



# Central Peninsula Church

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Matthew 16:13-23  
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## The House That Jesus Built

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SERIES: *Understanding the Church*

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Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a typical American family driving home from church one Sunday. Dad was fussing about the sermon being too long. Mom said she thought the music was too loud. Sis, who was a music major in college, thought the soloist was off key. And Grandma said she couldn't hear very well, since they were seated in the back. As they pulled in the driveway, little Willie, who had listened to all of this, started to fuss about the woman in front of him with the big hat. Then he paused, nudged his dad, and said, "But, Dad, you gotta admit, it was a pretty good show for a nickel!"

To more people than we would like to admit, the church is really just like going to a show. The better the entertainment, the more they enjoy coming. But the less they like what they see and hear, the more they complain and grumble. If the show gets real bad, they refuse to sit through it, and maybe even look for a better show down the street. But, you have to admit, compared to what you pay to get into the movies or a ball game these days, it's a pretty good show for a nickel!

But, as I hope most of us here know, the church is more than just a show. People that view the church that way spend a lot of time thinking about how the church caters to their own needs, like a religious country club. Are the people who go to that church my kind of people? Do they meet my social needs? Is the music they play my kind of music? Does the pastor speak my language? Are the programs run well? These are what I would call horizontal issues. But, somehow, we know the church is more than that. But what does that mean? What is the church?

This morning we start a series on this subject of the church, and I want to answer this most basic question. I will warn you that the answer to this question could revolutionize your life. If it really gets a hold of you, you can never view the church, much less your own life, the same.

One of the great ironies of Scripture is that Jesus said very little directly about the church. It wasn't until late in his ministry that he even mentioned the church. And yet it could be argued that the church was the very reason he came. I want us to look at that incident in the life of Christ where the word "church" first came forth from

the lips of Jesus. Turn with me to Matthew 16, where we'll be looking at vv. 13-20.

### 1. The church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus and his disciples have come to the district of Caesarea Philippi. This is the northernmost part of the Jewish territory. It was an area kind of like ours in that it was known for its paganism and its idol worship. It was in this area that Herod the Great had raised a temple of white marble to Caesar Augustus, worshiping him as a Roman God.

Jesus gathers his disciples in this remarkable place and asks them a question for group discussion. In v. 13 he asks, "**Who do people say that the Son of Man is?**" Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man, so this is really a personal question about himself. He's asking, "Who do people say that I am?" Verse 14 records their response. "**And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'**"

John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah and the prophets; the disciples run through a list of Jewish heroes. Notice how they only told him the best things they'd heard about him. They'd heard people say other things as well. Some said he had the spirit of a demon, but that didn't count right now.

And then in v. 15 Jesus asks them another far more important question: "**But who do YOU say that I am?**" Simon speaks, and like a voice from another planet, he says in v. 16, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" Simon sets Jesus apart from John the Baptist and Elijah and the prophets and says, "You are the Christ." That means "the anointed one." It was the term they used for the Messiah. Simon is saying, "You are the fulfillment of all the expectations of the Jewish people down through the ages. You are the one who breaks the dawn of a new day and new era." He adds, "You are the Son of the Living God." For the Jews, this was another way of saying the same thing, that Jesus was the Messiah, but over time it came to also mean that Jesus was in fact God.

Jesus goes on to offer a fairly lengthy response, and I want to spend the rest of our time looking at it, because what he says is foundational to our understanding of the church. First he blesses Simon for getting it right. **“And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven’”** (v. 17).

He says, “Simon, you’ve been talking to my Father, haven’t you? You didn’t get that insight from your own or intelligence, but from the Father.” Then look what he says in v. 18. **“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”**

He says, “Simon, I’m going to give you a new name. From now on you’ll be called Peter.” The Greek word, by the way, is Petros. It would have been a nickname that any man could be proud of. Petros means “rock.” He says, “Great job, Simon. From now on I’m calling you Rocky, because you’re just like that; you’re just like a rock!”

Then, drawing on that nickname, he makes a promise, “and *upon this rock* I will build my church and the gates of hades will not overpower it.” Now it’s very important to see that he does NOT say “upon this petros I will build my church.” Instead, he says, “upon this petra I will build my church.” It’s a slightly different word. Scholars differ on the significance of that. But it appears he’s not building his church on Peter, rather he’s building it on the truth that just came out of Peter’s mouth - the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

This is the first thing we need to understand about the church, that it is built on the rocklike foundation of Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ the church is nothing; it crumbles; it can’t even exist. We live in a day and age where truth is not viewed as all that important. There are some Christians that would even say that being a Christian is not about believing certain propositions, but rather it’s about experiencing God, being in relationship with God. But here we see that the church is built on the proposition that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And it’s out of embracing that proposition that we actually come into a relationship with the living God.

It strikes me that the church is built on a proposition that cannot be ascertained by flesh and blood! Jesus says, “If you can say with Peter that I am the Christ, you didn’t get this from flesh and blood, you got this from the Father!” You can see how the

church is really a supernatural institution. Apart from the Father’s work, no one can even get the basic insight that’s needed to participate.

## 2. The church is being built by Jesus Christ.

But the good news is that part of the promise is that Jesus says, *‘I will build my church.’* In other words, “It’s not like we’re holding this information back. I want you to participate. I plan on building my church.” Notice that this is HIS work. Yes, we get to participate, but he is the one who gets the job done.

You know, in certain way, we pastors have the easiest job in the world. I’m like a guy who runs a business with an absolute guarantee of success. I have a guarantee of success from Jesus himself. He says, “I will build my church.” So it’s not up to me. It’s not up to us. We get to participate in what he’s doing, but ultimately it’s up to him. We should never operate as a church as if it’s all up to us. We should always operate out of the fundamental conviction that he’ll fulfill his promise; he’ll build his church.

Sometimes we wonder, “What’s Jesus up to? What’s Jesus doing in this world?” Well, here is an answer. He is building his church. To build means, “to form by uniting materials by gradual means into a composite whole.” Another definition is “to develop by a definite process.” That’s what’s going on right now in this world. It’s interesting, when you read the letters of Peter, it’s clear this message really sunk in. In chapter 2 of his first letter, he spoke of the church as “living stones” built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). Every time someone comes to Christ, a new stone is added. One by one, living stones are added and this process continues until he returns for his own.

To use another analogy, Scripture says he is the Groom who will return for his Bride. It sounds funny, but the fact is the Bride is getting heavier every year as she waits for the Groom to come. She’s growing. She’s enlarging her size. She’s getting bigger and bigger as she waits for her groom. And when the Groom shows up, he will say, “You’re mine. Come on home with me.”

## 3. The church belongs to Jesus Christ.

Notice he claims the church as his own. He calls it *“my church.”* It doesn’t belong to a pastor or to elders or even to the congregation. It belongs to him. And because it belongs to him he doesn’t have to clear his decisions with Rome, London, Colorado Springs or some denomination or some group of clergymen.

In biblical terms, he is the Head of the church. He is the final authority. He is the boss. When a church loses a sense of this, it ceases to function as the church. When decisions are viewed merely as the decisions of man, or

some board of directors with all their limitations and prejudices, then it's all about power; it's all about how to get my own agenda enforced, and then the church succumbs to politics and voting and lobbying for certain positions. The question is never what we want. It's what Christ wants.

And sometimes what Christ wants is very different from what we want. Think of the apostle Paul. He was a devoted Jew, a Pharisee. He had persecuted Christians. And then he meets Christ on the Damascus road. And he goes to Jerusalem because he believes he's the perfect guy to preach the gospel to his fellow Jews. He even tells God that. He goes into the Temple and he's praying and he's telling the Lord how he's just the right guy to tell the Jews how Jesus changed his life. It's like, if you want to reach football players, you use a football player. It makes sense. But God says to him, "Paul, you need to pack your bags and get out of Jerusalem. These people won't accept what you have to say. Here's what I want you to do. I want you get as far away from Jerusalem as possible, because I want you to make you a light to the Gentiles." I mean, that doesn't make sense. That's like sending a computer guy from MIT to reach the football team at Notre Dame. We would never do that.

But that's what can happen when we listen to Christ and not our own ideas about how things should be done. Christ is the Head. He calls the shots. And he knows better than we do what to do.

So we've seen that the church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. We have seen that he has made a promise to build the church, and that he himself is the head of the church in that it belongs to him. But we still haven't reached a definition of what the church is.

#### **4. The church is made up exclusively of those called out to put their trust in Jesus Christ.**

Jesus uses a word here, "*church*," that bears looking at a little closer. As I said earlier, as far as we know, this is the first time he used this word. It's the Greek word, ekklesia. It comes from two words: ek is a prefix which means "out from among." Then the word, klesia, comes from the word, kaleo, which means "to call." So when you combine the two, the meaning is "to call out from among." In Jesus' day this was a familiar term to both Jews and Greeks. To the Jews, the word referred to them as God's chosen people, as those people called out from among all the nations of the earth to be God's people. To the Greeks, the word meant something different. The ekklesia was an assembly of citizens at a town meeting. Now here, Jesus adopts this word and uses it to describe the assembling of his called out ones. The church is made up of those called out ones; those called out from among the pool of humanity to be

God's people, to be citizens of God's kingdom.

It's really a wonderful thought. Since the beginning of the church Jesus has been reaching down into the ranks of humanity and selecting, choosing, calling out, and drawing people to himself. These are men, women, boys, girls, all different colors and cultures. He calls them out and places them in his church. That means the church is exclusive by its very nature. Did you know that? I'll bet you never thought of the church as exclusive, but it is. You see, the only way you become a member of the church is to place your total trust and to offer your total allegiance to Jesus Christ. That's how you know you're a "called out one." That's why at CPC we have never emphasized church membership. We believe that those who have put their trust in Christ are already members.

By the way, we're talking here about what is called the universal church. The universal church is made up all true believers everywhere. It crosses denominational bounds and geographic bounds. You don't get into the universal church by going through a membership class or by some kind outward ritual like water baptism. You get in by placing your trust in Christ, which is synonymous with being born again. At that moment you are spiritually baptized, not by water, but by the Holy Spirit.

We're not talking here about joining an institution. It's kind of like being born as an American citizen. If you're born as an American citizen, you're always an American citizen. It doesn't matter where you live; you can live in Greenland. It doesn't matter what language you speak; you can speak Swahili. It doesn't matter what color your skin is. It doesn't matter how much money you have and don't have. You can be filthy rich or dirt poor. You're an American. Being a part of the church is the same thing - if you are born into God's family through trusting in Christ, you're a Christian, you're a member of his church.

To carry the analogy a little further, if you're an American, the only danger you have to worry about is if America is destroyed. Then you're no longer an American because America doesn't exist. Is that true of the church? What if the church is destroyed? Jesus deals with that too.

#### **5. The church will survive and flourish because of the power of Jesus Christ.**

He says, "*the gates of hades will not overpower it.*" What does that mean. Some would say this refers to the fact the church will survive attack. We say, "the best offense is a good defense." But if you think about this,

you'll see this is not about defense, it's about offense. What are gates used for? They're used to keep some people out and to keep other people in. It seems to me this is about offense. The mission of the church is set people free, to get them past the gates of hell. Sometimes the best defense is a good offense.

We've all been watching closely as our nation nears entering into war with Iraq. One way to look at this is that our country will be storming the gates of Iraq to set people free from tyranny. We've got over 200,000 troops standing ready to do that. In the same way, the church stands at the gates of hades ready for attack.

Scholars point out that this phrase, "the gates of hades," often refers to death in ancient literature. Death is what holds people captive. Scripture says that death is the last enemy to be abolished. When Jesus rose from the dead, he conquered death. And now, as people put their trust in Christ, the gates of hades come loose and people are delivered from tyranny. To get them out, we have to bust in and then we have to bust people out. This is about evangelism. This is about proclaiming the gospel and expanding the church. These are the "keys" that Peter is given in v. 19, to bind and loose. The privilege of binding and loosing was seen in the book of Acts as Peter preached the gospel and announced to all who believed that their sins were forgiven.

This past week I decided to through the entire book of Acts in just one sitting. I did it because I wanted to see more about what the early church was really all about. If Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it," how did that play out in the first 100 years of the church?

What I learned surprised me. I learned two things. First, I learned that the whole focus of the book of Acts is on the expansion of the church. In Acts 1 Jesus said, "You shall be my witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to to the uttermost parts of the earth." And that's exactly what happens in Acts. The church starts in Judea, spreads to Samaria, and then finally makes it all the way to Rome, which was considered the ends of the earth. In the process it had to overcome one major barrier - race. Was the gospel for all people, or just for Jews? When they finally got that figured out, nothing could stop them.

The second thing I discovered was that the church never could have done this themselves. Before Jesus left, he told them to stay put. He said to stay in

Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. Only after the Holy Spirit came and filled that little band of 120 people at Pentecost were they allowed to move a muscle! But once he fell on them, they couldn't stop moving.

And what I realized as I read this was that the Holy Spirit was everything Jesus had been to them, but more. As a matter of fact, he's called "the Spirit of Jesus" in Acts 16:7. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and he does everything Jesus did, but now he does it through the body of his worldwide church. Jesus guided, he guides. Jesus healed, he heals. Jesus preached, he preaches. Jesus comforts, he comforts. Jesus still does all these things, but now he does it through his Spirit working in and through all the people who make up his church. And this is how the church expands, when we operate in the power of his Spirit.

One of the commercials I enjoyed during this year's Super Bowl was a spoof on the movie *Castaway*, in which Tom Hanks played a FedEx worker whose company plane went down, stranding him on a desert island for years. In the commercial, a FedEx guy looking like the bedraggled Hanks goes up to the door of a suburban home, package in hand. When the lady comes to the door, he explains that he survived five years on a deserted island, and during the whole time he kept this package in order to deliver it to her. She takes the package and says thanks. But he's curious to know what's in the package that he's been protecting all these years. He asks, "If I may ask, what was in the package after all?" She opens it and shows him the contents, saying, "Nothing really. Just a satellite telephone, a global positioning device, a compass, a water purifier, and some seeds."

You see, the Holy Spirit is like the contents of that package. He's everything we need, both as individuals and as a church to make a difference in the world around us, but so often we don't take advantage of what he offers.

## CONCLUSION

So what is the church? The church is that gathering of called out ones around the world which is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. It's a gathering which he continues to build, stone by stone, and in which he continues to operate as Head. And it's a gathering which is filled and led and empowered by the Spirit of Jesus, preaching, healing, loving, forgiving...just as he did.

Now, wouldn't you say that's a pretty good show for a nickel?

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