

Intro:

This afternoon I want to return to a subject that I have preached about before, although this is not a 'rehashed' message from the past. I have been getting a sense that I need to teach you some things on this subject for a while, but I had a feeling that I had taught a good deal about it already.

I looked back in my records and discovered that most of my preaching and teaching on this was in 1995-1996 and some in 2002... so it is time we revisited the subject.

The subject is 'the Church'.

Here we are, gathering every week, gathering as a church, but often, I think, we are gathering more by instinct than by understanding.

In other words, as Christians, we have an 'instinct' that we *ought* to gather together. We *enjoy* the gathering together, we are *fulfilled spiritually* by gathering together, we *enjoy the blessings and benefits* of gathering together, and all of that because we are acting on our 'instinct' about what we ought to do.

I want you to have more than just an 'instinct'; I want you to have an understanding of what it is you are doing when you gather together. I also want you to understand what it is we are trying to achieve in this particular gathering, this church, Grace Baptist Church of Victoria.

I chose a rather provocative title for this message:

It's Not Your Church

Does that feel a bit like a poke in the eye?

In our normal English conversation, we often refer to 'my church'.

- 'My church is over on Matson Rd, in Langford.'
- 'I'd like to invite you to my church...'
- 'We don't do that at my church.' or... 'We do that at my church.'

You might also have another way of referring to the church we attend.

- 'I go to Don's church...'

Let me reiterate the title of this message:

It's Not Your Church

And it's not my church either.

So whose church is it?

Read Mt 16.13-19

Proposition: The church belongs to the One who builds it.

I. The foundation of his church

A. Jesus told a parable about the wise man who built his house upon the rock at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount

1. A favorite song of Sunday School children – not for the house that stands firm, but for the house that falls flat [goes ‘smash’]
2. Unfortunately, the delight of children is the reality of the world – lives are built on the sand instead of the rock of God’s word

But what is the ‘rock’ on which the church is founded?

B. The foundation controversy

1. Catholic theology: Peter is the rock. But...
 - a. The rest of the NT gives no indication this is true
 - b. The words are different – [a stone] vs. [massive rock, a boulder]
2. Apparently competing views:
 - a. Peter’s statement is the massive rock
 - b. Jesus himself is the massive rock

Some commentators want to argue about the difference – but Peter’s confession is Christ: ‘thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God’ – the statement and the Christ are one and the same.

C. The rock on which every born again life depends

Romans 9:33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Ephesians 2:19 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*;

i.e., the foundation of the apostles and prophets are their teachings concerning Christ.

1 Peter 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. ⁶ Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. ⁷ Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, ⁸ And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

1 John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: ³ And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. ⁴ Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

1. How does one enter the church of Jesus Christ? By falling on the rock that is greater than I
2. The confession of faith demands an enlightened understanding
 - a. My own condition is desperate, I cannot save myself, my works can never justify me before God
 - b. Jesus Christ is my substitute (the Christ, the promise of God) who took my place for my sins
 - c. My faith in Christ will cleanse me from my sins and make me a child of God

You may not understand the theology behind these statements, you may not be able to fully explain all the ramifications of the confession, but faith in Christ on the basis of this simple understanding will make a man a part of the church of Jesus Christ.

Proposition: The church belongs to the One who builds it.

Jesus laid the foundation in his person; the apostles proclaimed the foundation in his person; we confess the foundation in his person; to whom does the church belong?

But a building is more than a foundation...

II. The formation of his church

... I will build my church ...

A. The work of Christ in building His church

“The importance of the church can scarcely be overstated. It is that which God purchased with the blood of His own Son (Acts 20:28). It is that which Christ loves, nourishes, and cherishes (Eph. 5:25, 29), and which He shall present to Himself blameless in all her glory one day (v. 27). Building His church constitutes Christ’s principal work in the world today (Matt. 16:18) through His giving of spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:12). Thus the exercise of those gifts by believers aligns us with what Christ is doing today.”¹

1. Offering his blood to save the church
2. Actively nourishing and cherishing the church he loves
3. Persistently purifying his church
4. Personally providing the gifts for building the church
 - a. By edification
 - b. By evangelism

B. The history of Christ building his church

1. Apostolic age – trials, troubles, persecution, expansion
2. Post-apostolic age – doctrinal struggles, government oppression, persistent growth
3. Flourishing age – great advancement, prominence, and the trial of prosperity
4. Dark ages – corruption, persecution of the true church by the professing church
5. Reformation – renewal, struggle, persecution
6. Revival/missionary age – Whitefield, Wesleys, Edwards, and more, Carey, Judson, Taylor, and more ... and troubles and trials along the way

¹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 393.

7. Modern age – prosperity, corruption, weakness ... and life

Our own church is a microcosm of the work of Christ in building his church – our efforts so often seem futile, yet Jesus Christ uses a word here, a witness there, and the light of the gospel shines in a heart one by one.

And the church is built by Jesus Christ, working in and through us.

Proposition: The church belongs to the One who builds it.

And yet there is more...

III. The future of his church

... the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

A. Identify the gates of hell

1. Some say the gates of hell represent death – death is no conqueror of Christians
2. More specifically...

“Jesus meant that the powers of death, Satan and his hosts doing their most powerful work of opposing life, would not prevail over the church. The church cannot die. This statement anticipated Jesus’ resurrection and the resurrection and translation of the church. Even Jesus’ death would not prevent His building the church.”²

- a. Gates = the ‘town council’, the place of judgement in the ancient cities
- b. Gates = the assembled forces of evil, attempting to destroy the church and its Christ before the church even begins on the cross ... but
- c. Gates = the antagonistic forces of evil actively opposing the church through the ages
 - 1) Externally as the persecutors of the church

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003). Mt 16:18.

2) Internally as false shepherds and false prophets

3) Internally by scandalizing weak and failing saints (tripping up by sin, confusing doctrine, etc.)

d. Gates = the assembled forces of Satan gathered against the Lord and his saints as the Lord returns to the earth

B. The gates **shall not prevail** against the Lord's church

1. In our weakness He is strong
2. In our extremity He is the victor
3. In the end He shall prevail

Proposition: The church belongs to the One who builds it.

- Jesus founded the church.
- Jesus builds the church.
- Jesus will achieve the ultimate victory for the church.

Conclusion:

The English word 'church' doesn't adequately translate the underlying Greek word. The word we have here is , an assembly.

The word 'assembly' took on a special meaning in the New Testament. In Greek, it had meant any political or religious gathering of people.

In the New Testament, the word means the body of believers who can assemble together but are always assembled in Christ, whether they are physically assembled or not.

The English word 'church' is basically a transliteration of another Greek word that adds precious meaning to the concept of 'the assembly.' That other Greek word is . The Scottish call their churches 'kirks', directly from this word.

What does mean? It means 'the Lord's' – something belonging to the Lord.

The church is the assembly that belongs to the Lord.

This local church that we are in — whose church is it? It's not your church; it's not my church; it's the Lord's church.