

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, October 23, 2022

Upon This Rock I Build My Church

In a recent sermon (7/31/22), Charles spoke to the satanic illusion that there are multiple denominations of Christianity; various flavors to suit every individual's particular desires. In reality, there is "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," (Ephesians 4:5). We are surrounded by false "Christians", who use Christ's name as a convenient part of their carefully crafted, self-righteous identity, while they deny Christ with their every thought and action. Charles spoke to our duty to make that distinction clear when we preach: these phony "Christians" are not Christian at all! I would like to build upon that discussion today. Where Charles focused on what Christianity is not, I will approach it from this perspective: where do you find the Church of Christ in the earth? Throughout the ages, the people of God have been assembled, and walking together in faith, with the promise of the same salvation and the same savior that we believe and trust. There is plenty to say about what that looked like in the Old Testament dispensations, but our focus for today is the New Testament Church. Jesus Christ instituted His Church roughly 2000 years ago. Throughout the intervening centuries, it has been the duty of every Christian to ask and answer the question: where is the church? Once satisfied with the answer, it is the Christian's duty to be assembled with the church, doing all that they can to build up the church, despite difficulties and distress. During that time, the church has not been in a fixed place, and yet it sits upon an immovable foundation. I submit to you friends that Christ gave us the complete answer to this question at Matthew 16:18, when He said: "upon this rock I build my church". Before we explore that foundational statement, let's read through the entirety of Matthew 16.

Matthew 16

"1 ¶ The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. 3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? 4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed."

- The world desires Christ after the flesh. Salvation on demand to the impenitent sinner. People want flash and pizzazz – they want a momentary spectacle, with reassurance that they are sufficient in themselves, and can go forward with security in their own uprightness. The true child of God is emptied of any such notion.

“5 ¶ And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. 6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. 7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. 8 Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? 9 Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? 10 Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? 11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? 12 Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”

- How often do we consume our thoughts and conversations with worries about dangers to our flesh, or interruptions to our earthly happiness, when we should instead be diligently guarding against dangers to our souls?

“13 ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? 14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.”

“21 ¶ From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. 23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

- What a stark change in tone from the Lord’s words to Peter at verse 17. Friends, do we not deeply feel Peter’s reaction? Do we not struggle – daily – with the same battle between our flesh and our spirit? Between a temporary, earthly view, and an eternal, heavenly view? Whenever we are faced with matters of suffering and death, our focus naturally goes to 1) the distress of our flesh, and 2) the worry about what that affliction means about our relationship to God. Satan knows our distress and fear, and whispers in our ear, stoking the flames of doubt and despair.

Suffering and death will come, beloved; we reside under that righteous judgment for our sin. But the blood of Christ has paid the eternal price, and He is sufficient to deliver us, so that we will not see eternal death. Sufferings try, and perfect, the faith of God's people, they do not defeat it. When such hours come upon us, we must strive to bring our fevered thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ who himself was obedient unto death. (**Philippians 2:8**) As we follow Him to the grave, we will follow Him in the resurrection.

"24 ¶ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. 28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

- By "kingdom", I believe that Christ is referencing that these people will shortly behold all of the events that will usher in the Gospel era. The death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ to the right hand of the Father, followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the blossoming of the church across the world. None of those things had yet happened, and that path was not yet clear to these dear friends of faith. He is giving them reassurance that they will soon see with their own eyes, and therefore better understand His work.

Let us now look at verses 13-20, remembering our primary question: where do you find the church of Christ in the earth?

Matthew 16:13, 14 *"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."*

- Jesus is not asking what the apostles themselves think. He is asking them what they are hearing from those that have seen the works, and heard the preaching of Jesus.
- "Son of man" is a name often used to refer to Christ. It speaks to the fact that though He is God, He took on the form of a servant, making himself lower than the angels. He had to take on this decaying flesh in order to pay the price that us worms cannot pay. For Christ to own that name shows His great mercy; His condescension to us sinners contains our eternal hope.
- People had been seeing and hearing from Christ for some time now; they were assembling in large numbers to hear him preach. Some were probably coming out

of curiosity, some to find fault and accuse, and some because of genuine interest. Whatever the motivation, there is clearly confusion among people.

- **Matthew Henry:** *“Many men, many minds - those that were not willing to own him to be the Christ, wandered in endless mazes, and followed the chase of every uncertain guess and wild hypothesis.”*
- While there certainly would have been those with insincere motives, I have to believe that there were many sincere and faithful souls that were simply not yet seeing these matters clearly. These people would certainly have known of the Messiah, and believed on Him, to the saving of their souls. But now comes the opening chapter of a new dispensation. No longer a Messiah that is promised to come, but a Messiah who has actually come. He had not yet fulfilled all that had been prophesied. A lamb in the midst of wolves, but not yet a lamb slain. They didn’t yet know what to make of this scene. We see previous shifts in dispensations, complete with faithful souls that didn’t have a full view, and yet were faithful and obedient. Consider Abraham as the dispensation of the Jews began:
 - **Hebrews 11:8-10** *“8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”*
 - These matters would have become clear to those faithful souls as the work of Christ was completed. My friends, we find ourselves on the brink of another dispensation change. The Lord’s return must be soon by any measure. We shouldn’t be discouraged that we don’t have full clarity. We watch and pray for understanding, while continuing to press on in the service of God as we understand it at this hour. We know that the Lord will surely show His servants what we need to know, when we need to know it.

Matthew 16:15-17 *“15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”*

- Now Jesus turns the question on the apostles themselves. Who do you say that I am? These men had received personal teaching, and spiritual gifts by this point, but they hadn’t yet seen His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, etc. This was still a question of faith, and not one of sight. He is asking this of these men, knowing that the work of building up the church would fall directly to them after His

departure. They cannot teach what they don't thoroughly believe in their hearts. Things are about to get serious: what say ye?

- **Ephesians 2:19-22** *"19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."*
- Peter speaks here, but he is speaking for all of them. His words are a fundamental profession of faith, which is the key to this whole discussion. This is the first time recorded in the scriptures that anyone publicly called Jesus the Christ – the Messiah – the Anointed One. In previous passages he is historically referred to as Christ; we find an angel telling Joseph and Mary that He is Christ; we find the Holy Spirit revealing to Simeon that he is Christ, we find devils calling him Christ; but among men, the most we have are questions and speculations until these words from Peter.
 - **Henry:** *"The people called him a Prophet but the disciples own him to be the Christ, the anointed One; the great Prophet, Priest, and King of the church; the true Messiah promised to the fathers, and depended on by them as He that shall come. It was a great thing to believe this concerning one whose outward appearance was so contrary to the general idea the Jews had of the Messiah. He called himself the Son of Man; but they owned him to be the Son of the living God."*
- Jesus refers to Peter as Simon Barjona (son of Jonah); Christ is pointing to Peter's earthly father, as a reminder that by flesh and blood we have no place in the family of God. We have a place only because our Heavenly Father commanded it; because Christ reconciled us to the Father, and brought us into that family by adoption. We are blessed because He commanded it, and delivered the gift of free grace. Our worldly parentage did not – cannot – bring the blessing of God. Each soul is chosen and called by the Father at His own will and pleasure. Neither nature, nor nurture got the job done – only the grace of God. "Blessed art thou" – this is not "congratulations on a job well done". This is a bestowment of that deep spiritual happiness and joy that can only be found in the soul that has been visited by the Spirit, and renewed in faith.

Matthew 16:18 *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

- This is the first place in the Bible that the word church is used: Ekklesia - "called out assembly". Now that we have men publicly professing Jesus as the Christ, His church is immediately established.

- Where Jesus had previously referred to Peter as Simon, now He uses Peter's providentially appointed name as an object lesson. Peter ("petros") means rock or stone. The word "rock" used later ("petra") means large rock. Which would make that sentence sound like this: thou art petros, and upon this petra I will build my church. Your name means rock, you are hewn from earthly materials that will not last; but it is upon this other rock – this immovable, eternal, spiritual rock that you just exhibited when you made your profession of faith – that I build my church. The church of Christ is built upon Christ, and the public profession of faith, which identifies His glorious attributes.
- This is His church. He is the builder, ruler, and head:
 - **Colossians 1:18** *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*
 - **Henry:** *"That Christ would build his church upon a rock. This body politic is incorporated by the style and title of Christ's church. It is a number of the children of men called out of the world, and set apart from it, and dedicated to Christ. It is not thy church, but mine. Peter remembered this, when he cautioned ministers not to lord it over God's heritage. The church is Christ's peculiar, appropriated to him. The world is God's, and they that dwell therein; but the church is a chosen remnant, that stands in relation to God through Christ as Mediator. It bears his image and superscription. The Builder and Maker of the church is Christ himself; I will build it. The church is a temple which Christ is the Builder of (Zec 6:11-13). Herein Solomon was a type of Christ. The materials and workmanship are his. By the working of his Spirit with the preaching of his word he adds souls to his church, and so builds it up with living stones. Ye are God's building; and building is a progressive work; the church in this world is but 'in fieri' — in the forming, like a house in the building. It is a comfort to all those who wish well to the church, that Christ, who has divine wisdom and power, undertakes to build it."*
- This is a unique entity in the entire world. Families will fracture; companies will fail; nations will fall; but the Church of God will remain. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Satan strives in vain to thwart the work of salvation that is wrapped up in Christ and His church. Death itself cannot bring this work to an end. There will be people of God alive in the earth, brought together in the church, until the Lord's Kingdom is established, and the whole body of Christ is united in perfection. Jesus gives a similar promise in the Great Commission; after granting authority to His church to operate, He assures the outcome: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (**Matthew 28:20**)

Matthew 16:19 *“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

- Here we see our Lord giving authority to the church to operate. That authority has to be His in the first place, else He cannot give it. Once again, consider the beginning of the Great Commission (Sermon: 5/7/17): *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”* (**Matthew 28:18**) You find this same authority granted to the church in Matthew 18:
 - **Matthew 18:18-20** *“18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*
- He gives the church “keys” in the form of His word, which we are to faithfully apply to our lives, to the governance of the church, and to our preaching to the world. His word – faithfully applied – will bind and loose. This is not some cart blanche “power” that we wield at our pleasure. This is sober business to think that we have anything to do with such serious matters, which ought to cause us to approach the word of God with meekness and care, taking forth the precious from the vile so that we are as the mouth of God. (**Jeremiah 15:19**) The faithful preaching of the Gospel of Christ will bind the wicked (**Psalms 2, Psalms 149**), and loose the saints (**Luke 4:18**), at His good pleasure.

Matthew 16:20 *“Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.”*

- The time for the apostles to loudly proclaim Christ to the world would soon come, but it had not yet arrived. That work was to earnestly begin after Christ was resurrected and returned to Heaven, and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church on the day of Pentecost. (**Acts 2**)

Returning to our original question: where do you find the Church of Christ in the earth? You find His church where you find people assembled together, united in their public profession of Christ. That profession is the key; without that profession, there is no church. It cannot be a profession that simply names Christ, it must necessarily identify Him as He is, and not as the flesh wants Him to be. Put another way: where you find the doctrines of God being faithfully preached, you find a church. What doctrines? Those doctrines that have been at issue since the beginning; those doctrines that are the quarrel of the covenant. Let’s pick them out of the exchange between Peter and Christ:

- *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*
 - Nature of God (generally):
 - Only living, true, almighty God, etc.
 - Just (thus need for reconciliation)
 - Merciful (thus Christ)
 - Nature of Christ (specifically):
 - God (Son of the living God)
 - Anointed One / Messiah (all that pertains to the work of salvation)
 - Nature of man:
 - Totally depraved (thus the need for salvation in Christ)
 - Unable to save ourselves
- *“Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”*
 - Unconditional Election (flesh and blood – merit - didn’t earn faith)
 - Sovereignty of God (choosing who to reveal to)
 - Limited design of the atonement (revealed to one and not another)
 - Irresistible Grace (Peter had no choice in the matter)
 - Triune nature of God
- *“Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*
 - New Testament church (needfulness and function)
 - Perseverance of the Saints

When we survey the many “denominations” of the “Christian” landscape, we see that virtually every denomination has long since failed this test. If a church does not plainly profess these doctrines, then they are not a church. If they profess other, strange doctrines (ex: God loves everyone; men have free will by which to save themselves, etc), then they are not a church of Christ. Any other doctrines define a false Christ, which makes such professors antichrist, by definition. When we are preaching at these churches, we should be clear that this is the primary issue: you profess a false Christ. We should certainly preach against the various sins that these warehouses promote in their members (sodomy, adultery, fornication, idolatry, etc.), but let’s keep squarely in mind that those sins are the only natural conclusion of worshipping a false God, because the Father has not given them faith. Those sins are the rotten fruit on the branches of a corrupt tree; they are the effect, not the cause. Those churches are not built upon the rock.

This is going to apply to 99.99999999% of the churches that we encounter at this time. Every major denomination has long since abandoned any accurate profession of faith; with one voice, they have taken the glory and sovereignty of God for themselves. When preaching at these churches, we should certainly preach against their flagrant sinning; and yet their false “Christ” needs to be front and center.

Why do I say all of that?

- It's a near certainty that any church in this nation is professing a false Christ on the face of their doctrine. However, if we are going to put our hand to preaching outside of a church, then it is incumbent on anyone participating to specifically know why we are there.
- If we encounter the rare situation where a church is preaching right doctrine, but they have clear sin in their behavior, then I think we should be careful with leaping to the conclusion that they are not a church of Christ. Our duty in that instance is to rebuke their sin, and to have no fellowship with them while that sin continues.
- When I say "rare" in the previous item, I mean that it might only be a theoretical point. But it is a critical point. It's the mindset that I'm trying to get at. If we approach this question of "where is the church" based solely upon whether there is sin going on in a church, then we are putting ourselves in danger.
 - Consider what we see in the scriptures. Throughout the scriptures we find men of faith falling into sin, and being rebuked. We find churches throughout the New Testament falling into sin and being rebuked. The key to whether they are servants of God is not whether they fell into sin; it's whether they professed true faith from the heart.
 - Consider what we see in history. Calvin, Gill, Owen, Spurgeon, Luther, etc.: each of these preached in a way that seems to indicate faith. However, each of them had at least one area where we can see that they were clearly off. These monstrous denominations of our day started hundreds of years ago. Take Lutherans for an example. We know how the modern "Lutheran" church has perverted doctrine and practice beyond recognition, but Martin Luther boldly professed Christ. At the beginning of that church were there saved people involved? Was it truly a church of Christ? By the evidence we can see, I think it was. Then they fell away from that profession, and the Lord took the candlestick.
 - Consider our own path. Each of us is acutely aware of our own sin. Each of us is aware of sin and error wherein the Lord has corrected us as a body. We believe that we are, and were, Christians despite that, and we are thankful to God for correcting us and teaching us better things. We don't know what correction yet lies ahead, but we sincerely ask our Father to provide it in due measure, knowing that He only gives that correction to His own children.
 - It is a terribly sobering fact to consider this: from the beginning of the New Testament church, until now, every single church that had a candlestick has ultimately lost it. Each church had a lifespan appointed by God, wrapped around a flock of His chosen sheep; when that flock was safely delivered home, the Holy Spirit departed from that place. How that process works, and

when that happens, is entirely the prerogative of God. When does a church cease to be a church? Certainly, if Christ is no longer being professed, then it has ceased to be a church. But, even if a church is professing Christ in word, the candlestick can already be gone, leaving a lifeless husk which will eventually wither to nothing, or will morph to profess a false Christ. The promise is that the church will persist until the coming of Christ; each of the sheep will be saved. The promise is not that the church will be found at any specific place.

My friends, this is sober business. We have nothing that we did not receive from God, and what we have is contained within these sinful, corrupt, decaying, earthen vessels. We have nothing to glory in, save for Christ, and we had better hold fast to Him. We cannot stand upon our past works. None of us can stand upon the work of others. We find ourselves in times of change, with iniquity abounding all around us. We are tempted to self-righteousness; we are tempted to lethargy; we are tempted to despair. There is a relentless cacophony: “here is Christ, there is Christ”, which will only get louder as the coming of our Lord draws closer. Where is the church? Our job, my dear friends is to stay upon the fundamental truths of God – maintaining our profession of faith in word and deed, until we see our Lord come through the clouds. My hope is that this church will still be standing when the trump sounds. Hear the words of Christ to the church:

Revelation 3:10-13 *“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*

I love you all. Amen.