

WORSHIP SERVICE - 5.22.2022

CHURCH MATTERS - PART 1

I. INTRODUCTION

MAIN POINT: The local church matters because it is God's design for each believer to be submitted to and part of a local community for their spiritual formation.

MATTHEW 16:18-19

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. 19 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.

II. WHAT IS THE CHURCH

- There is no verse that says we must join ourselves to a local church.
- There is however, a biblical mandate for being part of a local church and there is an assumption by all of the NT writers that all disciples of Jesus were to be part of the life and ministry of a local church.
- You will find evidence of the existence of the local church and principles in God's Word for membership.

- Why does it matter to know what a church is?
- Because your understanding of what the church is will shape the way you live out your life, it will shape your spiritual walk with the Lord and how you engage with the local church.
- The NT writers use a lot of different metaphors to help us understand something about God's people and their relationship to Jesus Christ (e.g., the body of Christ, the household of God, the bride of Christ, the family of God, the temple of God, the flock of God).
- These rich metaphors all tell us something different about the unique group of people called the church. They are all needed because there is nothing else in this world like the church.

- Do I really need to gather with people to be part of the church?
- When Paul was bringing correction to the church in Corinth regarding the Lord's Supper, he says to them, "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church..." (1Cor. 11:18)
- The church came together, they assembled. The activity of coming together is what the church does.

- Gathering is the very definition of Church—ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, means gathering or assembly of a people called for a particular purpose.
- Jesus could have chosen another word besides 'church' to describe what he was building.

- He chose the word 'church' to represent his people.
- There is something about the gathering of his people that is a foretaste of the end-time assembly of the multitudes that will constitute the new creation.
- The church is not a building but people so it is more accurate to say that the church is a people who assemble in a place.
- Regular gatherings are what defined the early church. A church doesn't stop being a church when people aren't gathering together, however, gathering is essential for the church to function as a church.
- Our Christian faith is organized around the regular gathering of God's people, their coming together to be shaped into a people for God's glory.

WHO IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

- All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ (Matt. 28:18).
- Christ gets to determine what he is building. He is the head of the Church.
- Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church.
- Ephesians 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,
- He is the head of the church. Not the pope of the Roman Catholic Church, not the Patriarch of Constantinople In the Eastern Orthodox Church, not the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Anglican Communion, not the most popular celebrity preacher and teacher in Evangelicalism or the one who has the largest church
- Jesus is the head of his church! And it is Jesus's Church!
- We don't get to dictate what it is supposed to be.

WHO IS PART OF THE CHURCH

The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith is helpful in giving us some terms concerning the church Jesus builds.

1689 LBCF 26:1 The catholic—that is, universal—church may be called invisible with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace. It consists of the full number of the elect who have been, are, or will be gathered into one under Christ her head. The church is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The church is universal and invisible

- When we talk of the whole of the church, we call it the universal church because we are looking at describing all of those who are truly in Christ, all of his elect, who have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved, until the Lord returns.
- The word 'catholic' simply means universal.
- It is the full expression of the people of God in all ages.
- We say that the universal church is invisible because we do not know who the whole number of the elect are. Only God knows fully who belongs to Him (2Tim. 2:19).

1689 LBCF 26:2 All people throughout the world who profess the faith of the gospel and obedience to God through Christ in keeping with the gospel are and may be called visible saints, as long as they do not destroy their own profession by any foundational errors or unholy living. All local congregations ought to be made up of these.

The church is local and visible

- The invisible is made visible.

- The visible church consists of professing believers called visible saints.
 - Only visible saints should be members of a local church.
 - A profession of faith in Christ and obedience to Christ are marks of visible saints.
 - 1 Cor. 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.
 - Individual, visible saints make up the church.
 - Anybody can visit a church worship service, but the only ones that can belong to the spiritual community and family of faith are those who have trusted Christ.
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- The visible church includes a mixture of people.
 - 26:3 of the confession states that even, "*The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error.*"
 - The visible church is made up of sinners. Some are being sanctified, but not all are being sanctified.
 - And because you have a mixture of regenerate believers and false converts you have to understand that not everyone who is part of the visible church is part of the universal Church.

III. THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

How does Christ, who has all authority and is the one building his church, exercise his headship over the Church?

- First, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit carries out the work of Christ (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13; Acts 16:6-10; 2 Cor.. 3:17, 18).
 - Second, through his appointed earthy representatives, the apostles, who are the foundation of the church.
 - Ephesians 2:19-20 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,
 - Jesus says he will build his church "on this rock."
 - What rock? Peter? Peter's confession? Are his apostles the rock?
 - You can't separate Peter's confession from Peter and Christ's statement. Jesus's church will be built by people with the right confession, the right gospel.
 - Then Jesus says to all of his apostles, "*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...*"
 - What are those keys?
 - Keys are symbols in scripture of authority.
 - Those keys are the authority to do what Jesus had just done with Peter.
 - It deputized them as agents of God's kingdom of heaven to represent Christ on earth, and affirm true gospel confessions and confessors.
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- Binding and loosing are judicial terms. They were terms used by Rabbis as they applied the law to people and situations. If a particular law was applied to a person and a situation, it was said to 'bind' the person. If it did not, it was said to 'loose' a person.
 - This is the authority Jesus gave to his apostles.
 - They could stand before someone making a profession of faith, consider their confession and their life, and pronounce an official judgment on behalf of God's heavenly kingdom.
 - The authority Jesus gave them was to determine who on earth was part of God's heavenly kingdom.

- Jesus establishes the church's ability to grow and be built up through the power of the keys—which gives the church the authority to assess and affirm a person's words and deeds to see if they match up with a proper confession of Christ, and render judgment concerning that membership in Christ's church.

- Matthew 18 shows us how those keys are applied and put into action to render judgment regarding someone's words and actions.
- It's the passage that directs us on how to deal with someone who sins against us.
- Jesus outlines four steps of direct confrontation to call the brother to repentance and to be restored to fellowship.
- If he repents, his confession stands. It's credible. No further steps needed.
- If after the first three steps are exhausted and the person still does not repent. Judgment is rendered indicating that their confession of faith is not valid, their life is inconsistent with the gospel, that person is to be removed from the covenant community and treated like a sinner—someone outside the church.
- We call that church discipline.
- In this passage, Jesus invokes the power of the keys again to declare that what is bound or loosed on earth, will be bound or loosed in heaven.
- This is not just something the apostles have been given the authority to do, Jesus has given it to the local church.

- These two passages demonstrate the authority Christ has given his church. It presumes some type of understanding of who is part of the community of believers based on their confession and their life.
- The local church is granted the authority, through its leaders and members, to announce an official judgment on heaven's behalf.
- Example from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth.
- **1 Cor. 5:1-5** It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.
- 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I **have already pronounced judgment** on the one who did such a thing. 4 **When you are assembled** in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, **with the power of our Lord Jesus**, 5 **you are to deliver this man to Satan** for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.
- The ability Jesus gives his church to remove someone from the fellowship presupposes an authority granted to the church from the moment someone shows up to assess a person's confession and life if they are claiming to profess Christ.
- Will the church always get it right? No.
- Will the church make mistakes in how it exercises the power of the keys? Yes.
- Does the church's pronouncement on earth change someone's status in heaven? No.
- But that does not invalidate the authority given to the church here on earth by Jesus Christ.

- It's possible you've been part of a church or many different churches over a long period of time and have never given serious consideration to the church's authority over your spiritual life and formation and its authority to affirm your confession of faith.
- It's possible that you might not have considered the importance of the local church, and your role in it, as vital to affirming who belongs and who doesn't.