

Date of sermon: 9/11/2021
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Matthew 16:13-18
Title of Sermon: The Promise of the Church
Series: The Bride - #1

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¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

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Let's look at Matthew chapter 16. And I'm going to start reading in verse 13. "Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, and he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'" Now, this is a phrase that Jesus used more than anything, any phrase, any title in the Scriptures to describe himself. He used a lot of other things, but this is the one He used absolutely the most -- hands down. "'Who do people say that 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?'" And I think at this point He looked closely, if not dead-on, to Peter. "Who do you say I am?" Peter, always being willing to speak up before anyone -- you gotta love this guy. There's nothing better than a guy who thinks before he speaks, but when he's right, it's beautiful. 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 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, and whatever you bind on earth, it's gonna be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth, it's gonna be loosed in heaven.' Then he warned his disciples, 'Don't tell anyone else that I'm the Christ.'"

I don't think Peter had any idea of the power of this prophetic word. I don't think he had any idea of the expanse of this word. "Peter, the church is gonna take the gospel of the kingdom to the world." Satan is gonna come after it. Satan is gonna seek to destroy the church. Satan is gonna get in and divide the church. He's gonna send all kinds of things to the church. He's going to bait them to get involved in all kinds of things. He's gonna send viruses. He's gonna send plagues. He's gonna send racial tension. He's gonna send anything that he can. "But Peter, at the end of the day, when all the dust settles, and people are walking through the craziness of the other side -- Peter, there's one thing I will guarantee you - the church will stand."

I'm a pastor because I love two things: I love people and I love God. And if you put those two together, it spells the church. Jesus didn't say -- He did not say that the church is not gonna have a battle. He did not say that the gates of hell were not going to try to destroy the church. No, in fact, Jesus didn't say, "And if the church fails, I have other institutions. I have other organizations. And if the church doesn't make it, I'll raise up other institutions." He didn't say that. He said singularly, "I'm gonna build my church, the gates of hell are gonna come against it like you cannot imagine, and it's gonna prevail." Why? Over the next six weeks, what I want to look at is -- it's really more than that, it's gonna be ten weeks. Six weeks if the first part of the series called The Bride. And the second part -- I may change -- I'm not there yet, I know where I'm headed. I just don't know what title. Titles are kind of hard for me -- I don't even like them. But I'm gonna look at six weeks called The Bride. What is this church? What is its nature? What is its assignment? What is its power? And then I'm gonna look at what is its challenge? So, six weeks we're gonna look together at this promise that Jesus gave to Peter. And to you. "I'm gonna build my church. And the gates of hell's gonna rage, and it's gonna spit, and it's gonna come after the church, and it's gonna hit the church, and it's gonna wound the church -- but the church is never gonna fail." In fact, it's gonna prevail. And when the battle comes -- and it will -- and we'll look at the last four weeks, The Battle of the Church -- we will see that there is a significant challenge. Why? Because the bride is a mystery

and she's a warrior. She's crafted by God; she's raised up by God. That's what this text is gonna tell us. And sent into this battle to advance the kingdom of God. That's what He says. I will call her into being, I will set her on a course. She will advance the kingdom of God. And she's the caretaker of the gospel. Might I add -- the single caretaker of the gospel. Hasn't been given to any other institution. For good reason. Because there's no other institution that reflects the triune nature of God. The gospel has been given to the church. She's the caretaker of the gospel. And the reflection of the triune God. There's nowhere else in all of Scripture that there is an institution -- other than marriage -- but marriage hasn't been entrusted the gospel the way the church has. And there's no other place that has the ability to reflect the glory of God. No other institution -- created by even Christians -- other than the church. And she's the validation of the coming of Christ.

Where do we begin? We begin where Peter began. "Peter, who do you say that I am?" And Peter, as he was looking at Jesus, he said, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." That's a confession. And at the heart of the church is a confession. Now, you and I -- I don't know how you grew up -- I didn't grow up in a creedal church. I didn't grow up speaking the creeds. I didn't grow up reciting the creeds. I didn't grow up reciting confessions. I didn't. Our liturgy was three songs, a special, the choir sang, we took offering, the preacher preached, we had an invitation, we came down, and that -- let me tell you what -- that was our absolute service every Sunday. We never spoke a creed. We did sing the doxology -- that was as close as a creed -- and I truly miss it. Those of you who've been around periodically, I sing it just for nostalgia, and frankly, I love it! But we weren't creedal people. What's creedal people? Creeds are things that the early church spoke. "I believe in Christ the risen Son," and that goes on. We have all kinds. The Nicene Creed. And they did it for good reason. It was what they taught their students, it's what they memorized. What Christ is really saying is, the church is a creedal institution. So, for those of us who didn't grow up in it, we need to embrace it. At the very heart of the church is a confession, a creed. Peter nailed it. He nailed it, we know, because Christ said, "Peter, let me tell you what -- people on earth didn't give you that, the Father gave you that." And by the way, that's at the heart of the church. And the heart of this church, and at the heart of any church where Christ resides is this confession. And by the way, if this confession is not at the heart of the church, that's not a church. It's an institution. It's an organization. It just happens to not be the church of Christ. Because at the heart of Christ's church is this confession -- Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

It's not: Jesus Christ is a historical figure. It's not: Jesus Christ is a noble teacher. It's not: Jesus Christ is a phenomenal leader. No. No, Peter says it very clearly. "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the One who has come to redeem the people. The Son of the Living God." Now, over the years, all kinds of people have tried to minimize that. They have. Institutions have tried to minimize it. Some have suggested that Jesus is one of the great prophets. Mohammad is a great prophet. Joseph Smith is a great prophet. So, they suggest. And so, what they're trying to do is, they're trying to, if you will, minimize Jesus, elevate others. They're not trying to extinguish Jesus -- there are scores of people who suggest that Jesus is a great prophet. There are others who say that He's a misguided mystic. Some professors at institutions that were once proclaimers of the gospel -- I'm thinking of one in particular, Harvard -- suggests, as one professor said, "He is an historical footnote in the life of faith." "He's an historical footnote in the life of faith." Others -- liberal theologians will deny His deity. Some will deny His virgin birth. And it's not really uncommon to get that today. Forty percent of people -- 40 percent of people believe that all religions lead to the same God. If you were to go out, and you ask people, "Do you believe in God?" And, you know, in the United States we take polls all the time. And the polls tell us that way over 90 percent of people believe in God! That should be deeply encouraging. Until you ask them a little bit more. "Tell me about that God." And their belief is that 40 percent of people believe that all religions of the world have truth that should be embraced and practiced. "Peter, who do you say that I am?" "You are THE Messiah -- not A messiah, not ONE OF -- THE Messiah. Jesus Christ, the son of God."

Fifty-three percent of all people polled in the United States believe that when anyone prays, they pray to the same God. You see, at the heart of the church is a confession -- and it's an important confession, because it will define you apart from the 53 percent. It will define you apart from the 40 percent. It will not allow you to walk in the majority. You will have to decide, and you have to decide today, 'cause you're hearing it -- am I willing to acknowledge the limitations that Christ gives me? The specificity that Christ gives me. Am I willing to acknowledge that what Christ said to Peter He says to me -- "Who do you

say that Christ is?" Who is He? Peter says there's actually only one answer, in terms of the confession of the church. You are the Christ, the son of the living God.

Today's 9-11. I've thought about it all day. Man, I thought about that day -- I remember it like you probably, if you're old enough, you remember where you were. I also remember 9-23. Do you remember that day? 9-23 was the funeral for America. 9-23, Yankee Stadium, was the funeral for America. We needed a preacher. They gave us Oprah Winfrey. We needed a worship leader -- they gave us a woman that came out of the gay bathhouses of San Francisco. We needed somebody who knew how to help us mourn death. They lined the stage -- if you remember that day, on 9-23 -- they lined the stage, and everybody and anybody of every faith except for a person who would say, "Jesus Christ is the Messiah" -- there was no one on the stage who would agree with this confession. On a day we as a country mourned nearly three thousand people who died, in an attack on our country like we've never seen, on the day that we gathered ourselves to mourn, this confession was absent. But the church was not. Why? Because at the heart of the church is a confession -- "Jesus, you are the Christ, the son of the living God." And at the heart of that confession is a promise. It's a promise that Jesus makes, not Peter. It's a promise that God makes, not me. And what is that promise? "I will build my church." That's what He says. "I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not prevail." See, at the heart of our church is an inevitable promise. I'm not gonna suggest that it's to every individual church. I'm saying that it is to the church of Jesus Christ, both in its universal expression, those in the kingdom of God and in its individual and local expression. And what Jesus says should be the most encouraging thing to you in the world. Encouraging in a day like ours, where church attendance has plummeted in the last two years. Deeply encouraging where church division has exploded all over the world. Where pastoral resignations have seen a 25 to 35 percent increase. On this day -- let me tell me what, this text will encourage you. All the news -- Fox News, CNN -- man, it'll drive you to sheer depression. But not this text. Why? Because Jesus says, at the heart of this church that is a confession of Christ is a promise -- "I am going to build my church."

Jesus is the one who said to His disciples, "Come, follow me. My yoke is easy. My burden is light." Why would He ever say that? Because, He says, "I'm gonna do all the work. I'm gonna do the work of saving you. I'm gonna do the work of redeeming you. I'm gonna do the work of calling you to myself. I'm gonna do all of that work." And so, the reality is, He's just taking this extension, and He says to them in this text -- "I am going to build my church." Now, if you're a builder -- and Jesus says that He is -- you've got a blueprint, don't you? I've never met a builder in my life that started a building program of any kind that didn't have a set of blueprints. And Jesus has them. Oh, they look a little different. They look a little different. I've seen the master blueprints, though. I've walked into the streets and made my way around Istanbul -- 18 million people. Probably today over 20 million people. Crazy! And the reality is, at the heart of that, Jesus says, "I'm gonna build my church here." Oh, it looks different than the church in São Paulo -- but it's there, too. The reality is, if you go into São Paulo, you can go into the streets, you can go into the favelas, you can go into anywhere. And Jesus says, "In this place, I have a master blueprint. I'm gonna build my church. It's going to be here." Why do we know that? Because He promised. And I don't know about you -- I've never seen Jesus make a promise that He didn't fulfill. He said, "I'm gonna raise my body from the dead." And He did. He said, "I'm gonna turn water into wine." And He did. And He says, "I'm gonna come back for my church," and it will be here when He comes back. And there's no place on the earth, absolutely no place on the earth that Jesus doesn't have a vision and a design to build His church. And here's the beauty of it -- He takes sole ownership of building it. He takes sole ownership of defending it. He takes sole ownership of encouraging it. And He says, "I will build my church." It's gonna take energy. Building always does. Tearing things down -- it's easy. You can tear anything down. Give a monkey a match and it can burn something down in an hour. A monkey can do more damage in an hour than a thousand men can do in a year. It's easy to tear down. It's easy to walk into any church -- our church, included. It's easy. In fact, we've made a sport of it in terms of critiquing and criticizing the American church. Sometimes missionaries come back, and they just want to tell me how bad the church is in America. I want to remind them -- can you pause before you get on your high horse of critique that you're actually criticizing the bride of Christ? I don't know about you, but if somebody came to me and started just shredding on my wife, and just having at it -- I'd give 'em as a pastor a few minutes. And then I'd say -- "You're done. That's my wife. There's no one I love more than her."

I don't think the Father in Heaven takes it glibly when you destroy the church in your mind. When you critique it. When you divide it. When you try to come against it. I don't think He takes that glibly. It's His church, and it was His Son who said, "I'm gonna build it." And He promises, "I will never quit." How about you? He promises, "I will never stop." How about you? He promises, "I will never change my mind and build something else." How about you? You see, at the heart of the church is an inevitable promise. And my friends, I will tell you honestly, the last two years have been the hardest ministry years of my life. Hands down. Hands down -- there hasn't been anything harder, and this promise breathes more life into me than anything. It's that building this church, sustaining this church, is not my assignment. I'll love it, I'll serve it, I cherish it. Jesus is the one who said, "I will build it." He's the one who said, "I will craft it, I will forge it. I will bring it into being." And He says, "I will do it behind enemy lines, I will do it in communist China. I will do it in secular New York. I will do it in flamboyantly sinful Las Vegas. I will do it in Russia. I will do it anywhere and everywhere, and I will do it in Salem."

At the heart of the church is an inevitable promise, and at the heart of the church is an invincible power. This line surges through me. It does. "I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not overcome it." For two thousand years, we've witnessed this. For two thousand years, they've tried to destroy the credibility of the Bible. They haven't. For two thousand years, there have been whole regions, whole countries that have made it illegal. They've tried to suppress God. They've tried to suppress the church. They've made having a Bible illegal. And it's almost like the more pressure they put against the church, the more vibrancy that it has. They've gone in and burned every Bible that they could find -- they just can't burn what is pressed into a person's heart. They can't take away what is memorized in a mind. And the fact is -- God says the church will prevail. Oh, Satan has attempted. He has. I think he's attempted significantly in the United States in the last two years. Every week I read an article about the damage done to the church, the wound in the church, the decline of the church, wondering what the church will look like. I don't know what the church will look like -- I guarantee you one thing, it will be here. It will be. Why? Because it's been given an invincible power. Christ is the one who said, "No matter what Satan brings at it, I will win."

My friends, if you were to go to Rwanda, there was a day when the Tutsi and the Hutus hated each other. They despised each other. But if you go there today, you'll see ministers from both tribes coming together and worshipping. You'll see the church coming out of the ashes of the horrific wars and death. If I can take you into Russia, where, for 70 years, they've made God illegal. Basically, they've declared over and over and over that God is dead. And if you make your way through Russia and if you make your way through all of the Uzbekistans, and -- all of the "stans", what you're gonna see is this incredible visible discernible work of God, where the church gathers and they're doing baptisms. Some of the baptisms I know in some of the areas of Russia they literally only allowed non-Christians to come. Why? Because they have so many coming to be baptized they can't afford to have Christians come. Imagine that for our baptisms. Oh, that would be so good! Other than the fact that I really don't want to have to experience what they did in Russia to get there. Oh, but if you come into China where, you know, missionaries that our church sent back in the late 1800s -- we sent missionaries into China -- and then they drove all of the missionaries out, all of them. They went into the Philippines and they went into all kinds of other places, and they made the church illegal and they drove it under the ground, and they absolutely were convinced the church was going to die in China. I think on that day, God may have sat back in His chair -- if you can be so, you know, gracious with me to allow me that imagery -- I think on that day, when all of the missionaries, when the last one went out of China, and the rulers of China thought, "We are going to rid ourselves of all religion," I think it was on that day, Psalm 2 tells me, that God sat back in His rocker and laughed. "You think you will."

The gates of hell will come against the church. The gates of hell will bring discouragement. It will bring division. It will bring racial tension. It will bring a persecution that you could ever imagine. And today in the United States, I think -- I do believe that the church is being trimmed. I do believe that the church is being winnowed. And I do believe, on the other side, this church and every other church that stands on this confession will have a power far beyond what they've ever experienced in their life. Why do I say that? Rwanda. Russia. Uzbekistan. China. Yemen. Thailand. I've been to all of them, and I've witnessed the power of the Spirit of God to raise up a church in the most unlikely of places, and I can only imagine -- Satan, give it your best shot. Bring division to the church. Get us focused on all kinds of crazy things -- tragically, like viruses and vaccines and masks. Get us on those! But you'll have only a few

moments. And out of that, the church will rise. Why? Because at the heart of the church is an invincible power. And that power's gonna be seen in our country again. I'm not trying to project that our country is going to be rebuilt. I'm not that interested in that. I'm ultimately interested in the church. Why? Because that's the promise that God gave me, and I love two things -- I love God, and I love people. And when you put those two together, it spells church.

If you were to take a syringe and place it into virtually any country and take it out and examine the syringe, what you're gonna see is the church. If you go over to Africa today, there's virtually not a leader in Africa at a significant level that wasn't trained in grammar and in English or in their education that wasn't trained other than by the church -- a missionary. That's not my observation -- that's senior Christians, Kessler and others, and presidents, who have traveled all over the world, far more than me, and if you go virtually to any place in the world, if you go into the United States and you take a syringe and you extract out the medical care that we're receiving today -- what's at the heart of it? It was the church. If you go to Katrina and you extract out, who was it there that stayed and loved and served and rebuilt? It was the church. And if you go to Ida, and you follow the track -- oh, FEMA shows up, but let me tell you what -- they're gone real quick, and you know who stays? You know who rebuilds? I've walked the Ninth Ward. I've walked Luciana. I've walked those places, and I've interviewed them. I sat in a barber chair and asked a guy, "Who was it that came down here and built it?" And this is not a believer. Just happens to be a barber. And apart from God, I think barbers know everything in the world. "Who came down here and rebuilt this area?" He jokingly said, "It wasn't the atheist society. It was you Christians." That's because of the promise of God, friends. That's not because we're good. That's not because we're great. It's because Jesus said, "Peter, I got a promise. When you confess the truth, I will build something, and I will take ownership of it. And I will build something that will endure forever. And yes, it will take shots. And yes, at times it's gonna look wounded. And yes, it's gonna have times where it kinda gets jolted and it kinda leans back on its heels -- but on the other side, it's trimmed, it's winnowed, it's strengthened." And let me tell you what -- when is all and said and done, Jesus says, when the gates of hell have given their best shot -- the bride will come out the other side.

If you were to take a schematic of our church -- it would not show you, if you were to look at our church, all of the lines pointed towards this meeting space on Saturday night or Sunday morning. If you were to take a schematic of our church, and the, what -- 12- to 15-hundred plus people who call this church home, the schematic of this church would not focus us on all of the lines drawing into this place. No, if you were to take a schematic of this church, in the 1890s, it would show a missionary who was sent out of this church to the state of Washington. It would show a Chinese brother who was sent out of this church who went to Washington DC. It would show in the schematic one of the missionaries in the late 1800s who was sent over to China who was there and died in China taking the church underground when God was illegal. If you were to take a schematic of this church during the world wars, you would see them making decisions where they were investing in this country. Not in a building program -- I have nothing against building programs, praise God somebody one day built this, and we're all living in the blessing of it -- but there was a time where they said, it's not gonna be any good to have a church if we don't have a country, and they invested in this country -- for you. For your kids, your grandkids. If you were to take a schematic of this church 70 some years ago, there was a couple who came and said, "We want to go plant churches in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic," and our church says, "We're with you." And we sent them out. And tomorrow there will be over 400 churches who will lift up the name of Christ who will stand on this confession who are experiencing the prophetic promise of God.

Sometimes the worst thing you can ever do is to get this crazy little myopic view to say, "We're only 15 hundred people." No, God has through this church and through every church that names this confession, He's taken them and sent them out all over the world to take this gospel of which we are caretakers to save people to the glory of Christ. The next six weeks I will do my absolute level best to preach from God's Word and tell you why I love this church.

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