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

7 Foundational Elements of a True Church, Part 1
Scripture: Matthew 16:13-28
Code: 90-294

Well, you can take John MacArthur out of the church, but you can't take the church out of John MacArthur. When I'm away from Grace Church physically, I'm not away from Grace Church in my heart. The church is never out of my mind ever. And not just the church in general, although that is true as well, but this particular church. I am so bound up in the life of the church that I really can never be apart from it. I don't think about other things nearly as much as I think about the church and the life of the church and the ministry that God has given me in the church. I don't think about, you know, the radio programs and books and things like that. When I pull back and get away and I'm with my books and with my Bible and when I'm thinking and planning and meditating, it's the church that dominates my heart. So these have been months where physically I have been away, but spiritually I've been here. Even like Paul said, "If I'm...if I'm absent in body, I am present in spirit." I have no right really to be compared to the Apostle Paul, but he is my hero and my mentor and I'm trying to follow his example and I think I understand what it means, "When I'm away in body, I'm still here in spirit." I understand what it's..what he's saying when he says, "I have birth pangs until Christ is fully formed in you." I understand what he means when he says that on top of everything I suffer, there's that daily concern for the church. It just never goes away. And that's as it should be because I'm called by the Lord of the church to Him and to His church.

And so, I'm always concerned about the church. I thought a lot about it. Thought a lot about what I would say when I come back. And I want to share what's in my heart and it has to do with the church and it's pretty basic.

The question I am most asked, or the dilemma I am most presented with is this...people saying to me, writing to me, telling me on the telephone, "I can't find a church." I hear that constantly from people I know very well and people I don't know at all, from people I talk to and to people whose letters I read, lots of people who write to me and write to Grace To You, "We can't find a church. We've looked everywhere. We can't find a church." There are some of you who are here, you've come here from some other part of the country or some other part of the world because you couldn't find a church...at least that's what you say, "We couldn't find a church." On the surface somebody might say, "Well that ought to be pretty easy, look for a steeple." But then again, architecture has changed a lot. You might...you might not even find a steeple in your town. And somebody else might say, "Well look for a cross." Well you might not even find a place that has a cross up. Well maybe you could look for a stained-glass window. And if all else fails. Find a sign that says "Church," that ought to do it. But in some places, that might be hard because it might be called a gathering, or a kind of place. It might

sound more like a social club or restaurant than a church. You say, "Well stick your head in and see if you hear a choir. Well that might not be it either, you might not find one there.

How do you find a church? Well, you say, that's ridiculous, they're everywhere. I looked in the yellow pages where I live and in my community not far from here there are 125 that claim to be churches, they're at least listed under church in the yellow pages. They're all over the place. I mean, I'm sure if you went from the freeway down here to the freeway that way, along Roscoe Boulevard, there...you've got to be within site of a half a dozen churches. What do you mean you can't find a church?

But I think we understand what people say when they say, don't we? Can't find a church that's really a church. And this is very, very frustrating. And somebody who is a little bit uninformed might say, "Are you kidding me? There are churches all over the place." But the truth of the matter is, people who know what they're looking for do find it very difficult to find one because there are a lot of places that use the word but don't deliver. Somebody might say, "Well you're just being too picky because the fact of the matter is, there are lots of churches and you know what? You can find one stylized just the way you like it. You can find a church where they dress the way you want to dress, where they meet at the time you want to meet and for the length of time you want to meet." It's interesting, I was just thinking about that. In the past the clock used to be on the outside of the church and the chimes would ring so that nobody would be late. Now the clock is on the inside of the church in front of the preacher so he's not going to talk too long. Big difference. But you surely can find a church where you can dress like you want to dress, go when you want to go, stay as long as you want to stay, pick your day, pick your time and pick the kind of talk you want to hear. I mean, we never had so much variety. Why are you having such a difficult time finding a church?

Well the answer is, not everything that says it's a church is a church. So this is sort of a...you know, let's go back to the basics...this is sort of the old Vince Lombardi deal, this is a football. Men, this is where we start. This is a church. What is a church? We need to know that because we need to measure our own church against that. I want to be helpful to you. I want you to know what a church is so that you know what this church needs to be. I want this church to be a church as long as Jesus tarries, until He comes, whether I'm around or not, I want it to continue to be a church so I want to be sure that everybody knows what a church is. I want to help folks who listen to this message on tape and radio and other places to know what a church looks like so when they find one they'll see it and recognize it. There's a lot of deception...a lot of deception. Just between the two freeways here you're going to find places called a church that aren't. They claim to be, they have the name, they put the name up, but they don't meet the criteria. Now where are we going to learn what a church is? Let's go to Matthew 16.

The first gospel is the gospel of Matthew and in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, you have the word "church" used for the first time...first time. And it's used by the Lord of the church, the Lord Jesus

Christ who says in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church....I will build My church." That's very personal, it's His, He will build it. It is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we understand that. And here in this passage, He gives us the necessary components for a church to be a church. You've got all kinds of things floating out there today. We've got what's called the Seeker-Friendly churches, we've got the New Emerging church. I was asked in a conversation on the phone with some other Christian leaders a couple of weeks ago if it bothered me that they used the term "seeker-friendly" church, or does it bother you that they use the term "emerging" church? I said I don't care about seeker-friendly, I don't care emerging, what bothers me is they use the word "church." That's what bothers me because that's the word that has to be protected or else people get deceived, or else the deception is wide-spread. If you say you're a Buddhist Temple, that's clear. If you say you're a Jewish Synagogue, that's clear. But if you say you're a church and you're not, then that is a serious deception. The Lord of the church said, "I will build My church," and in this text He lays out the foundation for the church. He gives us the defining characteristics, marks of the church.

And by the way, this is from verse 13 to 28, it's a big section here we'll look at this morning and we'll finish tonight. This is two parts, this morning and tonight. Next week we're going in to Luke 14 in the morning and then back to our doctrinal series on Sunday night. I don't want to lose any more time. So this is two parts and you're going to come back tonight, you all are because we're having free ice cream. You saw it in there, I know. We're going to have a lot of fun out on the patio tonight after church. But we're going to do this in two sections. So if you, for some reason, can't come tonight, you be sure and get the message.

What does the Lord of the church say about His church? Here it is in verses 13 to 28, I'll cover that, as I said, this morning and tonight. And I just want to say, first of all, that all the New Testament epistles that write about the church base what they write on this text. That's right. You can trace the writings of Paul and Peter and James and John and Jude back to this text. Here the Lord of the church establishes the foundation of the church. This is its first mention, the first time the word "church" appears it appears in verse 18, "I will build My church," future tense, I will build it, it's coming. And here are the necessary foundational elements.

Number one, and I'm going to give you seven of them...two this morning and five tonight. But the two take a little longer to develop. A true church is known, number one, by a great confession...a great confession. When I talk about confession, I'm not talking about admitting you did something wrong, not that kind of confession. I'm talking about confessing something that you believe, confessing something that you are convinced of. The church is a gathering of people all of whom make a great confession. Let's look at verse 13. "When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples saying, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'" What is popular opinion about Me? "And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, and others Elijah, but still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'" I mean, that's sort of complimentary, isn't it? I mean, John the Baptist was highly revered, the greatest prophet ever to say of Jesus, "Well He's got to be John the Baptist

reincarnate," is not a slur. That's certainly a great compliment to be equated with John the Baptist, it's just not true and it's not enough. And certainly Elijah, the great prophet who did miracles, great prophet Elijah to be compared to Elijah to be identified as a reincarnate Elijah, that is a compliment. And Jeremiah, that great weeping prophet, or one of the other great prophets which would include even Moses, I mean that is not saying something negative, that's saying the best that some people could muster.

Verse 15, Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" That's what people say, but who do you say? "And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" That's the great confession. Jesus said, "I'll build My church on that...I'll build My church on that." The first absolute in a true church is a biblical understanding of Jesus Christ. Anything other than a biblical understanding of Jesus Christ means you don't have a true church. It's another gospel and it's anathema, it's accursed. If anybody comes and preaches anything other than the doctrine of Christ, 2 John verses 9 to 11, don't let them into your house, don't bid him God's speed, don't have anything to do with him or you'll be a partaker of his evil deed. This is an evil thing to speak less of Christ than the truth about Him, even if you're being complimentary, even if you're saying He's a great teacher, He's a noble teacher, like liberals do who pastor what they call churches. Even if you say He's the best of the created people, He's a created semi-god, such as the cults say about Jesus. That is not adequate. The Lord does not build His church on a wrong view of Christ. First absolute in a true church is a biblical view of Jesus Christ. The foundation of the church is Christology...Christ.

Now let me just give you a little bit of background in the text. Go back to verse 13. Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi was a town that influenced that particular reason. Caesarea Philippi used to be called Paneas and Paneas was a term given to this particular area in honor of the god Pan, one of the famous Greek gods. And there because of the devotion to Pan who was believed to have been conceived and lived in a cave nearby, it became a center for Greek and Roman culture and idolatry and there were idols all over the place. It was a...it was a collection of religions there, pagan religions there. And it was, of course, in the land that was occupied by Jews and so there was a collision there of all the religions, Judaism and all the rest of pagan religions. It was a religious center filled with idols. The temple, the big temple there was to the god Augustus Caesar. The Caesars believed they were deities and wanted the people to worship them as deities and they changed the name of the town to Caesarea Philippi in honor of Augustus Caesar and they built a massive temple to this god Caesar. It was a great place for religions to collide and a perfect place to clarify the nature of who really is the people of God, who really knows God. Forget the idols, forget all other religions, including Judaism, My church, My people are those who say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

First of all, the living God, not these dead idols. They are no gods at all, they are no one. There's only one true and living God and all the idols that have been concocted and invented by men are nothing but foolishness. In fact, just for a minute, go back to Isaiah 44...Isaiah 44. And this is a really almost

humorous illustration of the foolishness of creating your own gods. Verse 9 is where we'd pick it up, but in the prior verse God says, "Is there any God beside Me?" the end of verse 8, "Is there any other rock? I know of none, I'm the only God, I am the living God, the One true God." Verse 9, "Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile." It's ridiculous, they make gods. Now their precious things are of no profit, even their own witnesses fail to see or know so that they will be put to shame. It's a shameful, stupid, ridiculous meaningless thing to make a god. Who has fashioned a god or cast an idol to no profit? "Behold, all his companions be put to shame for the craftsmen themselves are mere men." How can men make a god? Verse 12, "A man sharpens iron...or shapes iron into a cutting tool, does his work over the coals." This is a blacksmith shop here. "Fashioning with hammers, working with his strong arm, gets hungry and his strength fails, he drinks no water, becomes weary." Works really hard sweating away in there to make a god. Ridiculous. "And others shape wood, extends a measuring line, outlines it with red chalk, piece of board, works it with planes, outlines it with a compass, makes it like the form of a man, like the beauty of a man so that it may sit in a house." Makes his little god out of wood, sticks it in his house and then says, "This is my god." He cuts cedars for himself, takes a Cypress or an Oak, raises it for himself among the trees of the forest, plants a fir, the rain makes it grow. He's got his little forest going, all the wood comes up and it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of the trees and he warms himself by making firewood. He takes another part of the trees and he makes fire in his oven to bake bread. He takes another part of the trees and he makes a god and worships it. He makes a graven image and falls down before it. Is that stupid? Half of it he burns in the fire, over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast and he's satisfied. He also warms himself and says, "I'm warm, I've seen the fire." The rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it, worships, prays to it and says, "Deliver me for thou art my god."

So, they do not know, verse 18, they do not understand. He's smeared over their eyes, they can't see. Their hearts are so that they cannot comprehend. No one recalls. Nor is there knowledge or understanding to say...these people are so ridiculous, they don't even understand the stupidity of what they're doing. They say this, "I burned half of it in the fire. I have baked bread over its coals, I roast meat and I eat it. And then I make the rest of it into an abomination and I fall down before a block of wood."

Well in contrast to that, go back to Matthew 16 is the living God. "The church is built on the true and living God and no other god at all, and the true and living God who manifested Himself in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ." Peter understood, "You are the Christ, the anointed one, the anointed promised Messiah, prophet, priest, king, Redeemer. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Son meaning one with God in essence and nature. That's exactly what Jesus meant, that's exactly what He claimed and that's exactly what the Jews knew He meant. That's why John 5:18 says that they hated Him because He made Himself equal with God. That's exactly what He did.

This is the confession upon with the church is built, that the living God has revealed Himself in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our great confession. We say with Peter, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God." We say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God." And again we say with Peter, "To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life and we know that You are the holy one of God." We gather to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. We're here as worshipers. We are the circumcision who worship in the Spirit, who worship Jesus Christ in the Spirit, as Philippians 3. The church is not a group of people who gather together to hear a motivational speech. The church is not a group of people who are seeking help for their addictions. The church is not a collection of folks who want to feel spiritual. It is not an assembly of those who want to somehow mindlessly go through religious ritual thinking, somehow this does them good. It is an assembly of people who from the heart have made a great confession and that great confession is that there is a living God who has manifested Himself in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who is Himself the holy one of God and the only one through whom we can have eternal life. That is a great confession. We are those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and confess Him as our Lord. We follow the very purpose of John in his gospel, chapter 20 verse 31, "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and believing you may have life in His name." We are those who have believed and have life in His name. The church is a collection of redeemed people, redeemed through faith in the true Christ. It is not a collection of people who feel sentimental about Jesus, a Jesus unqualified and undefined by doctrine. It is a collection of people who make a common confession that Jesus is God, is Lord, Savior and Redeemer.

Look, if you will, to 1 Timothy 3....1 Timothy 3. In this epistle from Paul to his son in the faith, Timothy, he's instructing him on ministry and what he needs to teach and how he needs to live his life. And he says in verse...1 Timothy 3:15...he says that I want to tell you how to conduct yourself. Verse 15, I want to tell you how to conduct yourself in the household of God which is the church, and here it is again, the church of the living God, as opposed to all the dead idols. I want to tell you how to conduct yourself in the church of the living God which is the pillar and ground of the truth.

And then he goes in to verse 16 immediately and says, "And here is the foundation of that truth. The church of the living God is built on truth and the foundational truth is this, verse 16, a common confession...a common confession." The Ephesians said, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." The Romans said, "Great is Caesar." And the Christians said, "Great is the mystery of godliness." That's our common confession. A common confession that is without disagreement, a universal, unequivocated commitment, *homologoumenos*, to say the very same thing, we all say the same thing. In the church, the true church, everybody says the same thing. It is not spectators trying to figure out who Jesus is. It is an assembly of those who agree to a common confession and that common confession is the mystery of godliness. And what is the mystery of godliness? That God, and here in the last part of verse 16, is a hymn...this is a hymn from the early church containing six third-person singular verbs that are put in rhythm and parallelism so we know it's a hymn. Here's the mystery of godliness, "That He...that is God...was revealed in the flesh...that is God incarnate...was

justified in the Spirit...that is righteous-righteous...he was observed by angels at His birth, at His temptation, at His resurrection...He was taken up in glory and He is proclaimed among the nations and believed on in the world." This is Jesus Christ, our common confession, we hail the one who is the mystery of Godliness, and the mystery is that God became a man. It's a mystery unfolded. It's a mystery revealed. In the flesh He came, justified in His Spirit, attended to by angels, taken up in to glory at the end of His life in the glory of His ascension and the message proclaimed to the nations and believed on in the world.

This is our common confession, beloved. When you look for a church, this is where you start. Is there among this people a common confession that Jesus is the Son of the living God, the Christ, the Messiah, the Lord of all. This is the unanimous confession of the church. We affirm Jesus Christ to be God in human flesh, born of a virgin, living a holy sinless life, served by holy angels, dying on a cross as a substitute for sinners, rising from the dead. We affirm Him taken to glory and seated at His Father's right hand, after He having purged our sins, as you read earlier, is seated at the majesty on high. It is that Christ who is preached in the world and believed on. This is not sentimentalism regarding Jesus, some Jesus of people's emotional creation. This is not sacramentalism, this is not some symbolic Jesus, some Jesus on a crucifix somewhere. This is not some ritual Jesus. This is not the created Jesus who is less than God, that the cults and the liberals speak of. A church is a gathering of people who make a common confession, "You are the Son of the living God, You alone are Lord and Savior." Everything is Christ centered. Everything is Christ exalting. That kind of church cannot meet without exalting Jesus Christ. That's a true church.

But there's more and I want to give you a second point this morning. The church is not only built on a great confession, but a great communication...a great communication. And this is so important. Back to Matthew 16, and again I'm really kind of sharing my heart, I'm not trying to unpack every detail of this text. I've written a commentary on it, there's plenty of that for you to read, I'm just letting my heart take you to the key things that are here. But I want you to notice verse 17, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, you got it right.'" You're blessed because you made the great confession. You're blessed, you made the great confession. But how did you come to that?

"Oh," you say, "I heard this really clever speech and, you know, I just thought...I just thought Jesus seemed so...so good, I was just attracted to Him." Or, "I met this guy and, you know, he said he was a Christian, and, you know, I was just kind of attracted to him."

No. No, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, you got it right," and here's why you got it right. "You got it right because flesh and blood didn't reveal it to you." This didn't come from any human source. "But My Father who's in heaven." Wow. You had an apocalypse, *apokalupto*, to reveal, to disclose, to uncover, to make know, to manifest. But it didn't come from any human source because according to 1 Corinthians 1:21, "May by wisdom knew not God." There is no human source. There is no human approach or cleverness, or insight or wisdom or knowledge that can lead you to that great confession.

How would you ever be led to that great confession? "My Father in heaven revealed it to you." There's only one way that we can know the truth of the great confession and that is by divine revelation. Some people say foolish things to me, "How in the world can your church be very evangelistic when all you do is teach the Bible?" What kind of a statement is that? "Search the Scriptures for they are they which speak of Me," Jesus said. Even Jesus took the disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened the Scriptures and spoke to them of things concerning Himself in the law and the prophets and the holy writings. He's everywhere. It is the Word by which we are saved. We are begotten again by the Word, 1 Peter 1:23. We are sanctified by the Word, John 17:17. We are to desire the Word as babes desire milk so we may grow by the Word. We are purged by the Word, cleansed by the Word, instructed by the Word. You can tell a church, they spend their time exalting Jesus Christ and expounding His Word. John Calvin said, "If a church does not have sound doctrine and exposition of Scripture, it's not a church." And he added two more things, church discipline and baptism and the Lord's table. If any of those are missing, that's not a church.

Well I came up with seven and I'll get you through those tonight. But it starts with a great confession and a great communication. You didn't get this from any human source. There's a wonderful text tucked in the tenth chapter of Romans, you can look at it for a moment, that further explains this. Paul is indicting the Jews because they should have known the truth...they should have known the truth. And the Romans should know the truth too. He says to them, verse 6, Romans 10, "When it comes to righteousness based on faith, which is the gospel, the only way to be right with God is through faith not works, when it comes to this gospel message of righteousness based on faith, did not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven?" Don't say, "Oh, this is a mysterious message, how am I going to get this message? I'm going to have to find out some path of transcendental comprehension. I'm going to have to somehow enter in to some esoteric experience to elevate my mind like the Gnostics and attain to the heights of knowledge and climb up into heaven and grasp this glorious truth and bring it down as if I were to bring Christ down, as if there were some way that I could ascend...if there was some way that I could transcend my time/space world and my humanity.

Don't say that. And don't say, verse 7, "Who will descend into the pit, or the abyss, as if you had to go down to bring Christ up from the dead." You don't have to go anywhere, you don't have to go ascending into heaven by some transcendental experience, you don't have to go way down into the depths of some secret knowledge, tampering around with the world of the darkness to try to discover spiritual truth. He says, "What are you thinking?" Verse 8, what does it say...what does it say? And he's quoting out of Deuteronomy, "The Word is near you, it's in your mouth, it's in your heart. You already have it in your mind, you've already heard the gospel. You've been exposed to the gospel. You've talked about it. It's been on your lips. It's nearby, this very Word of faith which we are preaching. All you have to do is confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you'll be saved. Just respond to it."

In other words, the communication has been made. Go back to Matthew 16. It's not hidden somewhere up in heavenly space only for those who are esoteric and who are the enlightened few. It's not buried in the depths of some secretive meaning. It's right here. You heard it, you thought about it, you talked about it. It's time to believe it. The revelation is here. The revealed Word. Peter, you made the great confession because you received the great communication from God.

Now let's go back to verse 18 for a minute. "I say to you, you are Peter and upon this rock I'll build My church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." This is a very simple verse, it's been confounded into all kinds of confusion. This is just Peter, just plain ole Peter. He's very human. In fact, down in verse 23 Jesus says to him, "Get behind Me, Satan." So we don't want to make too much of this guy. This is not his inauguration into the Papacy. He says, "You're Peter, that's all you are, you're just Peter. You're just Peter. And your Peter who wouldn't do anything or know anything if My Father in heaven hadn't revealed it to you. You're Peter and upon this rock I'll build My church."

What do You mean? Well, *petros,*Peter, pebble, small rock, but upon this rock, *petra*, rock bed, I'll build My church. A sense in which He's saying you're just a pebble and I'm going to build My church on a rock bed. But there's another way to understand this. "Peter, you are a rock, you're just one rock. I'm going to build My church on the confession you made. But there's a rock bed and I'm going to build My church on that as well." And what's that rock bed? I believe that the Scripture would indicate that is the confession, the same confession made by the rest of the Apostles. Ephesians 2:20 says the church is built on the foundation of the Apostles and the prophets, all who made that confession. Peter, you're one of the rocks, you're one piece in the foundation and there are a lot more. But this is in common with all of them, they all have made the great confession because they all have believed the great communication.

He builds His church on all those who make the great confession, all those to whom the revelation is given and they hear it and they believe it. The church is not built on Peter. It's not built on the supremacy of Peter. It is built on the confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God, the holy one, the Lord. And if Peter makes that and the Apostles make that and you and I make that, He builds His church. It is built on the revelation Peter proclaimed, on the revelation the Apostles wrote. God revealed it and they wrote it down. They wrote down the New Testament, the Apostles and those who were their associates wrote the New Testament. They wrote the revelation of God on which their own confession was made, and on our confession is made as well. The church then is built on the great revelation of God which is contained in Scripture. And the church built on that, the gates of Hades cannot overpower. Gates of Hades, Hades is where you go when you die, the gate is how you get there, it's just a euphemism for death, even death can't destroy this. Death cannot overpower the church. In fact, the more you kill the church, the more it grows. The church is the gathering of people who make the great confession that Jesus is Lord because they're committed to the great communication of the revelation of God contained in Scripture through the Apostles and their associates who wrote it down.

Verse 19 adds, this is so important, "I'll give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven." Wow! What does that mean? You and the Apostles and everybody else in the church, here's the keys. What do you have keys for? To open something. We've been given the keys to open the door to the Kingdom. What for? To let folks in. You have them. And whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Those are little rabbinical phrases, binding and loosing the rabbis always talked about that. You're bound in your sin, you're loosed from your sin. You're bound in your sin if you don't repent, and so forth. You're loosed from your sin if you do repent. It's just a way to express how people responded to their sin. And He says, "Look, you can say to someone, the Kingdom is shut to you, you're bound in your sin. And you know what? That's agreeing in heaven. Or you can say to someone your loosed from your sin, come on in, and heaven will agree with that. Whatever you say on earth, heaven agrees with." How can that be? Because heaven has given you the revelation. This is the heavenly book. If I want to open the door to the Kingdom, I bring the great communication. People are begotten again by the Word that's sharper than any two-edged sword. It's alive, it's powerful. And we have with the use of the great communication, the revelation of God, the ability to open the door to the Kingdom. If I'm going to speak, let me speak authoritatively. If I'm going to speak, let me say you cannot go into the Kingdom, you're bound in your sins and until you come to God in repentance and ask for forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ, you're bound in your sins, that's what heaven says and heaven agrees in me saying that. I bear the authority of heaven, not because I'm a Pope, not because I'm a priest, not because I have any office or any title, but because I am telling you what heaven has revealed in this Scripture and you as a believer talking to an unsaved person one on one have the same authority. Or I can say to someone else, put your trust in Jesus Christ and the door to the Kingdom flies open and you go in and heaven agrees with this because heaven has revealed it.

How do you know a church? Because they're consumed with the greatness of Christ and with the authority and the power and the truth of revelation. And when Peter departed from the revelation of the will of God, verse 23, Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan." Any time you depart from the will of God revealed, you take up Satan's agenda, even if you're an Apostle. Submitting everything to the Word of God, getting in line with the Word of God, the church is built on divine revelation and it is invincible when it is built on divine revelation because heaven is behind it in all that it does. The church exalts the message of the Apostles, the revelation of God that came through them, the New Testament. The true sign of a church, the great confession, Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, the holy One, Lord. The great communication, we are here so that God may speak through His Word which alone has the power to save and the power to sanctify and the power to comfort.

Richard Phillips writing an article in a book called The Church said this, and I quote: "If we want people to join in Peter's great profession and thus to be admitted into the saving company of Christ's people, then we must not rely on flesh and blood devices. We must not be tempted by the things that appeal to men and women today, especially the entertainment that so dominates our secular culture

and sadly much of the church as well. We may make the most effective appeals to flesh and blood, to the things which are persuasive and enticing to the fleshly nature of mankind. But Jesus here assures us that by those means we will never bring about the saving faith first professed by Simon Peter. Instead, we must rely on the one means God has provided, His revealed Word. As we teach and proclaim God's Word about Jesus, the Father in heaven reveals the truth in the minds and hearts of men and women and brings them to true and saving faith."

We proclaim the truth of the Word and we bear the authority of the Word. We have the keys. We can open the door. We can give you the truth that opens the door to eternal life. But if you don't repent, you're bound in your sins, you cannot enter. We have the authority to say that because heaven has revealed itself and we affirm what heaven has said. If on the one hand you do repent, then we stand as the representatives of heaven, meaning God Himself, heaven is just a way to speak of God, we can say your sins are forgiven, enter the Kingdom, because that is what God has said in His Word.

How can you tell when you found a church? Great confession, great communication. Tonight, a great contrast, a great conquest, a great conflict, a great contradiction and a great consummation. Put it all together and you can identify a church.

Our Father, as we come now to the end of our time this morning, we feel like we've just touched the surface of these things, yet it's so rich and wonderful. We thank You that You've led us to this great confession through the revelation. We thank you that we are a gathering of people who confess Jesus as Lord. We are a great congregation of people who want nothing more than to hear the revelation of God brought to us, the Word proclaimed, explained, applied. This is the church. And by this great Word we have been saved, and by this great Word we can open the door to the Kingdom for others. Keep us a faithful church and may You raise up many more, we pray. All of this we pray to the glory of our great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God and with gratitude that You, our Father in heaven, revealed to us the saving truth. We pray. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).