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Sermon Summary #22

I Love Jesus but Hate the Church (Another Unbiblical and Insanely Stupid Statement) Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 16:13-20

Think for just a moment about all the many things, the countless things that Jesus Christ does as living Lord and ruler of the world. . . . And yet, despite all this work, all things that he faithfully sustains and directs and even those he destroys, he has one **pet project**, one all-consuming building program, one goal that ranks above all else in all he does: *Jesus Christ is first and foremost devoted to building his church!*

To know who Jesus is and to love him and to be a follower of Jesus and to be committed to the fame of his name is to love his church, his bride, and to be committed to her welfare and growth and success. To say you love Jesus but hate his church is biblical nonsense; it is insane; it is stupid; it is something that Jesus himself simply will not permit. Please know that Jesus will not take lightly the slander of his bride nor the neglect of the most important building project that he has ever undertaken.

How often do we hear: *“I’m just not into church?”* Well, **if you aren’t into church, you aren’t into Jesus, no matter how loudly or passionately you declare your love for him.** You’re deluding yourself if you think you are.

If Jesus is building his church, your absence from it is an act of unconscionable defiance of his will and rebellion against his heart. It places you in direct opposition to him. If he is **building in** and you are **bailing out**, you are fighting against the Son of the Living God. If Jesus has made it his primary and preeminent goal to establish and extend the church, his body, throughout the earth, any decision you and I make that detracts from the health and growth and edification of the church is an act of rebellion and resistance to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. So don’t give me any of this idiotic, high-minded, idealistic, post-modern, emerging church nonsense that says, “Oh, I like Jesus. It’s his church I can’t stand and I refuse to be a part of one.” I can’t prevent you from saying that, but don’t kid yourself that Jesus is anything other than **appalled** at your attitude and actions.

The first thing we need to do is determine what Jesus means by his use of the word “church”.

Capital “C” “Church” refers to all believers in Jesus Christ everywhere. We call it the **universal Church**. This expression of the Body of Christ includes all true believers whether they live in Indonesia or Indianapolis, whether they are physically dead and now living in the presence of Jesus in heaven or are still alive, as we are, here on earth. The universal Church refers to all born-again men and women regardless of race, culture, or geographical location. That is the primary sense in which Jesus uses the term here in Matthew 16. The other sense in which the word is used in the NT (**small “c” church**), in fact, the dominant and most frequent sense, is in reference to **local congregations** such as Bridgeway or Life Church or Crossings or Frontline.

What is happening in our day, **to a degree unprecedented in the last 2,000 years** since Jesus came to this earth, is that people are arguing that it is **not only legitimate but good** for Christians to be members of the capital “C” universal Church but not members or active participants in the small “c” local congregation. In other words, they are saying that they are part of the big “Church” or universal body of Christ simply because they are believers in Jesus. But they need not have anything whatsoever to do with the concrete, visible, local expression of church.

E.g., George Barna’s book, *Revolution . . .*

First, every word of exhortation in the NT epistles, every ethical principle, every theological truth, every fruit of the Holy Spirit, is addressed to people who were active participants and living members of a local church. There is not the slightest hint that any NT author, writing under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, envisioned living out one’s life as a disciple of Jesus Christ independently of or unrelated to the local expression of the body of Christ.

The simple fact is, the Bible knows nothing of the Christian man or woman who is not a living, active, contributing part of a local church congregation.

Second, Barna and his “revolutionaries” contend that the NT says little concerning the nature, structure, function, and necessity of local church life. Have they read the Pastoral Epistles?! See especially **1 Timothy 3:15**.

Third, according to 1 Thess. 5:12, all Christians are responsible “to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.” Again, there is **no evidence to suggest that a Christian can exempt himself/herself from the responsibility of accountability and submission** to the authority of the Elders or duly appointed leaders (whatever title may be given them) of a local assembly.

The prominence of Peter in the early church . . .

(1) What/Who is the “Rock”?

The fact of the matter is that **Peter was, in a very real sense, the rock on which the early church was established.** He was the acknowledged leader among the 12 apostles and the undisputed leader of the early church, as is clear from his preaching on the Day of Pentecost and his influential presence throughout the early chapters of Acts. But it is equally clear that the “foundation” on which the church was built in the first century and has continued to be built up until the present day is the truth about Jesus that Peter confessed: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!”

(2) What are the “keys of the kingdom of heaven”?

The standard RC interpretation . . .

Protestants have rightly understood the “keys” and the one who holds them as referring to **the authority to exclude or permit entrance into the kingdom of God** (cf. Rev. 9:1-6; 20:1-3). Especially helpful is Jesus’ statement to the Pharisees in **Luke 11:52**, “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge [what does he mean by that?]; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”

(3) What is the power of “binding” and “loosing”?

Jesus is saying that Peter’s (or the church’s) decisions are **a reflection or expression of what has already been legislated in heaven.**

“whatever you [singular] shall bind on earth shall be bound [*estai dedemenon* = future periphrastic, perfect passive participle = “**shall have been bound**”] in heaven, and whatever you [singular] shall loose on earth shall be loosed [*estai lelumenon* = “**shall have been loosed**”] in heaven” (Matthew 16:17-19).

“Truly I say to you [plural], whatever you [plural] shall bind on earth shall be bound [*estai dedemena* = “shall have been bound”] in heaven; and whatever you [plural] loose on earth shall be loosed [*estai lelumena* = “shall have been loosed”] in heaven” (Matthew 18:18).

Meaning? To the degree that we the church remain consistent with Scripture, our declarations “shall have **already** been established” in heaven.

At first Peter, and by extension all Christians, “binds” and “looses” by proclaiming the gospel that has already been given to us and making personal applications on the basis of how people respond to it. Example: Simon Magus in Acts 8 . . . based on his attempt to buy the HS with money, Peter declared in **8:21-23** . . . In other words, so long as Peter or we are faithful to the gospel as it has been revealed by God, whatever he or we declare to be bound will have been bound; whatever he or we declare to be loosed will have been loosed. It’s not that he or we decide someone’s spiritual destiny and God says, “OK, I ratify your decision.” In fact, **it’s precisely the other way around.** God doesn’t ratify our decisions. We ratify and give expression to his! God has already revealed that whoever repents and believes the gospel is saved and is granted entrance into the kingdom and the church. He has also revealed that whoever rejects the gospel is excluded. When we declare: “You are bound in sin and you will

experience judgment,” it is based on what we know to be true regarding the gospel. When we declare: “You are loosed from your sins, you are forgiven, and we welcome you into the kingdom,” it is based on what we know already to be true because of the gospel.

READ John 20:23 . . . Thus, the keys of the kingdom of heaven = key to knowledge and understanding of what gains entrance into the kingdom (i.e., the gospel). To Peter and to the church as a whole has been given **the authority to declare, through the gospel, the terms on which entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom is granted.** We don’t determine who can enter, but we can and do declare it (see Acts 2 and sermon at Pentecost; Acts 4:11-12 and 5:1-10). Whatever we “bind” (prohibit) or “loose” (allow) through gospel proclamation concerning Jesus will prove to be **an earthly application or confirmation of what heaven has already decreed.**

Therefore, Peter most certainly is not the Pope over the universal church, far less does Jesus give him authority over the thousands of local church congregations throughout the earth. I say this for several reasons.

(1) Peter never claimed any such power or prestige; in fact, he presented himself in a far different posture - see 1 Peter 5:1-3). (2) No one in NT ever bows to Peter in this way or submits to his absolute leadership. (3) There is no indication that all churches acknowledged his authority as Pope. (4) Peter teaches that all Christians are priests (1 Pt. 2:5,9). (5) Peter nowhere forgives sins (cf. Acts 8:20-22). (6) Peter is nowhere mentioned in Acts after chapter 15. (7) If Peter did possess a unique authority among the apostles and in the early church, there is nothing here or elsewhere about his power to pass this along by way of succession to a follower. (8) Note that whatever power and authority is given to Peter in Mt 16 is given to all in Mt. 18! (9) Finally, when you read the NT epistles you see that the authority to lead and govern the local church is vested in the Elders, not one Elder, certainly not a Pope, but in the plurality of men that the Spirit raises up to provide leadership.

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (v. 18)

Six things demand our attention.

(1) First, Jesus is clear: **“I will build my church.”** He will build it. The survival and growth and resilience of the church is ultimately dependent on the power and purpose and faithfulness of the risen Christ. This is his promise, his purpose, and he will see to it that it doesn’t fail. He doesn’t say to Peter or any of the other apostles nor does he say to us: “You” will build or “Pastors” will build or “missionaries” will build.

This is why Paul said in Romans 15:18 - **“I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed.”** Yes, Christ uses missionaries and church planters and Elders and pastors and worship leaders and you and me and everyone else who is born again. But growth comes from Christ (1 Corinthians 3:6).

This is the work of God the Son through the power of the Spirit, but **he uses people!** He will build his church, but not apart from his people and their grace-empowered efforts to preach and pray and disciple others.

(2) Second, Jesus says **“I will build my church.”** Not “I might” or “I’ll do my best” or “Let’s hope that the church is eventually built.” If you want to participate in a life-long project that **cannot fail**, devote yourself to pouring into the local church. That doesn’t mean local churches don’t occasionally fail. Sadly, all too often they do. But that doesn’t mean the church will come short of being built as Christ has designed. The visible presence of the church may diminish; it may ebb and flow. There are times when the voice and influence of the church are great and times when it is barely noticeable. But the church will never die. Christ **will** build it!

(3) He says **“I will build my church.”** What does it mean for Jesus to “build” the church? **Numerical increase?** Yes. **Spiritual growth and maturity of Christians?** Yes. So **how does he do it?** How does Jesus go about “building” his church?

There are countless ways to answer this question.

The first thing he does to build his church is to die and rise on her behalf! **READ Acts 20:28 and Eph. 5:25-27.**

He does it **by pouring out his Spirit** at Pentecost and into every believing heart. He does not ask of us anything for which he hasn't supplied sufficient strength and power to accomplish it.

He does it **by imparting to every believer spiritual gifts** for the "common good" (1 Cor. 12).

He does it **by inspiring human authors** to record infallibly his guidelines and principles and truths on the basis of which the Church is nourished and grows. See 1 Timothy 3 . . .

He does it **by ordaining structure and leadership** in the body. See 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1ff.; Hebrews 13:17.

He does it **by commissioning us to go and preach the gospel**. Primary means is church planting. He builds his church **by sending forth church planters** to establish new local congregations throughout the earth.

He does it **by calling to himself, through the preaching of the gospel, men and women from every tribe and tongue and nation and people**.

(4) Fourth, he says, "I will build **my** church." It's his, and he's extremely jealous for his bride and will not countenance or tolerate any who stand in his way.

(5) Fifth, he says, "I will build my **church**." Jesus is into building his church, his people, the gathered ones who have heard and by his grace have responded to the gospel. He doesn't promise to build his university. I'm thrilled we have institutions of higher learning. But there's no guarantee that they will last. I'm thrilled we have para-church ministries, but there's no guarantee they will last. I'm happy to see so many service organizations and civic groups that pursue a good and just cause, but there's no guarantee they will last. Jesus guarantees his church will last, because he's building it.

(6) Sixth, and finally, Jesus says, "I will build my church, and **the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**" What are the "gates of hell"? Some say the strength of Satan and demonic cohorts; hence the church will never be defeated by the devil. Of course, that's true. But "the gates of hell" = the powers of death and dying. Hades is the place of the dead in Jewish thought. The gates of hell/hades are the gates that make death look dominant and triumphant, as if Jesus is incapable of overcoming death and redeeming his people from its clutches. Jesus says, "These gates will not stop me from rescuing people from death."

Conclusion: