

Gathering pt1

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Gathering / Matthew 16:13–20

When we ask a question like “Who started the church?” you can get a lot of answers. In today’s day and time, the opinion of the church, especially in America, is low. The last several decades have been plagued by scandals and abuses. From the televangelists of the 80s, to the explosion of mega-churches in the the 90s, leading to the Y2K panic which some churches bought into wholesale, to the abuse scandals of the Catholic church and now #ChurchToo and #SBCToo, and the weird co-option of some segments of protestantism and pentacostalism by far right wing politics and QAnon conspiracies, and the veering of the left into denials of basic doctrines in the name of “deconstructing.” Getting to the root of the beginning of the church can seem like a lost cause at best and an exercise in futility at worst.

And really who cares? Does it make a difference? For some of us, we look at what the church has become and we are weighing in our minds, is this worth my time? In the age of the internet, do I need to get up early, get dressed, fight traffic, and be in a seat? What’s the point?

Over the next few weeks, I hope to answer that question. There is not going to be a diatribe against online church. Or a sermon on politics. Or a rant about “how things used to be.” We don’t do that here. I simply want to go back to the Bible, and look at what started a 2000 year old, enduring movement that, despite opposition, attempted co-option, persecution, splits, and yes sometimes corruption, is not only still around, but endures.

The church.

Go with me to [Matthew 16:13-20](#)...

and yes that is the only passage we are looking at today, thank the Lord
(Read passage)

This passage doesn't start with a discussion of an organization. It starts with the most important question in the world. Who is Jesus?

Jesus asks this of His disciples. Who do other people say I am?

Matthew 2. The Polarization Enacted: From Jew to Gentile (13:53–16:20)

All the opinions the disciples report are complimentary and demonstrate that Jesus remains quite popular. The crowds view him as some kind of spokesman for God. The equation with John the Baptist recalls Herod's fears in 14:2 and suggests that others shared these sentiments. Elijah represents the messianic forerunner of Old Testament prophecy (see comments under 11:7–15). Many had obviously not made the link between Elijah and John the Baptist. It would be natural to think of Jesus also as a kind of Jeremiah, a preacher of judgment and repentance who was widely rejected by the leaders of his nation

Then He asks them, ***who do you say I am?***

Folks, this is THE question. The one that changes your life. When you go from letting everyone else define Jesus for you, to experiencing Him for yourself.

The disciples, by this time, had heard Jesus preach about Himself, had seen Him heal people of seemingly incurable diseases, seen Him deal with demons, had experienced Him calming a storm, and seen Him raise the dead. And Peter, if not everyone, was CONVINCED, they were in the presence of the Son of God.

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Here is the first time in Matthew that anyone in Jesus' audiences has unambiguously acknowledged him as the "Christ" (Christos—Messiah—see under 1:1). Peter immediately adds the title "Son of God" as in 14:33, where all the disciples had acclaimed Jesus with this form of address. Apparently, Peter now has a deeper appreciation for Jesus' unique relationship with the Father. Nevertheless, full-orbed Trinitarian theology will not develop until a later date. **Peter also adds the adjective "living," a characteristically Jewish way of referring to God to distinguish him from lifeless idols and also a reminder that only Yahweh has life in himself which he can impart to others.**

Friends, that changes everything. When you see Jesus for who He actually is, God is at work.

See that is not something you just arrive at on your own. You are smart and capable, but **to go from unbelief to belief requires the intervention of God.** Don't believe me? Look at Jesus response to Peter, who had WITNESSED all of this first hand

v17- "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven..."

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Jesus attributes to Peter's confession insight stemming from divine revelation rather than human deduction. *The language does not specify how God revealed himself or require some sudden flash of insight, but it does affirm that God has led Peter to his correct understanding.* "Man" is literally flesh and blood, a stock Semitic idiom for mortal humanity

Whatever situation you find yourself in this morning, God can speak to you and call you and reveal Himself to you. He is close and you being here or hearing these words is not an accident.

Listen to Him today (Gospel presentation here)

But Jesus doesn't stop there, He refers to Simon by a different name "Peter" which means rock. A rock like a foundation.

What is the rock that the church is built on? Is it Peter? Is he the founder of the church? Some churches would say he is, but that is not what Jesus is referring to here. He is referring to Peter's confession.

See to be a church, not a social club or a religious order, or a cult, you have to be established on a single thing- the confession of Jesus as Savior. Without Jesus, there is no church. You can meet. You can sing. You can have someone talk- loud or soft. You can take up money. You can do nice things for each other and the community. You can have a cross on the building and wear fancy robes. But if you don't confess Jesus as Savior, you are not a church. You are something else.

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Here is the first use of *ekklesia* in the Gospels. It occurs only three times, all in Matthew, and the other two references are both in 18:17. Many hold that Jesus did not conceive of establishing a church and that these verses are later Matthean insertions. But the nature of Jesus' instruction to his community of followers certainly implied their continued existence in some form, even if there is little of an "institution" yet in view. Moreover, the word *ekklesia* in Hellenistic Greek often simply meant an assembly, as is also true of the underlying Aramaic *qāhāl*—a gathering of people for a particular purpose. Jesus, however, implies nothing here of any particular church structure or government; **He merely promises that he will establish a gathered community of his followers and help them to grow**

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Instead, Christ's "church" will comprise the community of people who submit to God's kingly rule (recall that kingdom equals kingship—God's rule or reign). The popular view that the church is somehow to separate itself from society, based on the derivation of ekklēsia from ekkaleō (to call out) affords a classic example of what linguists call the etymological fallacy. Words often develop meanings over time that differ from their roots. The only sense in which the word church in New Testament times means those who are called out is that believers routinely gather together by leaving their separate places of residence or work

And I want you to notice something else Look at vs 18-19.

The church belongs to Jesus. It's not yours. You cannot make it yours. And when you abuse her or ignore her or misrepresent her or treat her like she's less than what she is, that's Jesus' church you are doing that to. And He bought her. With His blood. With every nail and whip and thorn. He paid for her.

He is building her, and she may be marred, and defaced, and maligned, and broken sometimes, but she is still His and He is still perfecting her and bringing her back to Himself. Because there is always a remnant.

And for those who use her for their own gain, there will be a DAY to answer for that!

Jesus founds His church.

And one more thing. He sustains His church. He empowers His church. Look at the end of verse 18-19

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In v. 18b Jesus promises the indestructibility of his church. That the “gates of Hades will not overcome it” proves cryptic because gates are naturally seen as defensive protection, while “overcome” suggests an army on the offense. Is Jesus saying that Hades (Heb. Sheol—the grave—probably, as with hell, in the sense of Satan’s domain) cannot conquer the church or that it cannot resist the church’s advances? Is Satan on the defense or offense here? The latter seems more likely. In other Jewish literature “gates of Hades” is frequently idiomatic for “powers of death

The gates of hell. There is nothing that can stop the church. No government. No opponent. Not even Satan himself. **We don’t walk in fear. (quick aside about how fear is used to manipulate the church in 2022)**

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Similarly here Jesus encourages his followers that, irrespective of how Christianity may be attacked in a given place and time, the church universal will never be extinguished. Sects and cults which claim that true Christianity entirely disappeared from the world during certain periods of church history contradict Jesus’ teaching here.

And more than that, Jesus entrusts to His church, His power. The “keys” so to speak, are the power of His Spirit unleashed on the earth. We are given the mandate to seek and save and to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

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more immediate parallels suggest that one should pursue the imagery of keys that close and open, lock and unlock (based on Isa 22:22) and take the binding and loosing as referring to Christians' making entrance to God's kingdom available or unavailable to people through their witness, preaching, and ministry. This entrance to the kingdom will include the forgiveness of sins, tying this text in closely with John 20:23, which displays a very similar structure, and also with Jesus' use of the phrase "keys of knowledge" in Luke 11:52. Illustrations of Peter's privilege may then be found throughout Acts 1–12, in which Peter remains at the forefront of leadership in the early Christian proclamation of the gospel. It is also possible that Jesus envisions the unlocking of the powers of heaven to combat the attacking powers of the underworld.¹⁰⁹

As we walk thru the next weeks, we are going to learn more about the Church and God's purpose for her, but above all that never forget, the Church belongs to Jesus and He will sustain and defend her because He gave His life for her.