher. He's not just a prophet.

But He's the Son of the living God. He's the Christ. He's the Messiah. He's the one that the Jews had been waiting for for centuries.

[5 : 37] And He's here. He's become incarnate, born of the Virgin Mary, raised in Nazareth, and now gloriously come to fulfill the redemptive promises of God.

And immediately, He says to Peter that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

It's an immediate statement that the building of the church, and this word church, I will build my church.

It's very interesting that this is the first time that the word church occurs in the Gospel of Matthew, and for that matter, in the preaching of the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps He'd used it before, but it's the first time that Matthew records the word church, the word ekklesia in Greek. He would have used an Aramaic word, and it would have sounded differently, and it would have sounded something similar to the word synagogue.

[6 : 42] You see, otherwise you'd be asking yourself, why did Peter and the disciples say to Him, what is church? You've been preaching about kingdom. All the preaching of Jesus had been about establishing the kingdom, the rule and reign of God.

What is church? But they didn't ask that question, because they immediately understood that the word for synagogue, which was a term for the gathering together of God's people, was similar to the word church.

In Greek, the word ekklesia resonates with the Hebrew for the word to call, kaleo. In Greek, called out of darkness, called into fellowship with one another, called into union and communion with Christ.

But he wants them to understand that the establishment of the church, and Jesus only has one plan, and it's called church.

Church is not a second choice. And that the main choice is the salvation of the Jews, or the deliverance of Israel.

[8 : 09] No, church is his plan. It's always been his plan. It's wonderful to think tonight that we are part of that plan. Our minds are going back 2,000 years to Caesarea Philippi, but we are part of that same plan.

I am building my church, but where is he building his church? He's building his church in enemy-occupied territory. He wants them from the very beginning to understand that.

Peter doesn't understand it. Peter, I think, at this point, thinks that this is going to be glorious. This is going to be so much fun. But he wants them to understand that the gates of hell will not prevail against them.

Now, one of the main things that Jesus is saying in Caesarea Philippi is that he is the Lord of the church.

He is the Lord of the church. And he says that in the context of several things that I want us to think about briefly.

[9 : 23] That he is Lord because he purchases the church at the cost of his death. He says in verse 21, well, Matthew says in verse 21, from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

It's that word, must. He must go to Jerusalem. He must suffer the ignominy of the Jews, rejecting his claim to be the Messiah.

He must be crucified. And on the third day be raised again. There is a must here. There is an absolute necessity here.

Why is that? Let's think for a minute. If God is sovereign, if God is all-powerful, couldn't he just say the word and his people would be saved?

He could just will it to happen. There have been times in the history of the church when theologians have upgraded and made prominent the will of God.

[10 : 41] This is a Calvinistic denomination. And we're not afraid to say so. We believe in the sovereignty of God. We believe that nothing happens without God willing it to happen and without God willing it to happen before it happens and without God willing it to happen in the very way that it happens.

He numbers the very hairs of our head. Not a sparrow falls to the ground outside of his will and decree. Couldn't God just have willed the salvation of his people?

And the answer is no. In order for his people to be saved, his divine justice needs to be satisfied.

In our Westminster Confession that our office bearers give allegiance to in our denominations, yours as well as mine, in chapter 8 and section 2, when it talks about the work of Christ, the very first thing that the Westminster divine said about the necessity of the atonement was to satisfy the demands of divine justice.

God is holy. God is righteous. He cannot even look upon sin. And sin has to be punished.

[12 : 10] He couldn't just will the salvation of his people. That would be a denial of his justice. That would be a denial of righteousness. Someone must suffer for the sins of his people.

And praise God, it isn't you and it isn't me. We do not get what we deserve when we put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do so knowing that he has borne our sin. That God made him to be sin who knew no sin, that we might be reckoned the righteousness of God in him.

He took our sins upon himself and bore the divine wrath, the unmitigated wrath of God came down upon him and he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It was for you and it was for me. So that we get his righteousness. We come this evening clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

[13 : 23] That was one of Luther's great statements that he loved to repeat, that he wore the robes, the righteous robes of Christ.

During my lifetime, I've watched and listened to the debate as to what is appropriate to wear to church. From the wearing of hats for women to suits and ties and white shorts for men and so on and we're in a different age.

And I'm not commenting on it. I'm just saying that whatever it is that you wear to church, the most important thing is that you wear the righteous robes of the Lord Jesus, that you've taken him as your Lord and Savior.

Jesus is saying he builds his church at the cost of his death. Well, secondly, he is Lord because he expands it through the proclamation of the gospel.

Now, in verse 19, and there's been enormous debate about it, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And in the, not so much the Reformation era, but the post-Reformation era in the late 1600s and early 1700s, and particularly in our tradition, Presbyterian tradition, the keys of the kingdom have often been interpreted as discipline.

[14:52] And I think that's a mistake. I think that's an error. I don't think that's what Jesus is saying. What do keys do? Well, they open doors.

I drive a Ford F-150 truck. It's a statement that I'm in America, and I love it.

It's big, and it's tall, and you sit above the rest of the traffic, and nobody messes with you. They don't cut you off. And I bought a Ford F-150 because it's a keyless entry truck.

You leave the keys inside, and there's a code. So I don't carry car keys around. Keys are important because they open doors. It's as though Jesus is saying to His disciples, how am I going to build my church?

You're going to use the keys that are in your pocket that will unlock the doors of the hearts of God's people in Peru, and in Korea, and in China, and Australia, and in Glasgow City in Scotland.

[16:18] You all have different narratives as to how you came to Christ. Mine was very sudden and dramatic, and I can tell you that I was saved on December the 28th at about 11 o'clock at night in 1971.

I can tell you that. I can give you a time and a date. My wife was here this evening, doesn't remember a day. She was reared in a Presbyterian church, went to church twice on Sunday, and Sunday school, and sat around a piano and sang in the afternoon, and she doesn't remember a day when she didn't know and loved the Lord Jesus.

We all have different narratives as to how we were brought to Christ. But it involved people opening doors.

It involved people with the keys of the gospel in their hands. It brings a sense of responsibility, doesn't it?

As your congregation sends out a new congregation in Bears Den, you send them out and you say to them, there are keys in your pocket, and they're powerful keys.

[17:39] They unlock the doors to the kingdom of heaven. Those keys contain a narrative that if anyone believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be saved.

So, use your keys. Use your keys for the furtherance and the advancement of the gospel.

We sometimes talk about countries where the door is closed. There is a sense in which that is true, but there's also a sense in which at one point in the redemptive purposes of God, there will be those who will come with keys in their pocket.

There are many millions of Chinese underground Christians.

They meet in secret because of the nature of the country in which they live, but the keys have opened the hearts of those Chinese people and they've come to know the Lord Jesus and to worship Him.

[18:56] there is no political regime in all the worlds that can prevent the gospel from opening the hearts of God's people.

Well, thirdly, Jesus is Lord because He intends to defeat every hostile power that is arraigned against Him. As He said in verse 18, the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

well, there may be Lord of the Rings fans here. I think I've read The Lord of the Rings every summer since 1968 when I first read it in high school and if this helps you then so be it and if it doesn't just move on, just forget I ever said it.

But you'll remember a scene towards the end of the book where Frodo and his friend are before the gates of Mordor and it's a terrifying scene.

Two little hobbits and several thousand possibly a million enemies facing them in these terrible, terrible gates and that's the picture that Jesus is giving to Peter.

[20 : 33] It's what will happen to Jesus. Peter couldn't get it, you see. Peter says two things to Jesus that you cannot say at the same time.

Lord, you are my Lord. You are the sovereign God of all the universe but you are wrong. You are mistaken here.

This shall never happen to you. And perhaps to give Peter the benefit of the doubt he did it out of pity. Perhaps he did it out of fear understanding that if this happened to Jesus it might happen to him.

And Jesus spoke to him in a way that he had never spoken before.

Get behind me, Satan. It's as though something was triggered in the Lord Jesus. It's as though he had heard this voice before that you can gain a crown without a cross.

[21 : 43] And where had he heard that before? In the temptation in the wilderness. That he would give him the kingdoms of the world if only he would bow down and worship him, that he could be king over all the world and not have to undergo a cross.

And when he heard Peter saying this shall never happen to you, what he heard was the voice of Satan. He had heard that voice before and he said, get behind me, Satan.

Satan is a powerful being but he's not omnipotent and he will be defeated. In the redemptive purposes of God, God allows him certain freedoms to exercise his will and to do his worst.

And you may look around Scotland as we look around many parts of the United States just now in the last five or ten years and the rise of post-modernity, the denial of true truth as Francis Schaeffer would say, that there is no truth, there are no absolutes, moral, ethical absolutes, so everything is up for grabs, where it is almost impossible to have a coherent conversation.

salvation. And you may say to yourself, Satan has gained territory, and he has, but he will not prevail.

[23 : 30] And however difficult the journey, however difficult the task, however dejected you may become, when you think of a time when there were, how many did you say?

600, 700 members in this congregation in Glasgow, a significant percentage of the population of Glasgow. Yes, things may wax and wane, but it is very important and crucial for you to remember that he will not prevail.

He will not win this battle. Jesus will win. I taught at a seminary in America and still do, and when I was in the campus in Jackson, Mississippi, I had a dear friend from Brazil, and he had all that Brazilian temperament about him, and he taught missions, and one day he asked me what I was doing, and I said, well, I was writing a commentary on revelation for the banner of truth, and he says, oh, revelation is easy, and I said, what?

And he said, yes, revelation is easy. You can summarize it in two words. He said, Jesus wins. Well, I can't tell you the number of times I have remembered that conversation with Elias Medeiros that Jesus wins.

He will win the battle. He will be victorious. Every promise that God has made will be fulfilled. I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail.

[25 : 21] They will not win. Then, fourthly, Jesus is Lord because He calls His church to a life of cross-bearing. Well, we could spend an hour, but there's a meter ticking away.

Cross-bearing. You must take up a cross and follow me because He is Lord. You must suffer and endure the trials of this world, and you do so because you love Jesus and He is your Lord and Savior.

You go wherever He tells you to go. It's one of the marks of being a Christian. Calvin, when he writes his Institutes in Book Three, he says there are three qualities about the Christian life.

One is mortification, cross-bearing. One is vivification, the bringing to fruition of the fruits of the Spirit, and the other is meditation on the future life.

Cross-bearing. Take up my cross. Some of you know all about it. You've endured all kinds of trials and difficulties, personal, the loss of a loved one, health issues, issues of dejection and depression and all kinds of things in between, and you take up that cross and you endure every day.

[26 : 56] Every day you look to Him and you run with endurance the race that is set before you looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Thomas Akempis said that if you bear the cross, it will bear you.

If you bear the cross, it will bear you. Now, lastly, Jesus is Lord because He comes at the end of the age and judges our service. In verse 27, He says, the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what He has done.

Now, you may read that in a threatening way. You may read that in a way that Jesus is saying, you know, at the end of the year, you're all going to be judged. But actually, I think He's trying to say something positive to you.

When you bear the cross, when you take those keys of the gospel out of your pocket and use them and open the door of the gospel to the hearts and lives of sinners, God sees that, and He will bless you.

He will reward you for it. Life is hard. Christian life is sometimes hard. But Jesus will reward you, my friend.

[28 : 16] He will bless you at the end of the age. He will give you. Remember what Jesus says, that some will get one city and some five and some ten?

Some of you are going to get Glasgow. Some of you are going to get Edinburgh. that may not be good news to you. It's a picture.

It's a metaphor. That Jesus is with us and He follows us and He watches us and He will reward us as we endure in the gospel.

Can you imagine what it will be like for Jesus to draw aside the curtains and display His purposes as they are drawn in the lives of His people?

That's why the cross is worth bearing. It will be worth it when you get to the other side. These are extraordinary words and they're worthy of more attention than we have time for this evening.

[29 : 27] But at the 200th anniversary of this congregation that has known some wonderful ministers and I had the blessing of knowing some of them in the 80s and early 90s and Douglas Macmillan especially.

And I remember a holiday, church holiday vacation of about a hundred of us in the Isle of Man with Douglas Macmillan. And he was preaching on Psalm 23.

And he wrote a book about it that I've read many, many times. And I was raised on a sheep farm so I was very drawn to Douglas Macmillan. And at the end of the week he came to that part and goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And he said when he was a shepherd in the highlands of Scotland he said he had two border collies sheepdogs and he named them goodness and mercy.

And I've never forgotten that we had collies, border collies when we were growing up on our small sheep farm. And I've often thought that goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

[30 : 54] Well, dear Christian and members of this congregation, be encouraged. Be encouraged by the mighty purposes of God.

His redemptive purposes, His promises which can never be broken and He will be with you to the very end.