

## INTRODUCTION

If you fly often, you may get bored with some of the usual announcements. But here are some actual announcements that have been made on U.S. flights. One pilot came on the intercom and said: "Delta Airlines is pleased to have some of the best flight attendants in the industry. Unfortunately, none of them are on this flight!" Another flight attendant spiced up the usual pre-flight briefing by saying: "In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, little margarine cups will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab the cup, and pull it over your face. If you have a small child traveling with you, secure your cup before assisting with theirs. If you are traveling with more than one small child, pick your favorite." After a particularly rough landing one flight attendant said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Amarillo. Please remain in your seats with your seat belts fastened while the Captain taxis what's left of our airplane to the gate!" And finally, one flight attendant got laughs when she said: "In the event of an emergency water landing, your seat bottom can be used for flotation. In such event, please paddle to shore and feel free to keep the seat bottom with our compliments."

In our passage this morning, Jesus makes a very important announcement. He makes the very first announcement about His church. The word church is found hundreds of times in the New Testament, but in this message we will examine the very first time it appears in the New Testament.

Let me give you the timing and setting for this announcement. Jesus is about halfway through His three-year ministry. He and His disciples take a corporate retreat to a very unlikely place. They travel north to the Roman city of Caesarea Philippi, which was a center of pagan worship. It seems like an unlikely place for Jesus and His disciples to take retreat—it would be like me scheduling a GABC Staff Retreat in Las Vegas! But Jesus *knew* they would be far away from the closest Jewish Pharisee by meeting at this location. He also chose this setting intentionally, because it was the location of a place called "the gates of hell." Let's eavesdrop on this Jesus and Company retreat by reading Matthew 16:13-23:

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 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. 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.' Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ."

"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!' Jesus

turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'"

It's amazing to think about how some things begin in such small beginnings and grow into something huge with a worldwide impact. Facebook started in the dorm room of a Harvard University Student named Mark Zuckerberg, who built the program as a hobby so Harvard students could connect. Today there are 500 million active users. Google was launched in a garage by a couple of West Coast geeks who were trying to figure out a way to organize the massive amount of information available on the Internet. Today it processes over one billion searches per day. Chick-fil-a started with Truett Cathey operating a humble grill called the Dwarf House near a Ford Motor Factory in Atlanta, and today does more than \$3 billion a year, that's even with closing on Sunday. Dell Computers was launched in the UT dorm room of Michael Dell who dropped out of school to meet the demand for his new computer. Today, Dell Computers employees 100,000 people worldwide.

But none of these stories compares to the amazing story of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus introduced the idea of the church to 12 ordinary men, and one of them would be a dropout. And today, the world has over 2 billion people who confess that Jesus is their Lord. Let's notice three truths Jesus shared about His church that day.

## **1. JESUS IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH, AND HE IS BUILDING IT WITH LIVING STONES**

Jesus said, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." The word church is the *ecclesia*, which literally means a special group of people called out for God's purpose. The church isn't a literal building; it's a fellowship of people who have been born again. Jesus said He would build His church upon "this rock." But what or who is the ROCK upon which Jesus builds His church? The traditional Roman Catholic view is that Peter is the rock and Jesus built the church upon Peter, who was the first pope. However, I don't believe that's a correct interpretation. Now I'm not angry at any of my Catholic friends. I just believe they have some beliefs that aren't in the Bible. But so do Baptists! (Some Baptists think the Bible prohibits card playing, dancing and going to movies!) Someone said the Catholic Church only has one Pope but a Baptist church is full of popes!

The reason I don't think Jesus was talking about building His church on Peter is because of the words He used. Jesus said, "I tell you that you are Peter (*petros* = pebble) and upon this rock (*petra* = stratum) I will build my church." Jesus wasn't calling Peter the foundation. He was actually making a contrast. Jesus had given Simon the nickname of Peter, which means, "rock." We would probably have called him Rocky. But that word *petros* means a small rock. It's the kind of rock you pick up and throw at a dog. You wouldn't use a pebble for a foundation. Jesus used another word, *petra* to describe the foundation of the church. It was a word that meant a stratum of rock. Have you ever stood beside a mountain and seen the different strata of rock pressed into the mountainside? That's what Jesus was describing.

I think if had been there when Jesus spoke these words He would have pointed first at Peter and then He would have pointed to Himself. "You are Rocky, and upon this SOLID ROCK, I will

build my church." You say, "Why didn't Jesus just say, 'I'll build my church upon myself? Why would He use the third person to refer to Himself?'" Jesus usually spoke of Himself in the third person. For instance He said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10)

Paul confirmed that Jesus is the foundation of the church. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:11, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." Jesus didn't say, "I'll build YOUR church." He didn't say, "You'll build YOUR church." He said, "I'll build MY church." The church belongs to Jesus. One of my pet peeves is when some people refer to a church as if it belongs to the pastor. They often say, "Oh, that's Ed Young's church." Or "That's Andy Stanley's church." But no church belongs to the pastor, Jesus owns the church. Sometimes someone asks, "What is the secret to the growth of your church?" My first answer is to correct their misstatement. I say, "It isn't MY church, it belongs to Jesus. And I can't grow His church. He promised to build His church."

Do you know the main reason we know that Peter wasn't the rock upon which Jesus built His church? It's simple. Peter was standing there and he understood the identity of the Rock. Later Peter wrote a couple of letters and in one of them he clearly identified Jesus as the cornerstone, the capstone, and the foundation of the church. He wrote, "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by God but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house." (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Jesus is the foundation and we're the living stones that make up the spiritual building. Peter knew he wasn't foundation material. In our text Peter told Jesus to stop talking about dying. Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block!" By the time Peter wrote his epistles he realized he was a pretty "crumbly" rock. The night Jesus was arrested, Peter denied Jesus three times. He crumbled before the questions of a teenage girl. He was a lot more like Pebbles from the Flintstones than Rocky Balboa!

Peter had come to learn a very important truth about the church. Jesus is the foundation, but we are all living stones built together. We need each other.

This spiritual building Jesus is constructing isn't made up of bricks that are all the same size and appearance. It's more like a stone wall of all different shapes and sizes. God loves variety. If you don't believe it, just look around. Unless you're a twin, nobody else looks like you. But like the stones in a wall, we are joined together through the mortar of the Holy Spirit. The stonemason carefully chooses each stone to fit with the others. That's exactly what God does with us.

We need each other. Where I'm weak in one area, you may be strong, and where I'm strong, you may be weak. I need you and you need me. Nobody can be a church alone. Green Acres Church is *not* this building. It's the people of God that make this a church.

God's church has been building for 2,000 years and as I mentioned last week, God is adding almost 100,000 new believers every single day. To some the church may seem old fashioned and out-of-place, but the church will be around long after every other group in humanity is a forgotten footnote of history. God's church is stronger than ever.

Chuck Swindoll wrote: "All kinds of prophets of doom wonder about the condition of God's building. They see it as condemned property, worn out, dilapidated, and derelict rather than as a magnificent edifice that is being constructed on schedule. The truth is, God is the master architect, and every stone is being placed exactly where He designed it to fit. His project is right on schedule." (*Hope Again*, p. 68)

During the days of Greek power, the Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and saw no walls. Puzzled, he asked the king, "Where are the walls about which you boast so? I see no walls!" The king pointed to the Spartan soldiers and said, "These are the walls of Sparta and every man is a brick."

We could point around to the people here who are followers of Jesus and say, "Here is the building of God, and every person a living stone."

## **2. THE CHURCH SHOULDN'T RETREAT—WE SHOULD ATTACK THE GATES OF HADES (DEATH)**

"...and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Some translations read, "the gates of hell," but it is literally, "the gates of Hades." In the Bible Hades is the abode of the unrighteous dead before the final Great White Throne Judgment described in Revelation 20. Hades is a place of torment like hell, but it's like the county jail before the trial of a guilty person, who is then sent to life behind bars. There was even a mythological Greek god named Hades who was in charge of the underworld. The Greek word *hades* literally means, "not to see" which means Hades is a place of utter darkness. So if Hades means the underworld, or the grave, then "gates" of Hades would be death.

But there is a specific reason Jesus used this phrase. I mentioned that Jesus and His disciples were at a place of pagan worship. Actually we know exactly where this location is and I have visited there many times with groups that I escort to Israel. There is a cave in the side of the mountainside (that clearly has many layers or stratum of rock). During the time of Jesus a powerful spring gushed out of this underground cave creating a dangerous vortex. This cave with the vortex was called "the gate of Hades." The Roman god Pan, who was half goat and half man, was worshipped there. The worship often involved human sacrifice. A person would be thrown into the vortex (usually a slave or a captured soldier). If the sacrifice appeared on the surface after drowning, Pan had rejected the sacrifice and another unlucky sacrifice was offered. If the body didn't float to the top, they believed Pan accepted the sacrifice. It was at the site of this pagan practice that Jesus made this powerful pronouncement that even the gates of Hades would not stop the growth and message of His church.

So Jesus was saying death couldn't stand against His church. Death is a constant every culture and race faces. It doesn't matter if you are American, Chinese, or Swede: You will face death. It doesn't matter if you're Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or atheist, death is something you can't ignore.

Jesus came to provide an answer to death. On the cross, He disarmed death. The Bible says,

“So that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery of their fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15) Because we are part of the church, we don’t have to fear death!

This verse about the gates of hell has been misunderstood for years. I can recall as a boy hearing my pastor preach on this passage several times. He pictured the church as being under attack from hell. He described the church as a mighty fortress. He graphically described all the demonic forces of hell attacking the church. They were assaulting the church with wave after wave of demonic warriors. And at the climax of his message he would triumphantly declare, “But the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!” There would be “amen’s” throughout our church.

Too many people think of the church as a place to retreat from all the evils of the world. That’s why they want to call this building a “sanctuary.” That reminds me of a place where certain species are protected. Some people want to hide in the church. There’s even an old song that has Jesus saying, “Hold the fort, for I am coming. Jesus signals still. Wave the answer back to heaven, by Thy grace we will!” That’s the idea of Jesus looking down from heaven and saying, “Oh my, my poor church. I see you down there. Just hold on. Hang in there the best you can!” What a wimpy picture of the church.

But what are gates for? They aren’t offensive weapons! You don’t fight with gates. Can you imagine a general preparing his troops by saying, “Okay, boys, get those gates ready, we’re heading into battle.”

Gates are defensive. They keep attackers out. We’re not here to hold the fort because we’re under attack, we should be moving out to storm the gates of Hades! And when we do, they will fall before the onslaught of the truth that in Jesus you don’t have to fear death. If you want to sing a song for me, let it be, “Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war; with the cross of Jesus going on before. At the shout of triumph Satan’s hosts doth flee; On then, Christian soldiers, on to victory! Hell’s foundations quiver, at the shout of praise; Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise!”

I know sometimes groups in the church often plan retreats. That’s great, but I can’t recall ever planning a church retreat because I’m more interested in planning a church ATTACK! Let’s have fewer church retreats and more church advances—attacking the gates of Hades!

### **3. JESUS HAS GIVEN US THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM—THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL**

Jesus said, “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.” Again, our Catholic friends teach that the Pope possesses the keys to the kingdom. When the Pope is wearing his holy vestments, he always has a set of keys fastened at his waist. These keys symbolize the keys to the kingdom they believe Jesus gave to Peter.

However, Jesus wasn't talking just to Peter. He used a plural. He said, "I will give to ya'll the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever ya'll bind on earth will be bound in heaven." This terminology refers to the forgiveness of sin. But we have don't have personal authority to bind and loose, to forgive or to condemn. The verbs Jesus used really can't be translated easily into English. He was saying, "What we announce as forgiven has already been forgiven in heaven." It's the idea that it is our job to announce that people who embrace the truth of the Gospel are forgiven. Our job is to proclaim the possibility of forgiveness; that's the good news.

The Bible says, "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14)

When the Bible talks about preaching it doesn't refer to someone standing up in front of a crowd and doing what I'm doing now. It simply means sharing the gospel with everyone you encounter. When Philip encountered the Ethiopian official in Acts 8, he preached the gospel to Him. In other words He shared the truth of Jesus with him one-on-one.

I don't know about you, but I have a drawer at home that contains a bunch of old keys and I have no clue what they open. Some of them are probably old keys to my house in Alabama. I think I have a key that might have started an old pickup I used to borrow from a friend. Nothing is more useless than a key that isn't used.

Sadly, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have been given a key to heaven, the truth of the gospel. This week you are going to encounter people who are still struggling under the fear of death. I want you to envision them pounding on a door, trying to get in. It's the door of heaven. Jesus has given you the key; will you share it with them?

## CONCLUSION

Jesus' disciples reported that they had heard what other people said about Him. Some said He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus said, "But who do *you* say that I am?"

That's the most important question you'll ever answer in your life. Who is Jesus to you? Don't answer what you've heard your parents or your pastor say about Jesus. Who is He to you? Can you say like Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God?" If you believe that, He can be the foundation of your life as well.

It was great to have Colt McCoy speak here last July. He's a gifted quarterback, but he's a better man. And he has great parents. His dad, Brad McCoy, is the speaker for our next Breakfast of Champions in January. Recently Brad was talking about that night last January when Texas was playing against Alabama for the national championship. It was tough to see Colt go down with a shoulder injury in the first quarter. Brad said when they took Colt down to the locker room he joined him. Colt was so determined to get back in the game that he tried throwing a football to his dad in the locker room. He couldn't even raise his arm above his shoulder level, but he tried. It was obvious he wasn't going to get back in the game. But rather than change into street clothes

and sulk on the sidelines, Colt had his shoulder taped up and went back up to help his team. He became an extra coach helping his replacement with plays and reading the defense.

After Texas lost the game, Colt was interviewed on the field. The reporter asked him how he felt about his injury and the loss. In front of millions of television viewers, Colt responded with grace and faith. He said, "God is in control of my life. And I know that if nothing else, I'm standing on the Rock."

I asked Colt about that statement at our banquet. He answered he didn't even remember saying it. He said all he remembered was the reporter asking the question and silently asking God to supply an answer. Wow! That was one prayer that God answered. What an answer!" I'm standing on the Rock."

Brad said after that night he received hundreds of texts, emails, and letters from people all around the world telling him what a great testimony that was. Brad has been a successful high school football coach for years and when he got back to his hometown from Pasadena one of his high school football players came up to him and said, "Coach, I heard what your son said after the game. But I just have one question. What is the rock?" Brad said, "Son, we sing about that rock in church." Then Brad started singing, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid Rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand."

## OUTLINE

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Jesus said, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by God but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house." *1 Peter 2:4-5*

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"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

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David O. Dykes  
Pastor, Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes