

## What is the Church

Matthew 16:13-20

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, February 12, 2017

This morning we are at the beginning of a series called “Foundations of the Church,” where we are going to look at some fundamental and foundational issues in the church. Like I told you before, you guys already laid a solid foundation here at Grace Fellowship Church and you should be encouraged that you have done a lot in just one year’s time. Most churches take a year to decide on the colour of the carpet, but in one year you guys have called a pastor and chosen a name for yourselves. You have found a place to meet and started several important ministries for the men and women and the children. You have adopted a constitution and by-laws. You have partnered with Grace Advance and grown in size and strength. You have laid out who you are and who you want to be, and where you want to go – and how you want to get there. You have done a lot in one year. You haven’t sat still. You haven’t let your lamps run out of oil, and you should be praising the Lord for what He has done in your lives in 2016.

You already have a foundation. You have already put concrete into the ground. Now it is my job to come alongside and add an extra layer to it. You have never have too much concrete in a foundation, right? Our contractors may correct me on that, but I think you can never have too much ground to stand on. Over the next couple of months, we are going to be adding some more concrete to the foundation here at Grace Fellowship Church. We are going to be giving you some more ground to stand on so we can make our base stronger and stronger and so we can all get on board with this thing together.

With that said, this morning let’s start out like this. Christians can be pretty careless with their church bulletins. I don’t know if you have ever noticed before, but the bulletin is the one thing that everyone reads and no one pays attention to before it goes out. It isn’t that way here at Grace Fellowship – our bulletins are given careful attention – but in most churches the pastor is in a hurry and the secretary is in a hurry, so sometimes late Saturday night or early Sunday morning a few thoughts are thrown together, and “viola,” a bulletin is born. Because of this, church bulletins can say some bizarre things.

Several years ago, a major Christian denomination published a list of misprints in their bulletins and they came up with this:

“This afternoon there is a Weight Watchers meeting here at the church. Please enter through the double doors at the back of the sanctuary.”

Can you imagine reading that when you walked into church? Who let that one slip? Here are some other ones:

“Last week, Miss Charlene Mason sang, ‘I will not pass this way again!’ giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.”

“Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.”

“Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack’s sermons to help her.”

One misprint that I particularly like was this one:

“Tonight’s sermon is called ‘What Hell is like.’ Come listen to the choir practice beforehand for a preview.”

It must have been a bad choir. Maybe they needed some more practice. But I mention that because while we laugh, I think we would all agree that the church is nothing to be laughed at. While we can poke fun at these mistakes, I think we would all agree that the church is nothing to make fun of. It is okay for Christians to be careless with their bulletins and their church websites and their church newsletters, it is not okay for them to be careless with the church’s identity or the church’s doctrine, or the church’s people.

It’s not okay to throw a few Christians together and come up with a flashy name and call that a church. It is not okay to do that. That doesn’t please God – that is not His plan for the church. It is not okay to meet in a coffee shop once a week to discuss theology, doctrine, and the latest blog from Al Mohler and call that a church. That’s not enough. That doesn’t “cut the mustard,” as we say back home. It is not okay to sit together in your living room and listen to a sermon online and call that a church. It is not okay to join with other Christians to promote good causes like pro-life and the sanctity of marriage and protest and write letters to parliament and get people all worked up and ready to do something and call that a church.

The church of Jesus Christ is so much more than all of those things. It has a much, much greater purpose in the Kingdom of God. Now please hear me out – there is nothing wrong with going to a church with a flashy name. A lot of good churches have those. A lot of sound theology comes out of places with flashy names, and there is nothing wrong with meeting at a local coffee shop to discuss theology and doctrine and the latest blog from Al Mohler. There is nothing wrong with listening to sermons online or on the television. There is nothing wrong with promoting pro-life causes and the sanctity of marriage – if you do it correctly; if you do it in a God-honouring way. A lot of good can be done through work like that. There is nothing wrong with any of that. But there is something terribly wrong with doing all of that and calling it “the church” and confusing it with the church. God has something greater in mind when it comes to His church. He has something greater in mind when it comes to his people. That is what we are going to talk about this morning.

What is the church? If the church is not a flashy name or a weekly meeting in a coffee shop, what is it? What does it do? What is its identity? If it is not just about listening to sermons online or coming together to protest abortion, then how do we define it? What do we mean when we use the word “church?”

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 16. As you are turning there – you can’t really turn to one passage to learn everything you want to know about the church. The idea just kind of grows as

you read through the New Testament. But Matthew 16 is a good place to start because it's the first time the word "church" is used in the Bible. If we were going to define "the church," I think we would define it as "the people of God for this age." That's a simple way to define "the church." It's the people of God for this age.

If you think about it, there have always been people of God for every age. In a sense there has been one people, one Kingdom, one rule of God over creation. But in another sense, that rule expresses itself differently in different ages. What I mean is that God didn't give you the same commands that he gave to Adam and Eve... right? If you think He did, come see me after church and we will get you some counseling, because God didn't tell you to name the animals in the Garden of Eden. If you think He did, then you are delusional. He gave that command to them. He told them to do that. He didn't tell you to care for the plants in the Garden and not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He didn't walk with you in the cool of the day and talk to you the way He did them. He didn't sew fig leaves for you when you sinned and disobeyed him. Not literal ones. Why? Because they were the people of God for that age. They were the people of God for that specific time in history. When that time was over, things changed. You can see that with Noah. Now you have a different age. Now you have men building an ark – something no one had done before. Some scholars think it had never rained before. Pretty interesting. And now you had animals loading the ark two by two and the world perishing in a flood. Now you see the entire human race being wiped out. One man and his family have to build it back up again. That had never happened before. Why? Because they were the people of God for that age. They were the people of God for that age. They were the people of God for that specific time in history. No one else had those commands. No one else had been given these orders from God.

You see the same thing happening with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You see the same thing happening with Moses, David, and Israel. You see the same thing happening with the church. The church is the people of God for this age. They were the people of God for that age. The church is the people of God for this age – for this specific time in history. If you are ever discouraged about what is going on here in Chilliwack, because not enough people are coming to us or not enough people are getting saved, let me stop for a moment and remind you that you stand in a long line of believers that stretches all the way back to Adam and Eve. You stand in a Hall of Faith as Hebrews 11 puts it. You have friends and you have witnesses who have gone before you and are handing off the torch to you. They are giving you the baton and telling you to keep going. As they were faithful, you be faithful. As they stood firm, you stand firm.

You are the people of God for this age; for right now here in Chilliwack. Don't give up. Don't ever quit. Matthew 16 tells us what you are supposed to look like. It gives us the first time the word "church" is mentioned in the Bible. So let's look at Matthew 16:13-20 (ESV) together.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are

Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

To understand this better, in the first century, Caesarea Philippi was located about 48 kilometers north of the Sea of Galilee on the farthest reaches of the land of Israel and it was as far north as you could go while still being in the land of Israel. In fact, it wasn't even technically in Israel, but in the province of Syria. It was in a gentile land. While Matthew doesn't come right out and say it, it is safe to assume that Jesus went there for a rest, because no Jew would bother Him in a gentile territory. No Pharisee would be caught dead going that far north.

While He was there, verse 13 says that Jesus asks the disciples a question, “who do people say the Son of Man is?”

“What are the crowds saying about Me?” He asks them. “What do you hear?”

In verse 14 they answer Him this way: “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Without going into all of the details, John the Baptist and Elijah and Jeremiah and the Prophets were considered to be forerunners of the Messiah. They were considered to be the ones who would announce his arrival. In Jewish Festivals today, an empty chair is still reserved at the dinner table for Elijah in the hopes that he will come and announce the Messiah. This is what the crowds are saying about Jesus – they are saying that he is Elijah. They are saying that He is the “messenger boy,” not the Messiah, but the messenger boy.

So Jesus asks them another question in verse 15. “But who do you say that I am?” In the original language, the sentence could read, “But you, who do you say that I am?” Jesus says, “Okay, that is what the crowds are saying about Me, but what do you say? What do you believe about Me? You have been travelling with me for three years now. You have been watching me day and night. You have seen me heal the lame and the blind and the sick. You have seen me raise the dead and walk on water and calm a storm. You have heard my teachings. You have heard my parables. But you, who do you say that I am?”

That leads us to our passage for this morning. In Matthew 16:16-19, Jesus is going to give us four characteristics of the church. He is going to tell us what the church is in four short characteristics. I just told you that the church is the people of God for this age, but what does that look like? What does that mean exactly? Jesus tells us in this passage.

The first thing He says is that the church has a common confession. The church, the one true church, has a common confession. It believes the same thing. It has the same doctrine. Whether it meets in India or Indiana; whether it meets in Thailand or Tibet; whether it is located in England or Mexico or Zimbabwe or South Africa, the church of Jesus Christ believes the same thing. It may not believe the same thing in everything, but it believes the same thing in the main things – in the important things.

We see this in verse 16. Read verses 15-16 with me. Peter says that whereas the crowds say that Jesus is John the Baptist or Elijah or the prophets, we say that He is the Messiah. Whereas the crowds say that Jesus is the Forerunner, the buck stops with Him. The way Peter says this is striking. In verse 16 there are 10 words in the original Greek and four of them are the definite article. You could translate verse 16 this way: "Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of God, the Living One." Peter says, "You are the Man, Jesus. When it comes to salvation, You are it. There is no one else." "You are the way, the truth, and the life," John 14:6 says. "You are the chief cornerstone," as Ephesians 2:20 says. "You are the one sent by the Father," in John 10:36. "The anointed one," in Acts 4:27. "The Lamb of God," in John 1:29. "The Light of the World," in John 8:12.

This is a short confession, but it contains everything to show that Peter and the disciples are born again. Verse 16 says that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah who would save Israel from their sin. It says that Jesus is God, "the Son of the Living God." It says that Jesus is the only way to salvation which is implied in all of this. This contains everything that is needed to show that Peter is saved – a Christian. Look at how Jesus responds to this in verse 17. He doesn't say, "What do you mean Peter, calling me the Son of God? What do you mean talking like that? I'm not the Son of God. That's blasphemy." No. He says this in verse 17: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This is the only time in the Gospels where Peter's full name is given to us. "Simon Bar Jonah," or "Simon Son of Jonah." "Bar" means son in Aramaic. "Simon Son of Jonah."

Jesus does this to say, "You are right, Peter, in saying I am the Son of God." In fact, "Just like you are the son of Jonah, I am the Son of God. Just like you have the same nature as your earthly father, I have the same nature as my heavenly Father. And not only that Peter, but 'flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven revealed it.' I'm not going to scold you for this Peter, I'm going to praise you. I'm going to pat you on the back because God gave it to you. God gave you the amazing confession."

"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are it, Jesus. There is no one else."

"Millions will say that after you, Peter. Millions will say those very words. But it all started with you."

I think it is so sad that millions today don't believe this. I think it is so sad that millions of "Christians" today don't believe this. Do you know what I'm talking about? You ask them their testimony and they mention everything except "the Christ, the Son of the Living God." You ask them how they became a Christian and they mention everything except Jesus. They leave all of this out. They talk about their family. They talk about their childhood. They talk about the weather. But they never mention Jesus. They never talk about Him.

Let me read one of these testimonies to you. I actually made this up for the Leaders in Training at our previous church, but listen to this testimony.

I grew up in a Christian home where my parents took me to church every Sunday. We also attended church on Wednesday nights, went to Vacation Bible School, summer camp, and I even went to Christian High School. When I was six years old, at a revival service, the preacher told us that anyone who wants to be saved needs to come down to

the front and he would pray for them. I felt really compelled to come and I did. He prayed with me that night. I accepted Jesus into my heart.

Throughout my teenage years, I went away from the Lord, but seeing my best friend die of cancer brought me back. As I was leaving the hospital one afternoon, a song came on the radio which said that “God is love” and I know that He had a better plan for my life. I also knew that I needed to get right with Him, so the next week at church I rededicated my life to Jesus.

Since then, I have been blessed to be involved in many activities in the churches where we have attended. I have taught Sunday School, sung in the choir, memorized scriptures with my family, and even served for two years as church treasurer. In 2009, I felt a strong call to find a new church when we moved to central Indiana, and when we drove by and saw the sign for Plainfield Bible Church, we know that this is the place for us. We look forward to being a part of the ministry here.

When I read that to the Leaders-in-Training several years ago, they figured out that I wrote it, but our Senior Pastor was with us and he said that in 33 years of ministry; he had heard multitudes of testimonies just like that. He hears it all the time.

Now look back at Matthew 16 and tell me, where do you see Peter’s words in that testimony? Where do you see Jesus? He’s not in here, is He? Or He is barely in here; He is hardly mentioned at all. That testimony is not about what Jesus did; it’s about me. It’s about what I did. This testimony is not about Him. It’s about me. “I grew up in a Christian home.” “I went to Vacation Bible School.” “I memorized Scripture.” As some of you might say this morning, “I got baptized as a child.” “I partook of the Sacraments. I went through Confirmation as a teenager. I... I... I... I... I did it... I did it... I did it.” It’s not about the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Listen, it’s great if you grew up in a Christian home and went to Vacation Bible School as a kid, but none of that stuff saves you. You can sing all the songs at VBS and have no idea what you are singing about. You can be baptized or sprinkled as a child and have no idea what’s happening to you. None of that saves you. Only Jesus Christ the Son of the living God can do that. Only the Messiah can save you, so you must confess Him. You must talk about Him. You must believe in Him.

The church has a common confession, and that confession is not, “I...I...I...” The confession is “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” It’s all about Him – it’s not about you. It’s all about what he did – it’s not about what you did. You sinned; that’s all that you did. You messed up. You blew it with God, and He did the rest. So talk about Him. Brag about Him. Every testimony should be a theology lesson where you remember everything God has done for you in Christ. It shouldn’t be a bragging session; that misses the whole point of it.

To put it another way, what you believe matters. If you believe the right thing, you go to Heaven. If you believe the wrong thing, you go to Hell. It’s as simple as that. The church is for those who believe the right things. It is for those who believe that salvation is all of God and none of us. It is for those who believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father – the only way to Heaven. It is for those who believe He is the Man, the Son of Man. This is why when someone comes to our church we want to know, “What do you believe about Jesus? Tell me about Him.”

So the first characteristic of the church is that the church has a common confession. Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” and he nailed it. He got it exactly right, and I pray that you get it right this morning too. I pray that we all get it right as a church.

That leads to a second characteristic that we see in this passage: The church has an undying duration. Not only do we have a common confession, but we have an undying duration. The church will never die; it will keep going and going and going. Theodore Beza, John Calvin’s successor said, “The church is an anvil that has broken many hammers.” The church breaks many hammers. It outlasts its enemies. They keep wearing themselves out on it. John Calvin himself said that the church is an orchestra that plays until the end. It plays until the curtain drops. Martin Luther said that when God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel, but the church defeats the chapel. The church will raze it to the ground.

You see this in verse 18 where it says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Here we see the first mention of the word “church” in the Bible. *Ekklesia* means “the called-out ones.” The word comes from *ek* (out of) and *klerca* (called). The called-out ones. The church is the people who have been called out of the darkness and into the light. It is those who have been called out of the flesh, and into the spirit.

Jesus says something interesting about this church here in verse 18. He says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” If you read through the New Testament you will see that Jesus was a very powerful communicator. He was an expert at using things around Him to illustrate His message. In John 4, when He was talking to the woman at the well, He mentioned living water. In Matthew 13, when He was talking to some farmers, He gave them the Parable of the Sower. In John 11, when He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead, He called himself the resurrection and the life. Here in verse 18, He calls Peter a rock, because on the outskirts of Caesarea Philippi, there was a huge rock named Mount Hermon. It was a huge mountain. Caesarea Philippi was actually built at the foot of a mountain. Mount Hermon rose 3,000 meters about sea level, and it was so big it could be seen from 50 kilometers away. That is from here to Abbotsford, right? So you could see Mount Hermon from here to Abbotsford, and as they were standing at the foot of Mount Hermon, this huge rock, Jesus points at it and says, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. Just as this city was built at the foot of that mountain, this church will be built on you. Just as Caesarea Philippi stands on the shoulders of Mount Hermon, the church will stand on your shoulders. It will be built on your great confession; it will be built on your words.” Peter’s name actually meant “rock.” So this was a play on Peter’s name as well as a play on his surroundings. But the church would be built on Peter. That’s the point of all of this. It will be founded on his testimony.

Now it goes without saying that this passage has caused all kinds of pebbles for the church. So let me say that this doesn’t mean that Peter was the first Pope or some kind of super-apostle. If you look down in verses 21-23 it says:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Peter went from being called “a rock” to being called “Satan” in one chapter. I think that rules out his chances of being a super-apostle, right? That rules out his chances of being Pope. Let me also say that he wasn’t the head of the church in Rome. We don’t even know if Peter made it to Rome, and if he did it was to be martyred, not to be crowned head of the church. But Jesus calls Peter “the rock” here because he was the first one to evangelize the gentiles. That’s what this verse is talking about. Peter was the first one to tell non-Jews how to be saved. Before Peter, the church was made exclusively of Jews. It was made up of one race, one tribe of people. No one else could get in. But after Peter, all of that would change. Acts 10 tells us that as Peter is sent to a Roman centurion named Cornelius, he sees evidence of his salvation and he says, “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but now men from every nation can come to Him if they believe in His Son and do what is right.” And with those words, he starts the churches. With that statement and the baptism of Cornelius and his household, Peter starts the new people of God, and that is what Jesus is referring to here. Now men from every nation will confess, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Now men outside of Israel will be saved, and it all started with Peter.

“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” And I want you to quickly notice what Jesus says at the end of this verse. He says, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” “Hades” is another word for “death.” It is a reference to the unseen world where people go when they die, and Jesus uses that expression here to say that the church will never die. It will never go to the grave. Although it is hit with many hammers, it will break them all. Although Satan builds a chapel right next to it, it will raze it to the ground. It will keep playing until the end. You know, a lot of people are scared for the church today, aren’t they? They are afraid of what’s going to happen in the future. They say, “Boy, it can’t get worse. Can you believe who they put in the White House? Can you believe what’s going on in parliament?” Ever heard that before? Of course you have. I can’t tell you how many people asked me if I was leaving America because of Donald Trump. When I told them I was moving to Canada, they laughed and said, “Yeah right.” I said, “No, I’m actually immigrating to Canada, it’s not a joke.” But they talk like that because they are scared. People on both sides of the border are scared. They are afraid of what’s going to happen in the future – to the church, to our great nations.

But to put it in perspective, can you imagine being a Christian in the Middle Ages? Can you imagine what that would be like? That would be worse than anything we’ve ever experienced. Can you imagine being a Christian when your leaders keep you from reading the Bible? On pain of death? On threat of being burned at the stake? That was a capital offense back then. They would actually torture you for reading the Bible in your own language. Can you imagine being a Christian when your leaders tell you to pray to dead saints, and that Jesus is continually crucified at the Mass? That the only way to Heaven is to donate money to the church and pray to relics? Can you imagine how difficult it would be to be a Christian then? I am here to tell you that if the church can survive that, then it can survive Donald Trump or anyone else they put in the White House. If it can survive all of that, it can survive the Prime Minister or anyone else they put in Parliament. We are going to be fine. We are going to be okay. If the church can survive that, it can survive this. If it could survive then, it can survive now.

“The gates of Hades will not overpower it.” The hymn writer Samuel Stone wrote a famous song about this called, “The Church’s One Foundation” in 1866. He said this,

“Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war,  
The Church waits the consummation of peace forevermore  
‘Til with the vision glorious, her longing eyes are blest  
And the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.”

The church will be a church victorious. It will be a church at rest. George Whitefield said, “We are all immortal until our work on earth is done.” And you could say the same thing about the church. The church is immortal until its work on earth is done.

That leads to a third characteristic of the church. The first is that the church has a common confession. Second, the church has an undying duration “and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Third, the church has a powerful possession.

The church has something in its possession that is powerful and overwhelming. It can bring men into the presence of God. Jesus tells us what it is in verse 19.

And Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, 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.”

A key is a device that lets you into something that is locked. It lets you into somewhere where things are hidden and protected. That's why you have a key for your household and keys for your car, because you want to protect things hidden in there. You want to keep them safe. In a similar way, Jesus says to Peter and by extension the church, that I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. I will give you access to the things in there – to the priceless treasures of God. For those who confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, they will receive an invaluable reward. “Peter, you are the one who will tell them how to get it. Peter, you are the one with the keys – you and by extension, the church. Now, that doesn't mean you decide who gets in – that's God's job. But you do show them the way.”

I don't know about you, but I can't think of anything more powerful than a key that will let you into Heaven. I can't think of anything more valuable than that. I would sell everything I have for a key to Heaven, amen? Wouldn't you? People have done that all throughout the ages. They have sold everything to get into Heaven. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de Leon lost everything in search of the Fountain of Youth – in search of eternal life. Some say he went mad trying to find it. He tramped all over Florida in the summer looking for it. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC, the first emperor of China did the same thing. He spent a fortune trying to live forever. He went so far as to drink mercury because his advisors said it would keep him from dying. He boiled it down and drank it. Even today, people spend thousands of dollars on cryonics, the science of freezing your brains so you can wake up a thousand years from now and live all over again. But I am here to tell you that you don't have to do that because you have a key. You don't need a Fountain of Youth, or liquid mercury, or cryogenics, because you have what they were looking for. You have a Fountain of Youth. It is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. John 11:25 says, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will live even if he dies.” Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory.” John 6:39 says, “This is the will of Him who sent me, that of all he has given me I lose nothing but raise it up on the last day.” If you believe in Jesus, you will be raised. That is the secret to eternal life. If you come to Him, you will never die. That is the

Fountain of Youth, and the church is the place that teaches that. It has the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. It has the Key. Jesus is the Key. And what do we do with Him? What do we do with this great secret? Obviously, we tell others about Him. But how do we do that?

And that brings us to our final characteristic of the church. The church has a prominent profession. It has a prominent or important job to do. If you have been wondering as we've gone through this sermon, "Why can't a few Christians just meet in a coffee shop and call that a church," this is why. The church has been given an important job to do, and is not a coffee shop; not a place that makes cappuccinos. No offense to the cappuccino drinks in the room. If you have been wondering, "Why can't we just listen or sermons online or on television and call that a church," here is why. The church has been given the keys, and not the television; not the internet. Jesus didn't die for the television. He didn't die for the internet. He died for the church. Therefore the church alone can do this. You see this in verse 19.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, 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."

In the first century, for a rabbi to bind something was for him to say it was forbidden, and for him to loosen it was to say it was permitted. When you bind something, you restrict it, or you forbid it from going anywhere. When you loosen it, you free it up to do whatever it wants. In the same way, Jesus gives Peter and by extension the church, the authority to speak for God on earth. He frees it up to say this is forbidden, and that is permitted. This behaviour pleases God, and that behaviour doesn't. This is what we do with the keys. We give people the Law of God. We give them the commandments. When they break them because they can't keep the Law – when it crushes them because they fail to meet its requirements – we give them the gospel. We tell them about the saving power of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. The church has always told people about the Law and then given them the keys. It has always mentioned God's standard and then talked about His grace.

If you think about it, the apostles started churches for this reason, because they wanted to teach people the Law of God. They wanted to show them that this behaviour is forbidden, and that one is permitted according to God; according to the Lord of Heaven and Earth. After them, the early Church Fathers did the same thing. Irenaeus and Tertullian and Polycarp and Justin Martyr started churches to teach the Law and to show them God's holy standard and His grace for those who broke it. The saints in the Middle Ages did this. The Reformers did this. Luther and Calvin and Zwingli loved to tell people about the grace of God, but they started with the Law. They had to, otherwise people wouldn't know that they needed grace. They wouldn't know that they needed the keys. During the Modern Age, with all of the messed up ideas floating around like evolution and easy-believism and baptismal regeneration, the church is still proclaiming the Law and the grace of God. The church is still doing its job as it always has. We are still doing it here at Grace Fellowship Church.

If you notice in verse 19, it says, “And whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in Heaven.” Jesus says, “Peter, if you speak the truth in love; if you lead my people in the way that pleases me; if you teach my word the way I intend it to be taught, then whatever you bind on earth will have already been bound in Heaven. Then whatever you loose on earth will have already been loosed in Heaven.”

“I will be with you,” Jesus says. “All of Heaven will. We will back you up.” As you teach the Word of God and proclaim the Law of Grace, all of Heaven will be with you. John Knox said, “God plus one equals a majority.” You will always have a majority if you bind and loose in the name of God. You could look at it this way. As you teach and teach, and preach and preach, and want to quit because you think no one is listening to you, just remember that Heaven is with you. They are listening to you up there. When you witness and witness and witness to your family again and again and again and they think you are insane – they want to put you in a mental hospital for the things you say – Jesus will be with you and that’s all you need. The Son of God is on your side. When you talk to your co-workers about their need for a Saviour and they walk away; when you pray for that wayward child and they slam the door in your face; when you try to give people the keys and they throw them down or spit on themselves, remember that God plus one equals a majority. You will never stand alone. You will never be on the losing side. You have an important job to do, and rest assured, you will never do it alone. Your King is with you. All Heaven is.

These are the four characteristics of the church in Matthew 16: The church has a common confession, it has an undying duration, it has a powerful possession, and it has a prominent profession. I hope that all of this has shown you that the church is in a category all by itself. You can meet with the other Christians in a coffee shop, but a coffee shop can’t do this. It wasn’t created for it. You can listen to good material on the internet, but the internet can’t do this either. Despite what some may tell you, there are some things the internet can’t do. It doesn’t have the keys to the Kingdom, and it can’t bind and loose. Only the people of God can do that; only the people of God for this age. Adam and Eve were the people for their age. Noah and Abraham were the people for theirs.

You may feel like you are doing a small thing here in Chilliwack, but it’s not small – not to Heaven. You are doing something that Colossians says. Angels lean over the banister of Heaven and watch you and learn. You are doing things that thousands of years of Bible history have led up to. The saints of all time have handed you the baton. They have given you the torch, so run with it. They have given you a foundation, so build on it. Be proud of what you are doing for the Lord, and keep doing it. If you are wondering how to do that – how to keep keeping on – come back next week and we’ll show you. Next week, we are going to talk about what the church does. The church makes disciples. It makes followers of Jesus Christ. If you want to learn more about that, come back next time. For now, let’s close in a word of prayer.