

Matthew 16:13-20

“Is it possible to find the true church?”

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. ¹⁹ 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.’**

²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.”

Thesis: Loving folks who assemble in Jesus’ name to honor God, encourage one another, and share Jesus’ saving message make up the true church.

Suppose you just learned about Jesus and you wanted to affiliate with his church.

How would you go about finding a church true to Jesus’ teachings?

Here’s a sampling of what you would have found in the Los Angeles GTE Yellow Pages, 1985, 86: Assemblies of God Full Gospel LA Church.

Churches-Baptist

First Baptist Church of LA

Korean Baptist

Slavic Baptist Church of Hollywood.

Springfield Missionary Baptist Church

Churches-Southern Baptist

First Filipino Baptist Church

Southern Baptist Church of Hollywood

(Folded, I think. They invited me to come and talk about the church once).

Churches-Bible

International Bible Church

Philipino Bible Mission

(For your info, a page is attached.)

A religious author once experienced this:

“When I lived in Atlanta, several years ago, I noticed in the Yellow Pages, in the listing of

restaurants, an entry for a place called Church of God Grill. The peculiar name aroused my curiosity and I dialed the number. A man answered with a cheery ‘Hello! Church of God Grill!’ I asked how his restaurant had been given such an unusual name, and he told me: ‘Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After a while we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving the chicken dinners. We kept the name we started with, and that’s “Church of God Grill.”’¹

Churches that drift from Jesus’ plan and purpose somewhat resemble “The Church of God Grill.”

Can we cut through the confusing maze of ethnic, social and economic divisions?

I think so.

In today’s text, Jesus stated:

“On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” As promised, Jesus built his church.



How or where do we find it?

Three marks identify Jesus’ church.

Before we discuss these identifying marks, we need to clarify the meaning of “church.”

What Jesus meant by the word “church” doesn’t match what most people now associate with the word “church.”

Sometimes geologists examine rocks looking for helminthites.

I haven’t always known what helminthites are.

Helminthites are sinuous trails thought to be tracks that worms left on sedimentary or stratified rock eons ago.

You possibly know a related word: vermigerous.

Acts 12:21-23 speaks of a vermigerous king:

“On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, ‘This is the voice of a god, not of a man.’

“Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.”

If the doctor tells you that you have a vermigrade problem, you probably suffer intestinal worms.

¹ From the book, *Making It Happen*

Want to insult someone?

Tell that person he/she has a “vermigrade walk”— that is, creeps like a worm.

If someone orders you to “look for helminthites in that rock” you can say: **“Take a vermigrade walk.”**

We say and hear the word *church* a million times more than *vermigrade* or *helminthite*.

Yet few people use the word *church* according to its Bible usage.

1. Most now use the word *church* to describe a building where religious folks meet.

“The Lutheran Church is up the street, the Methodist Church next door and the Catholic Church a few blocks west and south.”

Not even once does the Bible use the word *church* to describe a building.

Note Paul’s words to Christians in Corinth, Greece.

“I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you...”²

Paul didn’t say **“at church”** but, **“come together as a church.”**

In the first century, the Greek word “ecclesia” primarily described an assembly, where people gathered for a common purpose.

² 1 Corinthians 11:18 NIV The origin of the word church was probably “called out,” but it’s used in the New Testament to mean “assembly” or the church at large.

Later, from Corinth, Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

You don’t have to be a scholar to see that Christians in Rome didn’t meet at one big building.

Romans 16 leads us to the conclusion that the church met in homes in various parts of Rome.³

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house.”

In Romans 16, Paul sent greetings to many similar groups evidently meeting in homes.



The Bible never calls bricks, boards, and mortar or combinations thereof, a *church*.

In the Bible, *church* isn’t a *building*.

The word *church* refers to an assembly of people or the *church* (God’s people) at large.

We can accurately say: **“Christ’s church meets here.”**

But buildings don’t make the church.

³ Scholars estimate Rome’s population then as a million.

Look at some of the implications for us if the church is an assembly of people.

A) If you are in Jesus, you are part of his church.

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.”⁴

Being in Jesus, makes us part of the church.

B) People talk about the way the church treats them.



That’s like one part of yourself talking to another part of you.

Imagine your thumb speaking to the rest of your body, “You don’t treat me right.”



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C) On the other hand, all of us in the body need to be thoughtful of others’ needs as well as our own.

If you tack something on a wall and hit the “wrong nail,” your whole body jumps into action to soothe your thumb, doesn’t it?

That makes every one of you an important, necessary part of the body.

People are the church; buildings are not.

2. Second, identifying church mark:— Jesus said, “You are Peter and on this rock, I will build my church.”

Jesus built his church on the rock of undeniable truth Peter had just uttered: “You are the Christ (the Messiah) the Son of the Living God.”

Peter’s Greek name *Petros* usually referred to a small stone of the type you might pick up to throw and make skip across water. The rock which Jesus built his church is *Petra* which usually described a huge ledge. Think of the ancient Jordanian city called Petra, where buildings were carved from mighty rocks. In fact, *Petros* is a masculine term while *Petra* is either neuter or feminine.

Jesus died for the church, but you see various human names on worship building doors.

Why do church groups post names of people and doctrines on their buildings, not Jesus’ name?

Out of all those churches you see advertised, only a few have the name of Jesus or God connected with them.

The lack of unity in the Corinth church scandalized and shocked the Apostle Paul.

He appealed for them to agree and avoid divisions.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12 NIV

“What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’⁵

**Paul asked: “Why are you wearing my name?
I wasn’t crucified for you!
You weren’t baptized into my name!”**

“For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men?

**Paul, Peter, Luther, Calvin,
Wesley, Knox, and John the
Baptist didn’t die for the church.
No saint died for you.**



Jesus paid all our debt and freed
us from permanent death in the grave.

No one other than Jesus deserves credit or honor.

That’s why Jesus prayed:

**“I have given them the glory that you gave me,
that they may be one as we are one: I in them and
you in me. May they be brought to complete unity
to let the world know that you sent me and have
loved them even as you have loved me.”⁶**

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:12 & 3:4 NIV

⁶ John 17:22,23 NIV

The church is a loving assembly, who believe in God, wear Jesus’ name, and always follow him.

3. Jesus tasked the church with witnessing to his resurrection, not just holding worship services.

“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (the grave) will not overcome it.”

If someone found a way to cure cancer, and a few received the cure, but didn’t tell anyone else, would you be upset?

If someone discovered a cure for cancer and folks just gathered weekly to talk about the person who found the cure, and never told anyone else, would you be upset?

Jesus cured our guilt, our loneliness, and death. It’s the greatest message ever told.

The church’s job is to share that life, not just to gather and talk about it.

We’re salt and light—agents of change.

Mr. Ritchel took it upon himself to get more people to attend church services. He determined he would fill the building of the First Methodist Church for an evening service. He operated upon the conviction that almost everyone will attend church if properly invited.

What the one man determined soon became a reality. He invited hundreds of people—entire clubs, a host of celebrities. Nearly everyone in Dallas heard of the one-man campaign. Newspapers, radio, and television helped him spread his invitation. He used persuasion, personal letters, and hundreds of personal invitations to get his friends out to the service. As a result, 2,700 came.

We cannot help but admire this man with so much zeal and energy. It shows what one man can do when he sets his heart to something. His enthusiasm leaves the rest of us somewhat embarrassed. It reminds us that we can do something we aren't doing. . .

How long has it been since you invited just one person out to hear the gospel? We would all be surprised at what we could accomplish with a strong determination faith in God, and an energetic effort.⁷

Right now Covid-19 terrifies and divides people.



Jesus intended his church to tell the world, every generation, that he defeated death.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” Hebrews 2:14, 15 NIV

“But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.’ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.” Hebrews 10:38, 39 NIV

**Jesus commissioned the church with a great message of love, unity and hope--
Resurrection in Christ to immortality!**

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⁷ Raymond Kelcy, Oklahoma City, OK in Broadway C of C Bulletin, Paducah, KE 3-6-75