

8/25/24 Christ Fellowship

What Would Jesus Do About Church

Matthew 16:13-20

Okay, here's a question for all you gym rats. What does a person have to do to become a member of a workout gym? In how good a shape do I have to be to join a gym? Do they let fat people in? And let them work out? No qualifications? Just pay the membership dues and go right to work on the equipment, huh? Even people that are really out of shape? Huh. Okay.

But doesn't that make the gym look bad? You know, "*Wow. Look at all the fatties running around in here. Must not be too good of a gym, huh?*" Don't you think they would want to only have fit people working out there? Wouldn't that look better for them?

That's pretty ridiculous, isn't it? That's the point of the gym, to get in better shape. And they welcome everybody to be members there no matter what.

Now, how about the church? Can anybody become a member of our church? Are you sure? Well, we don't even have dues to pay. It's free to join and anybody is welcome to attend here but not everybody can join. Did you know that? In fact, we have a very exclusive membership policy. You have to be a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ to join this church.

Why do you think that is? Why do you think we would let anybody and everybody attend but only Christians can join? Well, when you join this church, you then have the privilege of teaching a class or voting on something, and neither opportunities arise very often in our little group of believers but when they do, we have to make sure that the people teaching and voting are like-minded believers.

Now, what that looks like in our church is, if you want to join, we ask that you come down the aisle at the invitation and if I don't know you very well I will just ask you your salvation story. How did you come to know the Lord? Tell me about that experience. Maybe, if I already know you and your story, I'll just say, "*Welcome*" and that's that. But it's imperative that we know you are a believer in Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and nobody gets to the Father except through Him. You may believe in some small ways that are different than some of us and you may worship a little different than some of us but if you are a true believer, then we welcome you.

The reason that we have that stipulation is partly because of what Jesus says in our passage this morning. Turn with me to **Matthew 16:13-20** where Jesus asks His disciples a very important question. They have traveled about as far north as we have record of them traveling and we don't really know why they are there. I have a theory, though.

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If you Google "Caesarea Philippi", the pictures immediately make you say, "Wow, look at all the rock." But it also has a natural spring which is the main headwaters of the Jordan River. So, it's a very ruggedly beautiful part of the country in Israel and would have been fairly sparsely inhabited back then like it is now. So, my theory is Jesus needed to take His disciples there just to get away for a while. That's just my theory. We don't know. But that rock part will come back into our discussion in just a little bit. Let's read it. **Matthew 16:13-20.**

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

This is a very famously disputed passage of scripture and one that I believe has led to a lot of error and problems for over 1500 years. So, it's important that we get it right but I also don't feel the need to split hairs on some of this like some people do. Again, going back to the setting, Caesarea Philippi was known for its worship of many, many idols. There was a temple there built by the Caesar it was named for and they worshiped all kinds of crazy stuff so it's likely that Jesus had some of this in mind when He asked these questions.

Jesus asked the disciples these questions but Peter was usually the one to speak up. And don't you know the disciples cringed a little when Peter answered because he didn't always answer with great wisdom. But he does this time, great wisdom. But the first question Jesus asked was, "Who do people say I am?" And that question got several different answers and what is interesting to me is that if you asked that same question today, you would probably get similar answers.

Who is Jesus? Well, He's a good man. He's a prophet. A teacher. A rabbi. Some people say He was a fool. Some people say He is God. But it doesn't really matter what other people say. Jesus was using that as a conversation starter. The real question He wanted to ask came next. *"Who do you say I am?"*

Okay, I want you to picture something. It's the bottom of the ninth inning. The home team is down one run and the bases are loaded. And who is up next but the rookie...Simon Peter. Now, ol' Pete hasn't done so well this year. He's batting about .100 right now but he goes down swinging every time. So, when Jesus throws him this pitch, the other players hold their breath, squint their eyes and pray. Sure enough Peter puts everything he has into it and doesn't just make contact with the ball, he crushes it! The crowd goes crazy! It's a home run! Good job, Pete! Yay!

That's kind of what we see here with Peter's answer. But the really fascinating part of this passage comes with Jesus's response to that answer. Now, unfortunately most of us are not fluent in Greek and you really need to understand Greek to truly appreciate what Jesus says. I don't read Greek but I have some good commentaries that all tell me what it says. You probably know that in the Greek, Peter is from "petros" which means "rock" or "small stone." It's the size stone that a man could throw, so it could be a pebble or a little bigger.

pic on screen

So, Jesus says, *"You are Peter (petros) and on this rock (petra) - which means big rock or even a mountain - I will build my church."* Now, I have a picture in my mind of Jesus calling Peter a little rock and bending down to pick up one of the little rocks that would have been all around them. But then He compares that little rock to the huge mountain of rock, the stratified cliff in whose shadow they were standing. That probably didn't happen but it helps me to understand what Jesus was saying here.

Jesus is not saying that Peter was the foundation of the church. I believe the Catholic church is very mistaken in their belief of this. Yes, it could be taken that way in this verse but the rest of scripture absolutely does not support this. The rest of the New Testament makes clear that Jesus is the cornerstone, the mountain of rock upon which the church is built. Jesus is telling Peter that, yes, He, Jesus, is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One sent by God and it is on this fact and on Himself that Jesus will build His church.

It was not on Peter or any other apostle that the church is being built. Jesus started building it through them and continues building it through us. But as good of an answer as it was for Peter, it is not about him. And it's not about us. Jesus said he will build the

church. He is the cornerstone of it. He builds it and keeps it together. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says, that God's household is *"built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets but Jesus is the cornerstone."* (Eph. 2:20)

The early church never gave credit to the apostles as persons, or to their specific office or titles, but to their doctrine. It says in **Acts 2** that the early church devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, not the apostles themselves. And although Peter recognized himself as an apostle (1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1), he never claimed a superior rank, title or privilege over the other apostles. In fact, he warned them against lording it over those under their pastoral care (1 Peter 5:3). (John MacArthur, Matthew 16-23, pg. 30)

So, Peter could relax and not worry about having to build the church. That wasn't his job. And you can relax about not having to build the church as well. That's not your job. And it's not my job. That job belongs to Jesus and only Jesus. So, thank you, Jesus! But He does include us in the building process. So, how does that work?

Well, in thinking how Jesus is building His church, let's think about building a building. We know, of course, that the church is not a building but this is just for illustration. If we were to want to build some kind of building, we first need a foundation. Done. That's easy. We have the best foundation and that is Jesus. That's the main point of this whole passage. So, Jesus is the foundation but what comes next? Well, you need supplies. For a building you need the wood and metal and brick or whatever materials you are going to build with.

So, what does Jesus use to build His church? He is the builder. He's the contractor and the owner and He is the architect who drew up the plans and He is even the foundation itself but He uses people to build with. People are the walls and roof and every other part. That's where you come in.

Now, to put this building of people together, Jesus uses three main things, three main supplies: **truth, love and unity**. Now, again, this building of people is on the best foundation, piers down to bedrock, thick concrete braced with rebar and cured for eternity. The foundation is never going to be a problem. It's the supplies that are not always trustworthy.

Have you ever had plans to build something and need some 2 x 4's? You go to Lowe's or Home Depot and go check out the selection. You pick one up and it has a twist. The next one is bowed. The next is cupped. The next is full of knots. And pretty soon you're rethinking the whole project, right? I wonder if Jesus doesn't think the same thing sometimes.

But there is no Plan B and Jesus said He was going to do it and is, in fact, doing it right now as we speak. And we can choose to be obedient pieces of usable material or we can refuse. He gives us the choice. If you would rather be bowed, twisted and cupped and look like the world and attracted to worldly things, you can. But remember BOOCOD. There are Benefits Of Obedience and Consequences Of Disobedience.

So, if you want to be obedient, we have to focus on truth, love and unity. But what does it look like to be usable materials focusing on truth? Well, how about an example of what it doesn't look like? In Chuck Colson's book, Against the Night, he interviews a lady named Sheila about her faith. Sheila says, *"I believe in God. I can't remember the last time I went to church. But my faith has carried me a long way. It's 'Sheila-ism.' Just my own little voice."* (Charles Colson, Against the Night, p. 98.)

Now, what's wrong with that? I heard an illustration one time that I think I have shared here before but it's the perfect illustration of Sheila-ism. Years ago, before GPS and even compasses, a sailor trying to make his way across the ocean would use the stars and the moon at night to navigate. Sheila-ism is placing a light on the front of the boat you are in and navigating by its light. Sheila, to go back a few illustrations, is a warped 2 x 4. She's unusable in the building of the church because she is not focused on the truth that is modeled by Jesus nor the words of God nor the leading of the Holy Spirit. That's the truth that Jesus uses to build His church.

Now, what about love? We all love, don't we? Do we even need to talk about how to love? We have talked about it several times just lately. I think about the passage in **Micah 6** that says, *"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to **love mercy** and to walk humbly with your God."* That "love mercy" part is what it means to love people. We all need mercy. We all mess up. Even the people that mess up differently than you and mess up worse than you need mercy. That's how your love shines through to lost people. It's not just being loving to the other 2 x 4's sitting next to you. It's easy to love US. Loving US is not all it takes to build the church. You really are used by Jesus to build the church when you love the unlovely. I bet we could hear that message every week and every week some of us would have our toes stepped on. Or maybe just me.

How about unity? Jesus uses truth, love and unity and it is unity that is the mortar that keeps the bricks together in this building of people. It is the nail that keeps the 2 x 4's together. And when you bring any kind of disunity into the church, you are chipping away at that mortar. You are pulling out nails that hold a load-bearing wall up.

When you bring disunity into the church, you don't just bring it into this church, Christ Fellowship. When Jesus said He would build His church, He wasn't talking about just this church. He was talking about the whole group of called-out believers all over the world. And disunity chips at the mortar of the bricks holding the church together. So, disunity is hurtful, not just to this church but to 1st Baptist Chico and U-Turn Ministries down the road and the Methodist church off the square and to the whole body of believers that Jesus is building up. You are tearing it down when you get your feelings hurt and want to exercise your rights. That's what it boils down to.

Ephesians 4:15–16 states, *“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”* Nothing captures unity quite like the picture of Christ being the head and believers being parts of a single body. So, let's add “single united body” to the list of illustrations today. But that verse just really sums up everything, doesn't it? We speak “truth” in “love” and doing so brings “unity.” Truth, love and unity.

I think it was the summer before my senior year in high school. I worked for a guy framing houses. Now, this was back in the day before a lot of the equipment they have now plus this guy was cheap and, anyway, we did all the nailing by hand. No air-powered nail guns. And it was good training for me because I struggled getting good, solid hits on those long nails that it took to go through two 2 x 4's.

So, everybody that has ever nailed a nail and bent it has probably used the excuse, *“Oh, that nail was already bent.”* Right? Every time I bent a nail, I would say that and I said it often and then I would throw the nail down and grab another. What neither of us knew but found out later was the owner of the house would come behind us every evening after we left. And to try to save money, this guy would pick up those bent nails and hammer them back as straight as he could. But have you ever tried that? It's almost impossible to truly straighten a bent nail. I felt so much better after learning that was what was happening. The nails really were already bent!

I think there are probably a lot of bent church members in this world. They look nice. They look straight. But there is a slight bend to them that makes them difficult for Jesus to use when He is building His church. That slight bend is not always visible to other nails but the builder sees. He sees that bad language. He sees the porn use. He sees the alcohol abuse. He sees how you treat your spouse. And there is no room for that in the building of Jesus's church.

music

Let's bow our heads and close our eyes for a minute and let's all really ask God to search us and try us and see if there is any wicked way in us, as David said. Ask Him if there is any bend to you. Is there even a slight warp or bow? Ask Him to point that out and then ask Him to forgive you of that and then repent of that and ask Him for His help to do it.

Do you have that kind of relationship with God through His Son, Jesus? You can. All you have to do is believe that Jesus paid the debt the Father said was due for your many sins. He died on the cross as the sacrifice that makes you right with God. That relationship will change your life. It will give you peace and joy in this life, plus the assurance of life in Heaven for eternity with Him forever. Do it right now as the music plays.