

## Matthew 16: 13-20, 24-25 || The Church Jesus Imagined

- **Personal Greeting:** Good morning Mercy Church! It is an honor to be here. First let me say, I love your pastor. Pastor Spence has been both a friend and a mentor in ministry. Also, I have heard keeping up with Mercy Church since you launch and have been amazed to see what God has done through you—it is a joy to be here and be a part of it. As you just hear in that video, me and my wife and our three kids are preparing to move to Brooklyn in December to be a part of replanting and revitalizing a church. And we know that we cannot do this work alone, so we are thrilled to have Mercy church as a partner in this work.
- I was in New York City this past weekend, and I had one of the church members come up and speak to me, and something they said has been playing on repeat in my head. This man was probably in his 60s. He spoke with a thick New York accent and walked with cane. He walks up to me and says, **“Sometimes I imagine Jesus coming back and looking at his church, and saying ‘This is not what I had in mind at all.’”**
- That is an interesting thought, isn’t it? Is this thing that we call church anything like what Jesus had in mind when he started it 2000 years ago? Are we in line with what he intended the church to be?
- The question is especially important today because so many people in our culture would say, “I like Jesus but I really don’t like the church.” We have all probably heard the quote attributed to Ghandi: “I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” Why is it the approval rating of Jesus are really high, but the approval ratings of the church are so low?
- That is the opinion outside the church, but what about inside of it?
- I think if you talked to most Christians that would say that they are bored in church. They have a nagging sense that they ought to be doing *something*—that there is some meaningful mission they are supposed to be a part of. But they struggle to know what that is, and so, in the meantime, they sit quietly in church, do their best to pay attention, give some money occasionally, behave as best they can, and wonder if there is something more to this whole deal.
- *Steve Jobs story? In 1983, a man named John Scully was the President of Pepsi. And up until that point, the company had been his life's work. He had helped turn it into one of the world's most recognizable brands. It was doing quite well. When along comes a young guy who was in the process of leading a start up in Silicon Valley- the guys name was Steve Jobs and his company was obviously apple. Jobs was recruiting Scully to come and run the day to day operation of Apple, and Scully repeatedly told him no- why would he leave such an established and successful company for one that may not even be around in 5 years. Then Jobs gave his final pitch. He said, “Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life, or do you want to come with me and change the world?” Scully left that year and joined Apple and the rest is history- most people in this room probably have one of their products in their pockets right now.*
- Why was Jobs pitch so successful? There is something inside of us that craves to be a part of something bigger, to give our lives for a worthwhile cause, to be a part of a mission that is much bigger than us. “Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life, or do you want to come with me and change the world?”

- So, what is the kind of Church that Jesus has in mind? Thankfully he told us. If you have your Bible turn to Matthew 16. We are going to look at the very first time in the New Testament that Jesus mentions the word church and look at the purpose had for it.

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. Skip down to verse 24...

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

### **1. A Church on Mission Knows Jesus.**

- The Church’s mission starts with knowing Christ as he truly is. **Who you say Jesus is, will determine how you follow him.**

- Lets look at verses 13-18. There is a question underneath the mission, and **if we get the answer to these questions wrong there is absolutely no way to get our mission right.** There is a fundamental question lies underneath the mission of the church—the way we answer this question will determine how we live out our faith. It is when the disciples finally saw Jesus for who he really was, that Jesus began to show them the mission of the church.

- First, we have to notice the setting of this story because it is important to understand the conversation that Jesus is having with his disciples. Verse 13: <sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi... Caesarea Philippi was a Roman and a pagan city built within the border of Israel. It sits up on hill overlooking the Jordan Valley. One of the main features of the city is a huge rock face where the Romans had built temple after temple to a myriad of gods—including a temple to Caesar which had written on it: “The son of God, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords.” So, Jesus takes his disciples to this city with all these temples to all these gods, and asks, “Who do people say that I am?”

- <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” The basic thrust of the popular opinion was that Jesus was a prophet. Given Jesus’ preaching and his popular influence, this was a reasonable answer. Jesus in many ways acted like one of the prophets of old. Yet, all these answers fall short.

- But Jesus is not really interested in what everybody else thinks. He is just priming the pump, for the real question. Verse 15: <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

- Here is the question that lies underneath the mission. Who is Jesus really? Not what does the culture think of Jesus, not what do the religious leaders think of Jesus, not what does your family think of Jesus, but what do you really believe about Jesus. Jesus asks a direct question that we all have to answer- “who do you say that I am?”

- Maybe you are in here this morning, and you are still trying to answer that question. That is totally fine. I know Mercy Church is a great place to try to explore who Jesus is, and in trying to answer this question, you are joined by many throughout history.

- I think about CS Lewis, professor at Oxford, who was haunted by this question, “Who was Jesus really?” He started going through his options- was he just a great teacher, was he a manipulative zealot, was he a lunatic running around telling everyone he was God, or was he like Peter said, “The messiah, the son of the living God.”

- *Listen to the way CS Lewis reasoned: A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. (Mere Christianity, 55-56)*

- Verse 16, Peter speaks up as a representative of the whole group and says: <sup>16</sup>“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

- Through God’s divine revelation, Peter gets it right. This phrase that he utters is packed with meaning. “Christ” comes from the word messiah which means anointed one. It was understood as the deliverer who would come to save God’s people. It was understood as “a son of David” that would restore the nation of Israel to glory and independence. This was not just a normal prophet, this was the person through whom God would accomplish his ultimate purposes in the world. The Christ was the king who would bring the kingdom of God.

- The church Jesus envisions has him at the center of everything. A church that knows him as king.

- *How many of you guys remember the show “One Tree Hill”? So they filmed that show near the coast of NC. When I was about 17, some buddies and I decided that we would go and be extras on the set of One Tree Hill. You know when you are an extra, it is actually rare that you are going to end up on tv in any kind of recognizable way. But one of my friends was determined to be on TV. So, the scene was a club scene. There was a bar with all this flashing lights and a stage with a band. Which in hindsight does not make a whole lot of sense, because I think these characters were supposed to be high schoolers. But they get all the extras in place, and my friend weasels his way right behind the main character. At that time, the star of the show was a guy named Chad Michael Murray. The problem with being an extra is that the show is actually not about you. Shocking. But my friend was determined that he was going to be on TV and he worked so hard for his second of fame. The day came when the show aired, and my friend was ecstatic- he had made it on TV. When I watched it- I learned the truth- for one second- there he was my friends face- goofy and smiling in the back ground- right behind the star. I tell this story because we all have the ability to leverage our gifts for something bigger, something greater, something lasting and meaningful, but the problem is that it is not about us. It is about Jesus. We can strive and work and weasel our way into the picture, but Jesus is the main character in the story. He is the star of the show. Not us*

#### **Application:**

- Peter answered it right. How do you answer the question? **Who you say that Jesus really is will determine how you follow him.**<sup>1</sup> A right view of Jesus, leads to a right view of mission

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<sup>1</sup> David Platt, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary, *Matthew*, 216.

- If you think Jesus was a good teacher, you will reference him for occasional knowledge. If you think Jesus was a just a great example, you will look to him for inspiration. But, if you, like Peter, believe that he is the promised messiah who came to earth to save us from our sins, to conquer death and hell, and to rule as King over everything, that changes everything about your life.

## **2. A Church on Mission Makes Jesus Known**

Ok, once we get this fundamental question answered, Jesus begins to talk about the mission and purpose of the church. Jesus gives four metaphors that each tell us something significant about how Jesus envisioned the purpose of the church: **We have a rock, a gate, a key, and a cross.**

### **A. The Rock: The Foundation of the Church's Mission is the people of God proclaiming the gospel of Christ**

- <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. Jesus talks about the foundation of the church being: **The people of God proclaiming the gospel of Christ.**<sup>2</sup>
- On this foundation, I am building a community of people (Ekklesia in the NT always means a community of people)- Jesus said this is my community- a new community- not based on a particular nation, but on Jesus himself.
- Ok, lets stop for a second here. This verse is the most debated verse in church history. More ink has been spilled trying to explain this verse than any other in the Bible, and it all centers on this question: What is the rock on which Jesus is building his church? Traditionally, Catholics have said, "The rock is Peter, and this proves that he was the first Pope." Others have said, "No, the rock is not Peter or any other person, the rock is Peter's confession- the truth about Jesus that he just spoke. But there is actually a third camp, one that says, "No, Jesus is not talking about Peter, or Peter's confession, he is talking about the huge rock in Caesarea Philipi, He is saying that Jesus is building his church even in hard places, places that worship other gods, places outside the religious landscape of Israel.
- So, which is it? All three are true. Let me explain. The foundation of the church is a people, in a place, declaring a message. How could you separate them? A message always comes from a messenger and that messenger necessarily delivers the message in a particular place.
- The church is not a group of trained professionals that do all the teaching. No, Jesus was building a community of people who share the gospel, without the help of the pastor, *in the community*, and start ministries, Bible studies, services initiatives without them. Churches must make discipleship and send them into the world to love and to serve and to share Christ. A church equips and sends their members to take the battle into enemy territory.
- *In 2003, a ship named the SS United States was purchased by Norwegian Cruise Lines—a luxury Cruise company. The government commissioned the construction of this ship to carry troops to battle. The ship's construction was completed in 1952, and it was impressive. It was huge- the largest ocean liner to ever be constructed entirely in the US. It was fast- the fastest ocean liner to ever cross the Atlantic, and it was well design- built by some of the finest naval architect. But for all that this ship had going for it, it never actually accomplished what it was built to do. Eventually, it was converted into a luxury cruise ship that carried presidents and dignitaries. For all the amazing things about this ship, it never actually accomplished what it was commissioned to do.*

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<sup>2</sup> Platt, *Matthew*, 217.

- Could it be that the church has the same problem? Could it be that Jesus has given us a purpose and a mission, and we have busied ourselves with some many other things, that we have never actually accomplished the very thing we have been commissioned to do? To be a people delivering the message of Christ to a particular place.
- What is that message? Peter has already told us. It is the most amazing message imaginable. Jesus is the messiah, the son of the living God and we have the benefit of knowing the rest of the story that Peter didn't know. Jesus would go on and live a perfect life, he would go to the cross and die in our place, and then rise from the dead in power.
- And here is the message, you could summarize it in one word "grace." Do you feel as if know one loves you, God loves you. Do you feel ignored or overlooked, God pursues a relationship with you even when you run from him. Do you struggle with guilt from past sin, God offers complete forgiveness. Are you broken, Jesus the messiah has comes to make restore you. And if this was not enough, what he has done for you personally, he will one day for the entire world- heal all the brokenness and make it new.

**B. The Gate: The Aim of the Church's Mission is Outward and it Cannot Be Stopped.**

- Verse 18: On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
- For years, I understood this verse to be a promise that God would protect the church from all of Satan attacks on us. "The church seems to be under attack... Oh don't worry! The gates of hell will not overcome us." The image of the church here is a walled city trying to hold back an attacking army. I think about that Scene in Lord of Rings where the orcs are attacking the last major stronghold in middle earth. The people put all of their resources into making one final stand, keeping out the orcs, protecting their walls. I think that I our image of the church too often. Hunker down! Fortify the walls!
- But that is not at all what this verse is about. **This verse is about Satan's inability to keep us from plundering his kingdom, not his inability to plunder ours!** As we as the people of God faithfully share the message of Christ, he promises that the mission would advance further and further into enemy territory.
- Think about it. A gate is a defense weapon not an offensive weapon. When is the last time you have been watching the local news and they reported- man in critical condition after being attacked by a gate. No, a gate is a defensive weapon- As the church charges forward on its mission, even the powers of death and hell and Satan will not stop it.
- *There is a famous story about Abraham Lincoln that when the Union army finally pushed the Confederates back into Richmond, one of Lincoln's generals was really excited and celebrating, he burst into Lincoln's office and said, "President Lincoln, I am pleased to tell you we have finally pushed the enemy out of our territory and back into his own." Lincoln, thoughtfully stopped, and looked up and said to the other generals in the room, "When will my generals learn that the WHOLE COUNTRY is our territory?"* **Jesus is not content to be Lord of the Church. He died to be Lord of the whole earth, and he will accomplish his purpose.**
- **The Church's mission is unstoppable.** As it advances, the very powers of death and hell and satan will not overcome it.
- I love the way theologian and pastor JC Ryle puts it: "Nothing can altogether overthrow and destroy [the church]. Its members may be persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned, beaten, beheaded, burned; but the true Church is never altogether extinguished; it rises again from its afflictions; it lives on through fire and water. When crushed in one land it springs up in another. The Pharaohs,

the Herods, the Neros, the Bloody Marys, have labored in vain to put down this Church; they slay their thousands, and then pass away and go to their own place. The true Church outlives them all, and sees them buried each in his turn. It is an anvil that has broken many a hammer in this world, and will break many a hammer still; it is a bush which is often burning, and yet it's not consumed.” –JC Ryle (The True Church)

- As a part of Christ's church do you realize that you are part of a global movement that cannot be stopped.

### **C. The Keys: The Authority of the Church's Mission comes from Christ Himself**

<sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you

The disciples at this point had to be thoroughly confused. Wait a minute... I just said it, you are the king, you are the messiah, and the messiah is supposed to bring the kingdom. What is this deal about the keys and us letting people in? Jesus gave authority to his church. Think of the church like an embassy. An embassy represents a nation on foreign soil. They speak the language of another kingdom, they embody the values of another kingdom.

- There is a lot more to be said about this little verse (We could talk about church discipline or what binding and loosing is), but I want to make the simple point that Jesus is handing out keys to his kingdom.
- My son was asking me about this yesterday morning, what are the keys about? I said, Jesus gives his followers the keys to his kingdom and we get to open the door and invite people in for dinner!
- Imagine this—what if you had a uber rich uncle and he had a mansion on the beach. He gives you the keys and says invite anyone you want. That would be amazing wouldn't it. Now, imagine with me, the uncle says, not only do I own this mansion, but I actually own all the houses in this whole neighborhood. Here are the keys invite everyone, and oh by the way, feel free to make copies of these keys for anyone and everyone. That would be awesome, what an opportunity. What an invitation. Christ gives us even more- the keys to the kingdom of God itself
- What did Peter do with the keys? Peter used those keys at Pentecost, when he let three thousand into the church; at the house of Cornelius, when he admitted the Gentiles.
- The Pharisees thought they had the keys of the kingdom in order to keep people out, Jesus gives them to his disciples to let people in.

*Think about this. First century Jews used to pray, "Blessed are you O God, King of the Universe, Who has not made me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." Then Jesus comes on the scene and shakes everything up. Some of the first converts we see in the book of Acts: The Ethiopian eunuch— a gentile, a girl who had a spirit of divination—a slave, and Lydia— a women. Now all of these people who are unlike you, the outsider, the despised, are family. What are you going to do. You are not to support, accept, encourage people because they are like you, but because there is a whole new community based on the gospel.*

- As the church, we have the keys of the kingdom, and we have been given the chance to open the door wide open for all to come in.

### **C. A Cross: The Posture of the Church's Mission is one Service and Sacrifice**

The last image we see that helps us understand the purpose and mission of the church is a cross. Look at verse 24.<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

- Very simple Jesus says follow me in a life of sacrifice and service. If you want to find true life- it is not in getting all you can, accumulating stuff, amassing comforts, putting yourself at the center.
- No, there are upside down values in the kingdom of God. Christ calls his church to act like him.
- **To serve others-** what does that mean- constantly have a posture where you are putting the good of others before yourself. The Scriptures say, “Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”
- **To Sacrifice-** what does that look like? Giving up something you love for something you love even more, Jesus, his mission, his glory.

***“Are you living a life of sacrifice and service?”*** There is a small overgrown tomb in Cairo. In it lies the body of William Borden, the heir of the Borden milk company. He graduated from Yale in 1909 and had a life of luxury and power laid out for him. Borden is still a big company, but then it was one of America’s biggest. He had become a Christian as a teenager, and told his parents that he was giving his life to bring the gospel to Muslims. Refusing even to buy himself a car, Borden gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions. After only four months of ministry in Egypt, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at the age of twenty-five. Someone asked him right before he died what he thought about his decisions, and he said simply, “No regrets.” On his tombstone in Cairo is a brief description of his sacrifices for the kingdom of God and for Muslim people, followed by the simple phrase, *“Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life.”*<sup>3</sup>

Is there another explanation for your life apart from faith in Christ?

Could someone look at your life and say, “Apart from faith in Christ, that kind of courage; that kind of sacrifice; that kind of hope, makes no sense.””

- That is what I want Brooklyn to say about our church. That is what I want Charlotte to say about this church. What would it look like for Charlotte to look at Mercy Church and say, that really makes no sense apart from a radical faith in Jesus. It seems like everyone else is trying get more and more and more money- the people of Mercy church seem to just give it away freely. Most people seem to be trying to gain more and more power, the people of Mercy church seem to keep giving power away and serving in the places no one else wants to. Most churches seem bent on putting more and more people into their building- Mercy church keeps sending their people out to advance the gospel elsewhere.
- This is the type of Church Jesus envisioned. A church that reflect his life and ministry- Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life away. Jesus made himself nothing- taking the form of a servant.