Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

I Will Build My Church
Scripture: Matthew 16:18-19
Code: 80-113

The desire of my heart this morning to bring to you a word from the Lord which is fitting for our Shepherd's Conference and for the many folks who are with us who are pastoring and leading churches and church ministries around the country and the world. And with that in mind I have been drawn, I'm sure, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit to a marvelous text in Matthew chapter 16 and I would invite you now to open God's Word to that chapter...Matthew 16. And I would like to read from verse 16 on, down through verse 19...Matthew chapter 16.

"And Simon Peter answered and said, `Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' 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. 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. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'"

I want to focus our attention on one particular part of this text and that is verse 18 where the Lord says, "I will build My church." Men can build buildings and men can build organizations but only Jesus Christ can build the church. There are churches built by men, some of them you have attended, no doubt, as I have. But here our Lord says, "I will build My church," the only one approved by God and supernaturally constructed.

For all of the years of labor here at Grace Church, it has been my prayer and my desire to see Christ build His church. I never want to come to the end of my life and look back and wonder if He did it or I did it. I want this church to be the church that Christ is building. That's why we resist the gimmicks and techniques and manipulations and all the rest that people use to increase attention or numbers, all we want to do is get out of the way so the Lord can build His church His way. And it has been an exciting ministry here for me, and for you, I know, because we have seen Christ build His church.

This particular passage of Scripture, I think, is the most hopeful one in all of the New Testament with regard to encouragement for those in the ministry because it gives us the promise of God that He will build His church. As the disciples walked along the dusty roads of Caesarea Philippi, they were in a kind of exile. The leaders, the religious and the political powers as well as the people of Israel had rejected them. They had also rejected their message and their leader, the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it was apparent by now to the disciples that some of the Jews not only weren't interested in Jesus but

wanted Him dead. Down in verse 21 the immediately following passage, Jesus tells His disciples that He will go to Jerusalem and be killed.

Now the disciples knew that He was the Messiah and the confession of Peter in verse 16, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," really summed up what they had all come to know by the revelation of God. They were convinced that this was God in human flesh, God the Son and indeed the Messiah, the anointed King, the promised one. But they seemed to be alone in that conviction. Few people identified with it and affirmed it. For the most part, both the Kingdom and the King were being rejected wholesale. Things looked very bleak and very discouraging. And in just a few moments when Jesus said He was going to die, it was a statement that absolutely devastated whatever was left of hope in them...so much so that Peter said, "No, no, it can't happen, it won't happen." And Jesus rebuked him and said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan. You're a stumbling block to Me, you're not setting your mind on God's interest but on man's."

I mean, the disciples had really believed all along that indeed when the Messiah came there would be a great spiritual awakening and revival. And they would have expected Israel to turn from sin and embrace the Messiah. They also expected that there would be a wholesale political takeover of the land of Israel at first and all that Israel was once promised, stretching from the Mediterranean east to the rivers of the Mesopotamian Valley and they would have expected that the Messiah would have, first of all, thrown Rome out and broken the Roman yoke and begun, as it were, to establish a kingdom that embraced the world. And it wasn't going that way. The little group had retreated north to the very farthest northern point in the land of Israel, right up on the border, what we now know as the border of Lebanon, at the foot of the mountains in that obscure little town populated mostly by border Gentiles called Caesarea Philippi. They went there for meditation. They went there for some instruction. They went there for prayer. They went there to regroup. They went there to sort out the plan and what was supposed to be happening. And they went there for safety.

And all in all, it looked like the Messianic program of redemption was a failure. And they had put a lot into it. And they had abandoned everything. And the promise of it and the hope of it was so bright, but what was happening didn't at all square up with their cherished anticipation. They were struggling with unfulfilled hopes. They were struggling with the fact that they had made a major investment of their life in something that looked like it wasn't going to be what they wanted it to be. The rejection and the hostility of the people all around them was not what they had planned. There they are huddled up in that lovely area, an area of beauty even today, where the head waters of the Jordan begin and rush down through the Jordan Valley. A beautiful little clear stream rolls out of the hills. I've sat at that stream, drunk that water and eaten a little piece of Arab bread and thought about the disciples that day when they were there and wondering why it all seemed to be crashing down around their ears.

Because of their despair and broken heartedness that they were experiencing and because Jesus was about to tell them they hadn't seen the worse yet, He was going to be killed, He has to say to them what He says to them in verse 18. He has to fan the flame of whatever smoldering hope is left. And so He says to them, "I will build My church," as if to say, "I know it doesn't look very hopeful, I know the plan isn't unfolding the way you thought it would, I know that by all outward appearance it isn't working, but I will build My church and nothing is going to stand in its way, not even the gates of Hades." And Jesus is reminding them that you can't always tell by appearance. Do you remember the church at Smyrna? And the Lord gave the letter to John to send with the messenger to the church at Smyrna, part of the letter says, "I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich." Couldn't tell by appearance. Smyrna looked poor, it was rich. And later on to the church at Laodicea the Lord said, "You say I am rich and increase with goods and have need of nothing and you don't realize you are poor and you are blind and you are naked." Can't always tell by appearance.

It didn't look well but Jesus said, "I'll build My church in spite of what it looks like." And these men needed that confidence. And I am sure that through the history of the church as it has ebbed and flowed through all the years of redemptive planning, that there have always been times when God's few sat back and said, "It looks like this is the end...it looks like we're being swallowed up...it looks bad and bleak." And these disciples were only the first of many who have gone back to the confidence-building statement of Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18, "I will build My church."

The church through its history has been beleaguered, it has been persecuted, it has been martyred and rejected and maligned. It has been ignored. It has been liberalized and apostatized and the poor, ignoble people of God have looked like losers. But the truth is, we're not. And here in this brief passage the Lord affirms the triumph.

Now as we contemplate the rich meaning of the statement of verse 18, I want to help you look into some of the characteristics, some of the features of the church that Christ is building. First, let's look at the certainty of it...the certainty of it. Without any qualifiers, without any caveats, Jesus said, "I will build My church." That is a divine promise. That is a promise from Christ who is the true and faithful witness, from Christ who is God who cannot lie. That is a promise from the one who faithful and true, the one who cannot speak an untruth, who cannot promise and it not come to pass. That is a promise from the one who keeps His word...I'll build My church.

The future tense does not imply that God has not been doing it, it does imply emphatically that He will continue doing it until its completion. There is so much inherent in this that may escape us. Let me remind you of something in Titus chapter 1, for a moment. In Titus chapter 1, the first two verses the Apostle Paul gives the three main components of his ministry, the three main elements of his preaching and teaching.

One, he was sent from God, a messenger of Christ for the faith of those chosen of God. That is he had an evangelistic purpose. He was to come and bring the message of the gospel which elicited saving faith in the elect. Secondly, his ministry involved the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness. And he was come also for edification. He was come for evangelism leading to salvation and edification leading to sanctification. And then he says in verse 2, "I was also come to instruct in the hope of eternal life." And here he says I was come for encouragement leading to security, endurance. My ministry then is evangelism, and edification and encouragement. It is to bring people to salvation and sanctification and security about the permanent reality of their eternal life. And all of this...look at the end of verse 2, he says...God who cannot lie promised. And when did He promise it? Long ages ago. Literally what that says is before time...before time. God made a promise to redeem people before time. He made a promise that there was an elect who would come to faith, who would hear the truth and pursue a path to godliness and live in the hope of eternal life. And He made that promise before time.

Go back to 2 Timothy 1:9, just keep that thought, 2 Timothy 1:9, "God...says verse 8...who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity but now has been revealed." Here it is again. God made a promise, God made a plan involving Jesus Christ, a plan of salvation way back in eternity, before time. That's why Hebrews 13:20 calls this the "eternal covenant."

Now the question immediately that comes to mind is: If God made such a promise to redeem humanity, to whom did He make it? If He made it before anyone was created, if He made it before time, if He made it back in eternity, to whom did God make the promise? In John 17, listen to verse 24, "Father, I desire that they also...listen to this...whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am in order that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me, for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world." That is...just a massive statement that's so transcendent I don't know that we can even capture its significance. What Jesus is saying is this..."Father, there are some people that You have given Me and I want them to be with Me where I am in Your presence, I want those You've given Me to see My glory for You loved Me...here's the line...before the foundation of the world." Now let's follow the thought, let's pull it together.

Before time, way back in eternity, before the foundation of the world, the Father loved the Son. He loved the Son so perfectly that He desired to give to the Son a gift that would somehow express His love. And the greatest gift that the Father could give the Son as an expression of His love was a redeemed humanity. And Jesus is simply saying here, "I want them that You are giving Me, that You've chosen before the foundation of the world, I want them to be with Me where I am to see My glory." In other words, "I affirm the plan, I want it to happen." And in a sense, in the wanting and the affirmation of verse 24 is the inevitability of the cross.

Go back to John 6...back to John 6, familiar words, but here them maybe in a new way. Verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me and the one who comes to Me I'll certainly not cast out." Why? Because he's a gift from the Father, he's a gift of love from the Father, I'm not about to cast him out, I'm not about to spurn the Father's love, "For I have come down from heaven...why?...not to do My will but the will of Him who sent Me." And what is the will of Him who sent Me? "That of every one He gives Me I lose none, but raise them up on the last day. So this is the will of My Father that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

In other words, Jesus said, "Look, I've come into the world to do the Father's will. And the Father's will isn't some multiplicity of things, the Father's will is for Me to come and do the redemptive work on the cross which will provide the salvation by which the Father can give Me...the elect. He wants to give Me this redeemed humanity as a gift of His love and I have come down from heaven to do My part to make that a reality. And My part, obviously, is to die and to rise again that I might provide resurrection for them."

So when Jesus said He had come to the Father's will, what He meant by that was to fulfill the plan of God in eternity past, the covenant that God made to give to Christ a redeemed humanity and Christ in order to receive that redeemed humanity had to play a part, namely to come and die on the cross. The wonderful, wonderful conclusion of this is in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, don't turn to it, I'll just read it to you, it says there, that ultimately, "Everything will be put in to Christ's control and when all things are subject to Christ, then He says, all things are put in subjection. What does He do? The Son Himself then, verse 28, will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all." What will happen? The Son will say, "I have received this redeemed humanity as a gift of Your love, I have received them, Father, and now I give them back to You as a gift of My love to You." This is immense. When we read in the Scripture Jesus' words, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it," what He means to say is, "I am coming to earth and I am going to do the redemptive work and I am going to do what must be done to redeem all those who are the elect from all the way back in the beginning to all the way to the end, My death will make provision for all the elect, I will do that, nobody will be lost, I will raise them all because this is My part in fulfilling a role in the Father's plan to give Me a love gift, a redeemed humanity which in the end I will give back to Him as an expression of My own love."

The certainty then of the church is based on the unchanging, unwavering, absolute promise of God and the power of God to effect the fulfillment of the promise. That's why when you go in to the book of Acts you read things like this in chapter 2 verse 39, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off...that is Jews and Gentiles...as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." That's why in verse 47 you see the Lord adding to their number day by day those who were being saved as He is collecting His redeemed assembly. That's why in chapter 5 verse 14 it says, "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women were constantly adding to their

number." That's why in chapter 11 of Acts and verse 24, "Considerable numbers were being brought to the Lord." And over in chapter 13 verse 48, it just keeps going like this, we read, "And when the Gentiles heard this they began rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." The book of Acts starts the flow after Christ's resurrection of gathering the redeemed humanity.

And so the Lord says, "I will build My church." And it's a far bigger plan than any of us could ever conceive of as He fulfills His part in the Father's expression of love to Himself. Will you please understand this? The primary reason for your salvation is not to keep you out of hell, it's not to make you happy. The primary reason for your salvation is so that you can spend forever and ever and ever and ever glorifying Jesus Christ. That's the Father's purpose and the Son's purpose is to have you do the same for the Father. That's the infinity of this glorious plan.

This simply means that we're not building the church. Do you understand that? We cannot figure out a better way to get more folks in than God had in mind. Nor can we mess it up so fewer arrive than He planned on. It doesn't matter what human means we use, we cannot increase the number that God has ordained, and nor can we decrease it by our ineptitude. We are endeavoring to be holy and faithful and obedient so that God can do His work and we may have the privilege of being instruments in it. There is such certainty here. Against all the opposition of human wisdom and all the assistance of human wisdom, against all the efforts of carnality and ineptitude and indifference and apathy and apostasy and liberalism and error, against all the denominationalism and fanaticism and everything else, the true church will be built. If God's going to do it, it can't be stopped.

Secondly, I want you to notice the intimacy of it...the intimacy of it. Jesus said, "I will build My church." It was His by right, the Father said it was His. The Father made a pledge to give the Son a redeemed humanity, it was His. He personally possesses and owns it. That's such a tremendous truth. You start to see that unfold more clearly, don't you, in John 10 where those magnificent words of Jesus in the context of speaking of Himself as a shepherd says, verse 14, "I am the Good Shepherd, I know My own...I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father and I lay down My life for the sheep...I know Mine and Mine know Me and they belong to Me." You are not your own, says Paul, you are bought with a price. Acts 20:28, "He's purchased you with His own blood." First Peter says that it is the blood of the Lamb without spot, without blemish. The price has been paid. John 10 further down in verse 15, the next verse, "I lay down My life for the sheep." And the fruit of that comes in verse 27, "My sheep then hear My voice, I know them, they follow Me, I give eternal life to them, they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of My hand, My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand, I and the Father are one."

He was trying to tell those Jews that this was all about an eternal plan between the first member of the trinity and the second member of the trinity and that nobody was going to slip through the cracks.

And that He was collecting a redeemed people that were His own and they belonged to Him and they were so much His that no one could ever stop them, prevent them from becoming His. Nor could they ever be snatched out of His hand or the Father's hand. Instead of the Jews saying "Hallelujah," they picked up stones to kill Him.

But Jesus is saying when He says "I build My church" that I have a personal relationship with these people, they are Mine. He is not just the architect and the builder, not just the key chief cornerstone, but He is the very life of the church, so much so that "Nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." "Christ in you, the hope of glory," Paul told the Colossians. He lives in His church. His church is truly His church. His life pulses in the very veins of His church. Christ lives in you. You are His and He is yours. That's the intimacy of it. And the great transcendent reality is that you are His because the Father has given you to Him. You are a love gift from the Father to the Son for the purpose of spending all eternity glorifying Him. That's because the Father loves Him so much. He wants all of this humanity gathered from the very beginning of redemptive history to the end to spend all eternity praising His Son. You're His in that sense. That's your purpose.

Thirdly, He speaks of the identify of the church. And I suppose at this point we need to ask that fair question...what does church mean in this context? Now you've got to realize that these disciples were sitting up there in Caesarea Philippi and they don't know anything more than what Jesus has been teaching them. They know nothing about the future unless the Lord has given them some window on it. They don't know what a church is. They've never seen a church cause there's never been one. They don't know what a steeple looks like. They've never seen a church building. They've never heard of a Baptist or a Presbyterian or a Lutheran or Grace Church or a Bible church. They've never heard of any kind of organization with that name formally. They've never met a pastor or an elder or a deacon. They don't know anything about a church.

So when Jesus says I will build My church, they don't think what you think. They don't think what I think. Somehow you've got to fill in that a little bit. What did they think when He said "I will build My church?" I mean, after all, this is the first time the word "church" is ever used in the New Testament and it's only used twice in the gospels, the other one being in Matthew 18. It is not a technical term here for the institution that we have come to know. It is not some dispensational promise about a future entity that's going to come into existence, though it is true the church did come into existence in its formal sense on Pentecost. But I believe what He is saying here is just a general expression without the precise meaning that comes into play later on the book of Acts and ultimately in the epistles. It has the non-technical sense of an assembly, a congregation. In fact, most likely, though the New Testament was given by the Holy Spirit in the Greek language to the writers, when Jesus spoke He likely spoke in Aramaic. And if He was speaking here in Aramaic, the common every day language of the time, He would have said, "I will build My kahoul(??)," that word would mean congregation, the body of people that come together in the name of the Lord. Even ekklesiafor Jews who knew the Greek language would have the same kind of meaning as a gathering of Jews in a

synagogue, an assembly of people to worship God, a non-technical word. The basic word in Greek simply meant a town meeting, or a gathering of freemen to discuss whatever they wanted to discuss.

So when Jesus said "I will build My church," all they would understand is "I am going to assemble My redeemed people...I am going to gather My congregation of the worshipers of God who worship Him in truth and in Spirit." He was promising the assembly of a redeemed people. To support this non-general...I should say this general non-specific use of the word, you need only to be reminded that in Acts 7:38 the word ekklesiais used to refer to Israel. In Acts 19 verses 32 and 41 it's used to refer to a pagan Gentile crowd. And in Hebrews 12:22 to 24 it's used to refer to all the redeemed of all the dispensations. So there are times when it does have a more technical usage. There are times such as this time when it has a non-technical usage. He is simply saying, "I'm going to collect My people." If you compare it with verse 19, twice in verse 19 He makes reference to the kingdom of heaven, and that is to say all of those who are the subjects of the king in the kingdom which is entered by salvation. I'm gathering My redeemed people. I'm gathering the elect humanity into that redeemed congregation. I believe that's what He is saying. I'm bringing in the subjects who will be in My kingdom.

Later on there will be a more defined understanding of the church in its dispensational distinction as apart from Israel. Such definition starts to emerge in the book of Acts, gets particularly refined in Romans chapter 11 and other places in the epistles. But here is the promise of Christ that in spite of what it looks like, the continuity of the kingdom is going to go on. The assembly of redeemed people is going to go on. I mean, these Jews had a sense of history. They were part of the redeemed in this gospel era with the Messiah in their very presence. And they knew there were ancient folks who had believed in God and been true saints and true believers and Jesus is saying I want you to know that these are all My people from the beginning to the end, the church is no more the possession of Christ than are the Old Testament saints, this is all My people and I will continue to gather them. This generally focuses on the glorious continuity of God's saving and redemptive purpose.

There is a distinction as you will note later on between Israel and the church. It stays distinct even on in to the prophetic literature, clear down to the very end when God will bring a kingdom to His people Israel as a nation. But Israel and the church while having some discontinuity in the distinction, also have continuity in being all together ultimately the eternally redeemed people of God who forever and ever and ever will give glory to the Son and then back to the Father as well. Nations come and nations go, history ebbs and flows, time marches on, people attack the church but it remains...it remains...and it grows...and it grows. So our Lord is building a church whose certainty is that it is built by the promise and power of God whose intimacy is that each in it is His own personal possession and whose identity is that they are the redeemed people of God who come by faith.

And most importantly, the heart of the whole message, the fourth point, the foundation of it, the foundation of it...in verse 18 He says, "And I also say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock I

will build My church." Now that's a very important statement.

As you know, the Roman Catholic Church says this verse means that the church is built on Peter and it establishes him as the first head of the church. They say this passage proves that Peter was the first Pope...the Pope, Catholic literature writes, is crowned with a triple crown as King of heaven, King of earth and King of hell. He wields the two swords, the spiritual and the temporal. The Catholic Church says that the Lord conferred here on St. Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of the whole Church. And that same spiritual authority that was in Peter is now incarnate in the succession of Popes and Bishops of Rome since they succeed Peter. To be true followers of Christ, they say, all Christians both among clergy and laity must be in communion with the See of Rome and they must understand that Peter still rules in the person of his successors. The Roman Catholic Church has used this verse to establish Catholic tradition, Catholic authority, Catholic power. That view, of course, is in grave error.

Peter can't be the head of the church, he can't be the foundation of the church since Christ is both in the truest and purest sense. As Lenski said, "No Peter could hold up this structure."

The Protestants, on the other hand, have typically said that this is a play on words and it really doesn't refer to Peter at all. What Jesus is saying is you are Peter, petras, little stone, but upon this rock, petra, rock bed, cliff, I will build My church. And it's kind of an adversative there, the word "and" and should be translated "but" on the other hand, you're a little rock but on a rock bed I'm going to build My church and the rock bed of which He speaks would be Peter's confession in verse 16, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That may be. That may be. Certainly that's a viable way to understand the passage.

But let me take you to another understanding that I think may be more accurate. It does refer to Peter. When He says, "You are Peter and upon this rock," He changes tense for obvious reasons that are demanded by the use of the Greek language and the modifying terms. But He is talking about Peter and what He is saying is, "Peter, I'm going to build My church on you in this sense, the fact that you are articulating the truth. I'm not going to build it on your office, I'm not going to build it on your rank, I'm not going to build it on your worthiness, I'm not going to build it on your talent. No, I'm going to build the church on you because you are affirming the foundational truth of the church, namely that I am the Christ the Son of the living God.

What's the point? The point is, I believe Christ builds His church, builds His redeemed assembly through all of redemptive history on one premise and that is the articulation of the truth of divine revelation. And I believe He's saying what He says to Peter but He knows that Peter is only representative of the rest because in Ephesians 2:20 he says, "The church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and the prophets." All then who articulate divine revelation are foundational to the building of the church.

My, what a word this is for us today. The church is not built on clever technique. It's not built on manipulation. It's not built on a strategic marketing plan. The church will be built on those who affirm divine revelation which is foundational to the church. Peter was one of those key persons...the Apostles and prophets...who confessed foundational revelation. And as I said, all the Apostles, I think, are included in the Lord's statement. Peter is not alone the foundation but as the confessor of the great foundational truth of the person of Christ and all that God had revealed in Him, he becomes foundational to the building of that era. And I believe that even today when the Lord is building His church, He's building it on those who articulate revelation, those who proclaim the Apostles' doctrine. What did the early church do when it met together? They gave themselves to the Apostles' doctrine. The Lord is still building His church on those who confess that. The Lord will still build His church on those who unabashedly and unashamedly proclaim Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and who proclaim the Apostle's doctrine. Those who reiterate the same foundational truth are the ones on whom Christ is building His church. There are churches being built then that aren't being built on this foundation, they aren't Christ's church, they're somebody else's church.

This does not establish the primacy of Peter. If you think for a moment that this establishes the primacy of Peter, then ask yourself why in a few verses He looks Peter in the eye and says, "Get thee behind Me, Satan?" The point is, if you speak the Word of God, I'll build My church on you. If you speak the word of Satan, you're in My way...you're a stumbling block, not a foundation stone. Foundation is true and revelation.

Fifthly, as we look at this text, we see the invincibility of the church...the invincibility of it. Verse 18 says, "And the gates of Hades shall not overpower it...the gates of Hades shall not overpower it," shall not prevail against it, some say. Now what does it mean? Well I've heard all kinds of things saying that we in Christ are strong and when the enemy attacks us we can stand and be triumphant. It's not talking about an attack. No army ever attacked another army carrying a bunch of gates. Gates are not a weapon. "Oh, here comes the army carrying the gates." No, they don't do that. This is not an attack.

"Gates," what does that mean? Well what's a gate for? Keep somebody in. That's the idea. It's the idea that the church is going to be contained, wrapped up, imprisoned, held in so that it can't escape. The word "prevail" has the idea as translated in the NAS of overpowering, being dominant, winning a victory.

There aren't any gates that can dominate the church. There isn't any fence, any wall, any fortress that can close the church in and keep it captive. Not even...He says...the gates of Hades. Hades always means death, it's the grave, Sheol. And what He is saying is, "There isn't any gate that's going to lock up the church, not even death." That's the idea. Not even the realm of death. The power of death itself cannot hold the church. Why? Because in Christ we have conquered death.

That's His point. This is the promise of resurrection. This is all involved in the promise as articulated in John 6, "I will raise him up at the last day," it doesn't matter what Satan does, though he has the power of death as Hebrews 2 says, it doesn't matter what he attempts to do in destroying the church and killing the church. As Henry Martin said, the great missionary to India to his persecutors, "You cannot harm me, you can only kill me." The mighty river rushes underground and some day will burst out again in resurrection life. Jesus said, "Because I live you shall live also." Jesus Christ came down and He died and He went into the grave and when He came out of the grave, Revelation 1:18 says, He had in His hand the keys of hell and death. And He unlocked the gate and let everybody out into glory. This is the promise of resurrection, nothing is going to prevent the church from being what it's to be in the end.

You see, I think Satan knows the plan. And the reason Satan wants to devastate and destroy the church and keep it captive is so that it can't get released into heaven and spend all eternity praising God. I think every time you sing a hymn he detests it. His whole kingdom detests it. And the last thing he wants is a whole redeemed humanity occupied forever in glory, praising the Son and praising the Father, and he wants to stop it by taking the church prisoner in the grave. He can't do it. Our spirits don't even go there, they go immediately to be with the Lord and our bodies some day will be released in the great resurrection to be joined with our redeemed spirits and forever in the presence of God will do what we were originally called and elected to do. The church will burst to life and accomplish its purpose.

The certainty of the church, the intimacy of the church, the identity of the church, the foundation of the church, the invincibility of the church, of the redeemed, and lastly, just a word about the authority of it. Verse 19, "I'll give you the keys." Oh I love that. The guy who has the keys has a lot of power. Aren't we always looking for the guy with the keys? He can let you in, he can keep you out. He can say, "I'm sorry, sir, I'm not letting you in there." You give somebody keys, they have authority. Jesus says, "I'm going to give you the keys."

The keys to what? To the Kingdom. You can unlock it and usher people in. Can lock it and keep them out. You say, "Do we have that kind of authority? Absolutely. Do you know that I can say to a man, "Sorry, my friend, the Kingdom is closed to you," so can you. I can say to another man, "Yes, sir, the Kingdom is open to you."

You say, "Wait a minute, how can you have that power?" I have that power. "On the basis of what?" On the basis of what those people do with the gospel. If a man rejects the gospel, I can say, "Sorry, the Kingdom is closed to you, you're outside." If a person comes in repentance and faith and affirms Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and says, "I want to know Christ, I want to come into the Kingdom and I put my faith and trust..." I can say, "You're in the Kingdom, come in, sir." It's not based upon my rank or my office, it's based upon this message, isn't it? Don't we do that all the time? Don't we take the gospel to someone, present the gospel...in humble faith they respond, turn from their sin,

embrace Jesus Christ...and don't we announce to them, "Welcome to the Kingdom?" And aren't there times when we present the gospel to someone and their heart is the stony ground and we have to say to them, "I'm sorry, the door is shut to you?"

The point is this that we have the wonderful opportunity of being gate keepers in the Kingdom. As the Lord is assembling His elect, redeemed people from all of humanity to praise Him forever and ever, He employs us as door keepers to usher people in, tell others they can't come based upon how they respond to the gospel.

He said that to Peter but it wasn't just unique to Peter. It was true of all the other Apostles, it's true of all preachers, it's true of all of us. And then He says this, "Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. And whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And that particular statement has been misused repeatedly and confused. It's very simple, not even complicated. The rabbis used to say, "If you don't repent your sin is bound to you. If you do, it's loosed from you." That's an old rabbinical concept. The rabbis would say, "You obey the Law, you're free. You disobey the Law, you're bound in sin." And that's what that's saying. Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

In other words, when you say to someone..."You won't repent, you're bound in your sin," heaven is in agreement with that. You're doing on earth what has been done in heaven, like the disciples' prayer says. And if you say to someone, "You know, I want to tell you, because of your confession of faith in Jesus Christ and your affirmation that He's your Savior and Lord, your sins are loosed from you, you are forgiven," and when you said that you know you're saying on earth what heaven has already said. So here we are, this great eternal plan is being worked out that God ordained before time began with the Son and heaven is on schedule with it and we get to be the earthly gate keepers who act in harmony with heaven. What a privilege.

That's what we're to do. We're all about telling people how to get through the door and telling them whether they've properly responded in order to enter or whether they have improperly responded and are shut out. You see, do you get the picture that it isn't ingenuity that God is looking for? It isn't the ability to develop a back door and say, "Well this one is a little tougher, let me take you to the easy door." All God wants out of us is the recognition of what we've been called to do and that is to be door keepers to the Kingdom, to preach the unadulterated crystal-clear gospel of Christ and then to tell men their consequence in believing and not believing. We are the authority in the world. We are the standard in the world. We're not here to just kind of share little niceties with people, we're not here to coddle them and cajole them along and make them feel the warm and fuzzies and hopefully wake up some day and feel nice about Jesus. We are here to tell them there is a Kingdom and it has a door and here's how you enter it. And it's urgent. And it's not something we can postpone while we try to smooth out their ruffled feelings.

We have a tremendous responsibility. The Lord will build His church, it will be what He wants it to be. It's going to be complete. No one is going to slip through the cracks. He'll raise everybody at the last day. And He's asked us to participate in it and to be partners with Him in opening the door and letting His own in. We're part of a winner, not a loser, folks. No matter what it looks like, don't be fooled. We may look poor, we're rich. We may look like we're losing, we're winning.

Father, we thank you for this great confidence that comes to us through Your Word. What a joy it is as we put ourselves with those disciples on that day who heard these thrilling words of hope and promise. What a joy. It must have been for them confusing even yet as things continued to unfold and looked so negative. But oh what a day when they saw the risen Christ...what a day when the Spirit came at Pentecost. And we've seen that day extended for centuries and millennia and we have seen so much of the triumph of the church, our faith should be so much greater than those disciples because of what we've seen.

Father, help us just to get in line and to get alongside of You and do the church the way You want it done and preach the way You want preaching to be done and teach the way You want teaching to be done...to lay the foundation of biblical truth, to be door keepers who preach the message of saving grace. Keep us faithful and filled with joy as we anticipate the ultimate triumph yet to come for Christ's glory we pray. Amen.

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