

The Church and it's Founder

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[0 : 00] So today we begin a new series, 14 weeks, and the topic is The Church Jesus Builds. For those of you who are new to St. John's, we very, very, very rarely do topical series.

We mostly sort of work our way through a book of the Bible, but we're looking at a topic this time, the church. And you can get a breakdown of actually what we're covering in this hot little number right here, Faith, Hope, and Love, which is our fall brochure.

And if you turn to this page right here, I know a lot of paper tonight, right? You can see all the stuff we're going to cover. So much. There is a lot to say about the church. What we're essentially doing, though, is we are trying to recapture God's vision for the church.

So let me begin sort of over here somewhere, and then I'm going to pull it back into the topic, okay? I want to start by just giving you an outline of the gospel, very simple outline of the gospel, and then asking you an important question.

So here it is. Here's an outline of the gospel. So God made the world, and he made us rulers, sort of delegated responsibility looking after the world.

[1 : 16] Next, we rejected God, and trying to run life the way we want to run life doesn't really work out so well for us. God won't let us rebel forever, so there is death and judgment and punishment.

But God loves his people. And so he sent Jesus to die for us. Jesus is raised from the dead to give us new life, and we'll return to judge. God will remake the world.

That's quite simple. That is a simple gospel message. So here's the question. Where does the church fit into that story? In God's great story of redemption, where does the church find its place? Is it kind of like, I hate PowerPoint. This is so much better, right? Is it kind of like about here? Jesus turns up, has this great idea about a church.

That'll keep the whole thing going for a while. And it sort of finishes about here. My guess is this. My guess is that many people think the church is great.

[2 : 26] That's where you make an affirming noise. My guess is that people think the church is great. Right. Thank you. Good. Good. Good. But here is my second guess.

My second guess is this, is that mostly people think that the church is a resource, a resource to help us with our relationship with Jesus.

Now, that's not a terrible thing to think, but it does fall very far short of the biblical vision for church. So what is the biblical vision for church?

This is a significant preamble before we get to the text, okay? So what is the biblical vision for church? Well, let me give you a teeny tiny little window into the next 14 weeks here, okay? All right. From the very beginning of creation, God's purpose was to make a people to dwell with, a people to share his life with. So that's Adam and Eve. Sin interrupts that.

[3 : 23] It divides. It separates. Sin makes us selfish. We worship ourself, not God. God steps in though. A number of times. Many times.

A couple of big examples in Genesis 12. God makes a promise to Abraham and he says to Abraham, I will make you a great nation. So God here reaffirms his original plan.

He steps in to create a family, a group, a people to bless the world. Another example, and again in Exodus or Deuteronomy is probably a better example. God gathers his people around Sinai to hear his word and he starts putting parameters around what it means to be his people.

He starts to define them more. Lots more examples. The point is this though. A people to dwell with. That has always been God's plan.

Another way to describe this. Another way to say this would be this. In the Bible, scattering is a sign of God's judgment. We see that Adam and Eve kicked out of the garden. Tower of Babel.

[4 : 27] God scatters when he judges. He separates when he judges. Scattering a sign of judgment. Gathering. A sign of God's rescue. God's purpose in the world.

So the question is this. Where does the church fit into God's story? That's the question again. Where does church fit into God's redemptive story? And here's the answer.

Right in the center. Right smack in the middle. God's plan has always been about a people. It's always been about a gathered people.

If I said to you. Christianity is all about morality. It's all about doing the right thing. You'd say. Aaron. That's stupid. That's not right. You know that's not right. I know it's not right.

You'd go. That's a terrible attitude. Aaron. That's reductionist. It's shallow. It's incomplete. And you'd be right to say that. Well. When we say. Christianity is all about my relationship with Jesus.

[5 : 28] I want you to know. That's also reductionist. That's a very small view. It's incomplete view. It's incomplete. It's incomplete. Because the church is not at the center of God's purposes in that understanding.

Now you might be thinking. Aaron. You were just saying all this stuff about church being really important to keep your job. And. It does. It does appear. Alarmingly self-serving.

But. It's going to backfire. Over the next 14 weeks. I'd say. Because. If I was trying to be self-serving. It wouldn't work. Because there's going to be periods in this series.

Where you might find. I say some things which aren't popular. Which you might disagree with. And. And in those situations. You must remember. I'm right. But. We'll get there. I'll say things like this. Which might annoy you. Like. Christianity is not about you and Jesus. And you're like. I thought that was the whole thing. Now don't get me wrong. I want you to have a vibrant. Dynamic relationship with Jesus.

[6 : 27] And the church can help you with that relationship. But God's big plan is not to have. Millions of Christians. Having these really great. Individual quiet times with Jesus.

All over the world. As wonderful as that might be. That millions of Christians are having great quiet times with Jesus. On mountains. And experiencing Christ. And having these great individual times. I'll say it again. And God's plan has always been about a people. A gathering. So there you go.

We're going to talk a lot more about that over the next three months. Pretty exciting eh?

Pretty annoying though eh? A little bit. All right. Let's get to this week's passage. This is a big passage. If we're talking about church. Because it's the first time in the New Testament.

That the word church is mentioned. In Greek it's ecclesia. There you go. So Matthew 16. 13 to 18?

[7 : 26] 13 to 18? 20? Don't worry about the last two verses. No. We're going to get to those.

Those are really good. Okay. 16 to 13. Let me read it to you. Now when Jesus came to the district of Caesarea Philippi.

Oh by the way. I hate preaching with a computer. I'm not trying to be cool. Hey Alistair. But like. I just. I can't. My printer break down. So I know that looks really geeky with the thing.

And the beautiful titanium. But. It'd be better if it was an iPad. Sorry. What are we doing? Matthew 16.

13. Now when Jesus came to the district of Caesarea Philippi. He asked his disciples. Who do people say that the son of man is? Interesting place that Jesus to choose to ask that question. Caesarea Philippi.

Philip was a tetrarch. He named this area. Renamed this area after himself. And Caesar. Just to kind of cover his bases. It was the birthplace of Pan. Pan.

[8 : 25] Not. I mean. You know. Not really. But it was the so-called birthplace of Pan. The fertility god. A lot of pagan temples there. Huge. Massive temple in honor of Caesar. So great place for Jesus to ask this question.

Who do people say that I am? And verse 14. Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. Others say Jeremiah. One of the prophets. Not terrible answers. Here we thought Jesus. Was John the Baptist come back from the dead?

Elijah. It was this classic Old Testament figure. who people thought would return at some point. Anoint the Messiah. Make everything okay. Jeremiah. The suffering prophet. People probably thought that. Seeing the kind of hatred that was leveled at Jesus.

By the religious authorities. So there's this growing consensus. That Jesus is pretty spesh. But like. You know. The idea of him being a prophet. Obviously. You know.

Not awesome. Not terrible. But not really who he is. Completely. So Jesus presses them. In verse 15. And Jesus says to his disciples.

[9 : 25] But who do you say. I am. And Peter's amazing response. You are the Christ. The son of the living God. Christ.

As you know. This is a Greek word. It's not his last name. It's a Greek word. It's the Greek version of the Hebrew word Messiah. So it's anointed one. The one who will rescue us.

Peter is affirming that Jesus is God's king. Who will bring peace and wisdom. And righteousness to his people. And by adding the line. You are the son of the living God. You are the Christ. The son of the living God.

Peter somehow recognizes. The special relationship Jesus has. With the father. And Jesus answers him. Verse 17. Blessed are you summoned by Jonah for flesh.

And blood has not revealed this to you. But my father in heaven. By my father who was in heaven. I wonder how Peter thought he came to this conclusion. However he thought.

[10 : 21] Jesus makes it clear. You know. This was a gift. This was a revelation from God. And it's a beautiful example of how God bends down. Bends down to make himself known.

Placing in Peter's dark. And muddy mind. The best thing. A person can know. Which is that Jesus is the Christ.

Folks when you come to faith. You must relinquish any sense of merit. You must relinquish any sense that. I'm a clever chap. I worked this out. No. This was a.

A divine disclosure. It's a gift. It's a gift. Okay verse 18. Verse 18 is a tricky verse. And it's kind of at the guts of what I want to say here tonight.

And it's also probably one of the most debated verses in the Bible. And one that has caused a lot of acrimony within the church. Big picture first.

[11 : 20] Let me read the verse. And I tell you. You are Peter. And on this rock I will build my church. Okay. Right. What have we learnt about who Jesus.

What have we learnt about Jesus. Right. We've learnt that. We learnt who he is. He's the Christ. And now I've learnt what he's going to do. And what is he going to do? Build the church.

That's interesting eh. He's building a church. That Jesus came to do. As I talked right at the start about this. This is not a new initiative. Jesus didn't come up with this great idea.

Father I've got this. You're going to love it. It's awesome. I came up with it myself. Write it down. Put it on the fridge. You know. No. This is. This was. He's just. This is just God's plan right from the start.

What do we learn about the church here? Well. It's Christ's church. Do you see how it says. In illness rock. I will build.

[12 : 17] My. Church. Church belongs to Christ. And he's the builder. So it's my church. And he's the builder.

Jesus didn't come to just save. He came to build. And it's a remarkable idea. This isn't it. And I love the sense of that. The church belongs to Jesus.

He died to purchase it. We'll learn about that next week. He lives to. Animate it. To enable it.

To empower it. One day Jesus will receive it. You know the Bible talks about the bride of Christ.

Jesus will receive the bride. So it's his church. He's in charge.

He's the boss. I find that very comforting. The survival of the church depends. Not on us. But Jesus. And we can trust him with that.

[13 : 15] Now. The controversial part. Verse 18. It says. I'll read it to you again. See if you can work out what the controversy is. And I tell you. You are Peter. And on this rock.

I will build my church. So what's the rock? There's three options. Option one.

The rock is Peter. That is the. That's the. That's the. That's the Catholic church position. It's not. It's not. It's not. It's not unreasonable position.

There's a pun in the Greek here that we miss in the English. Okay. Peter actually means rock. Peter means rock. So Jesus could. So it's like. If you kind of read it. Not very nuanced.

You'd say. I tell you. You are a rock. And on this rock. I will build my church. So in that sense. You could go. Well. It kind of makes sense. That Peter is the rock. But I don't think Peter is the rock.

[14 : 14] For a variety of reasons. Because the two rock words. Are actually a bit different. There's petros and petra. There's a feminine. And a masculine version. And one is more of a. Like a pebble. And one is more of a huge stone.

There's also no hint of any kind of succession of leaders here. No kind of like succession of. There is one great. There's a. There's a papacy. There's no papacy started here. That continues on. Next person. Next person. Next person. Next person. Don't get me wrong. Peter is. I love Peter. He is very very important in the New Testament. But he is not this infallible leader. That the church is built on. We know that because later on. In the New Testament. Peter is questioned. He is rebuked. He is sent. So whilst this. The idea that Peter is the rock. Is not. It's not ridiculous. It's. I just don't. I don't think the rock.

[15:08] Of the church is Peter. The second option. Another way to look at this would be this. The rock on which the church is built. Is the confession of Peter. The faith of Peter.

Not a silly idea. Ephesians 2. Talks about. The foundational beliefs of the apostles in the church. But I don't think that's what Jesus is saying either. Because the passage does put some significant distance.

Between Peter. Petros. And Petra. And in the very next incident. Jesus calls Peter Satan. You know.

So Peter's faith is all over the show. I don't think. I don't think Jesus is saying. You know. It's your confession. It's your faith Peter. That we're going to build the church on here. I think the real answer is a slight variant of that. The third option.

The rock. Is Jesus. That's the one that makes the most sense of the text. So it's a mixed metaphor. Jesus is the builder. And he's the foundation. So the rock is not Peter.

[16:05] Or Peter's faith. The rock is the subject of Peter's affirmation. So Peter says. You are the Christ. And Jesus says. Yes. And on that. I will build my church.

The evidence. The big evidence for this is that. This is what Peter says. He thinks. This is what Peter talks about. In 1 Peter 2. He's quoting Isaiah.

Right at the beginning of. Of like his book. He says. Behold I. That's God. I am laying in Zion a stone. A cornerstone chosen and precious. And whoever believes in him. Will not be put to shame. He's not talking about himself here.

So the honor is for you who believe. But for those who do not believe. The stone that the bull has rejected. Has become the cornerstone. And a stone of stumbling. A rock of offense. Folks.

Jesus is the foundation of the church. So there you go. 500 years of debate. Cleared up in three minutes. You're welcome. Last part of verse 18.

[17:01] And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Isn't that wonderful? The gates of hell. Now that's. Don't get too caught up in this kind of mythological picture.

Of this gate. And you know. One of those dolls. It's called Griffins. Barking. Trying to snatch. You know. Like it's not. It's talking about death. That's what that means. It's talking about death.

The worst thing in the world is death. Death can't defeat the church. It means the church is eternal. It's immortal. Nothing can destroy it. That should be reassuring to us.

Given what people say about Christianity. Given various attempts to wipe it out. Nothing can destroy it. Verse 19.

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Okay. That sounds a little bit confusing. Right? So we'll just work through this sort of slowly-ish.

[18:03] Okay. Jesus the foundation. The builder. And the head of the church. Now delegates some authority to the church leaders. It's from this verse that we get that sort of mythology about St. Peter at the gate.

He's got the keys to the kingdom. Right? You know. That kind of joke. He jokes about that. Okay. That's not quite right. Although it's not completely off. Peter is not standing at the gate.

You know. Letting people in or out. However. Let me say it like this. The you. I will give you. The you is. Who's Kristen and Jeremy?

Kristen. It's your. It's a plural. It's you plural. It's your. So he's not just talking to Peter here. Let me explain the elements. And now I'll kind of summarize. That's the easiest thing to do. Okay. So the keys represent entry and locking.

Right? Opening and closing. Easy. Right? Opening and closing. Okay. So it's saying the church can open the doors to the kingdom of heaven or proclaim that it's locked.

[19:04] I'll come back to that. Binding and loosing. That stuff. That's like our old Jewish kind of rabbinical term. Like they would talk about. It's a technical term meaning.

Rabbis would when they would interpret the Torah. That kind of use this kind of language. Okay. I'll come back to that. Heaven and earth stuff. Seems to be saying something about what we do on earth.

Is linked to what happens in heaven. Right. Let's mash all those concepts together. And come out with what this verse means. It's saying the church is God's agent. Interpreting the Bible.

Preaching the gospel. Proclaiming truths. An example. Someone comes to you and says. I've done really bad things in my life. I need to turn my life around.

I need to say sorry to God. I need to repent. You proclaim what the Bible proclaims. Brother, sister, you are forgiven. Having done that.

[20 : 02] There would be no record of their sins in heaven. They would be welcomed into heaven. Does that make sense? Keys, binding, loosing, opening, shutting.

Right. Alternatively, someone could say. Someone you know might reject God. You might tell them about Jesus. But they just reject God. And when they die, God will reject them. Heaven is closed for them.

That's what the keys, the heaven, earth, the binding, the loosing stuff is about. Lastly, verse 20. And he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. It's not an uncommon thing for Jesus to say.

Jesus wants to keep Peter's revelation on the down low because at this point in his ministry, Jesus knows that the idea of him being the Christ would foster some unhelpful enthusiasm in the wrong direction.

So until he's fully demonstrated what it means to be Christ, he wants to keep that stuff silent. Okay, let me finish now with a question here. Given everything we've learned tonight, you might ask, so what?

[21 : 07] Who cares? I mean, it's great. It's interesting. Binding, loosing, didn't really understand what you're talking about. But it's kind of interesting. How does it affect me? You know one of the greatest challenges to Christianity in a city like Vancouver is?

I don't think it's atheism. I don't think it's sort of rampant immorality, I don't think. I think it's individualism. Individualism.

Which is different to selfishness. Have you guys ever heard of a book called On Democracy in America? Maybe some philosophy guys have.

Some Alexis de Tocqueville. French guy. That's exactly how you pronounce his name. So he wrote in 1830s.

He traveled to the States. He was a political thinker. He traveled to the States. He wrote a series of very famous essays on the culture of America. And he differentiated between selfishness and individualism.

[22 : 08] And he said this. Selfishness seeks advantage for the self at the expense of others. Individualism though is this. And this is a very helpful description.

A calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends.

I read it again. A calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends. The Vancouver report which I've quoted a few times before which came out a couple of years ago says the same thing about the sea.

It says that in Vancouver people retreat. They're increasingly retreating from community. They're retreating from community. Participating less in community. So we live in this very individualistic society.

And we are so immersed in it that I think we have trouble seeing it. And it's a philosophy that can easily bleed into the way we think about faith and church.

[23 : 11] We talked about this at the start. You know this idea it's all about me and Jesus.

Therefore the church is just this helpful resource. A resource that I can perhaps fulfill in another way.

I can podcast a sermon. I can receive tweets from noteworthy Christians. Nothing wrong with either of those things. Except when you think they're a substitute to the gathering. It sounds like I'm being harsh, right?

And I am because this is so important. The church, I know I've said this a lot but I really want you to get this. The church is at the center of what God is doing in the world. Think about this.

If Jesus was about building the church, the church is eternal. If it's a priority for God, Christ, it must be a priority for your life as well.

Even when it would be so much easier to retreat from the demands of a community like a church.

Folks, it's got to be a priority for you. Which has implications on how you feel about church attendance, on church planting, financial giving, serving the church family.

[24 : 19] Look, I know the church here, worldwide, does not look very impressive at times.

But it is a foretaste of the remade world God is preparing for us. And that is why gathering is so important to God.

So is that how we see the church though? That's what I want you to think about over the next week.

I'll finish there. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.