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Sermon Notes

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An Astonishing Rescue, a Magnificent Building

Matthew 16:13-20

In one of His most profound and triumphant statements in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said to Simon Peter:

Matthew 16:18 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.

It is astounding because it combines two images that ordinarily don't go together: an astonishing rescue and a magnificent building project

Perhaps the Most Daring Rescue of World War II: Cabanatuan POW Camp

On January 30, 1945, under the cover of darkness, the 150 Rangers, a specially trained commando unit in the US Army, infiltrated 30 miles behind enemy lines in the Philippine Islands and with the help of courageous Filipino resistance fighters, mounted a dangerous assault on the Cabanatuan POW camp. The raid to save these 511 POWs would turn out to be the most daring rescue mission of World War II.

But even this daring rescue cannot compare with the rescue of sinners from hell by Christ through the courageous evangelistic mission of His church...He rescues sinners from Satan's dreadful death camp, prepares us and equips us like Commandos, then sends us back into Satan's death camp to rescue others

Just as astonishing is the fact that the most amazing rescue in history is also the most incredible building project in history

Greater than the **Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris**, that took almost two hundred years to build, from 1163 to 1345

For almost two hundred years, skilled craftsmen chiseled stone, made flying buttresses, crafted stained glass, and made sculptures for the glory of God

The Cathedral of Notre Dame is at the center of French culture, of French literature, of French history, even of French geography: the "zero kilometer point" of every distance marker on French roads (i.e. 175 km to Paris, etc.) is a stone set in front of the Cathedral...

Certainly the Cathedral of Notre Dame is an amazing church building, graceful, elegant, and magnificently constructed through blood, sweat, toil, hardship, skill and extravagant expense over 185 years

But Christ has been building His church for two thousand years... with far greater grace, elegance, skill, strength and beauty... and with a far higher cost in blood, sweat, toil, hardship

Now, I have just begun this sermon with two seemingly conflicting images: a daring wartime rescue and a majestic place of worship

Putting the two images together, **imagine** the greatest construction project in history going on during the most intense battle in history... with the workers and craftsmen scaling high fortress walls and leaping into enemy territory to get the building materials, quarry them, shape them for the cathedral walls the whole time bombs are blowing up around them, and machine gun bullets are whistling around their heads, and fellow warrior/builders are getting hit and dying

This is all included in this one statement by Christ:

"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prove stronger than it."

I. Review: The Most Important Question You Will Ever Face

Matthew 16:13-15 *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?"*

- A. A World Full of Questions
- B. A World Full of Opinions
- C. The Most Important Question You Will Ever Answer

WHO IS JESUS OF NAZARETH??!!

- D. The Only Right Answer Must Be Revealed by God

Vs. 15-17 *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.*

- E. Simon Peter's Saving Confession... Revealed by God the Father

II. On This Rock I Will Build My Church

Vs. 18-19 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."

A. The Foundation of the Church: On Which Rock Does Christ Build?

1. Jesus changes Peter's name

a. Very significant!! A sense of ownership by Christ and a change of identity

i) Like Abram becoming Abraham

ii) Like Sarai becoming Sarah

iii) Like Jacob becoming Israel

iv) Like the reward given to those who overcome

Revelation 2:17 To him who overcomes, I will give ...a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

b. The change of name signifies a divine work of God's grace in Peter's heart... he will be a major part of the church; Christ intends to equip him for it

2. These words have caused much consternation and misunderstanding in church history

a. **Papal Authority**: For a millennia and a half, the Roman Catholic church has taught that Peter was the rock on which the whole church was built... they claimed that he was the first pope, to whom Christ here gives the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven... Vatican Seal: crossed keys

b. **Papal Succession** They also teach that Peter bestowed this authority on a successor, who then did the same (papal succession) right up to the present pope

3. However, Jesus actually makes a play on words here

a. You are Peter (petros) and on this rock (petra) I will build my church

b. The Greek grammar makes a distinction between the two... there is not a one to one identity of Peter and the foundation of the church

4. What then is the foundation of Christ's church? One scripture tells us directly a simple fact:

1 Corinthians 3:11 no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Himself is the only true foundation of the church

But in one sense there is another truth about the foundation we need to know

5. The APOSTLES' TESTIMONY TO CHRIST IS THE FOUNDATION

Ephesians 2:19-20 God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

- a. How are the apostles and prophets the foundation for God's eternal temple?
- b. Well, "apostles and prophets" I think represent the Scripture in its TESTIMONY to Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world
- c. There is an INTIMATE connection between Christ and the written word
 - i) We would know NOTHING about Jesus apart from the Bible
 - ii) We could know something of God the Creator by looking at Creation

- Magnificent sunrise
- Plentiful harvest
- Soothing spring shower
- Soaring eagle
- Majestic mountain
- Flashing, crashing thunderstorm....

EVIDENCE OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND OF HIS NATURE

- iii) BUT Knowing Christ the Redeemer must be revealed directly to us by the Scripture
- iv) The apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ's person, life, ministry, death, and resurrection
- v) They were humanly speaking the foundation of the Church in that all others that followed them depended on their testimony
- vi) Their LASTING witness to Christ is found in the New Testament, the apostolic witness to Christ

1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the

Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

2 Peter 1:16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Peter was the ROCK on which the church was built in that he was an apostle... and, together with the other apostles, he began on Pentecost by preaching Christ crucified and risen

B. The Progress of the Church: Christ's Unstoppable Building Project

“On this rock, I will build my church, and the Gates of Hades will not prove stronger than it.”

1. It is JESUS CHRIST who builds the church... “**I** will build my church”
 - a. Peter did not build the church; neither did Paul or John or any of the apostles
 - b. Martin Luther did not build the church; neither did John Calvin, or John Knox or Ulrich Zwingli or any of the reformers
 - c. William Carey did not build the church; neither did Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, Jim Elliot or any great missionary
 - d. YES Jesus has used each of these godly servants to build the church... men and women around the world are gladly collaborators with Christ in this building project
 - e. BUT it is Christ's building project from beginning to end
 - f. He is the architect who came up with the blueprint; He is the contractor who energetically erects the structure; He is the finish carpenter who makes it spectacularly beautiful
2. Note the promise: **I WILL** build my Church
 - a. He will never lose focus, never forget what He's about; never grow weary or run out of resources to finish this magnificent building job
 - b. Jesus has been perfectly, completely totally focused and consumed on building His church hour after hour, day after day, year after year, century after century for almost two thousand years
3. Note the ownership: “I will build **MY** Church”
 - a. He owns it for He died for it

b. It is HIS by right, purchased by blood

C. The Authority of the Church: The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

1. Many have stumbled over these words, misunderstanding them

- a. The Roman Catholic church focuses on Peter, claiming he is the first Pope, Christ's vicar and vice-regent on earth... they say this is the nature of the KEYS he gave Peter
- b. Sometimes the interpretation is given that Peter decides who gets into heaven and who does not
- c. From this has come all the jokes about this or that category of person dying and standing in front of Peter at the pearly gates and Peter asking them questions so they can enter heaven
- d. From this also medieval popes claimed absolute authority to rule over Europe

Pope Gregory VII reigned from 1073 to 1085. He excommunicated the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV. In order to receive forgiveness from the Pope and to have the excommunication removed, Emperor Henry had to spend three days repenting in front of the castle where the Pope was staying. It was bitter cold (January 1077). Henry spent most of his time kneeling in the ice and snow, weeping and pleading for forgiveness. When Gregory finally allowed Henry to come into the castle, the Pope publicly humiliated the Emperor.

Pope Gregory VII declared that the Pope has the right to depose kings and emperors, to make laws, and to require secular rulers to kiss his feet. He said that nobody has the right to judge the Pope. Gregory also declared that because of the merits of Saint Peter, every duly elected Pope is a saint.

A hundred years later, Pope Innocent III said the authority of the pope was like the sun and that of kings was like the moon... all the light of the moon comes from the sun, so also all the authority of kings is derived from that of the Pope

All of this pomp and arrogance came from a misunderstanding of this one statement in Matthew 16

2. Now, that Christ DID give keys TO PETER is clear from the Greek... the personal pronoun is singular: **I will give TO YOU (Peter)**
3. BUT He also linked the KEYS to the power to "bind and loose"

Vs. 19 whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

- a. Binding and loosing is a term used by rabbis of the right to make authoritative pronouncements... like binding someone's lifestyle, someone's practices, someone's behavior...
- b. It implies power to govern, to make decisions... and this IS what Christ gave to Peter
- c. BUT we should not understand that heaven was following Peter's lead, waiting with baited breath for Peter's rules and regulation... heaven doesn't follow, heaven leads

Matthew 6:10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

- d. NO...the Greek implies more a matter of communication on EARTH the will of HEAVEN

“WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH WILL BE, HAVING BEEN BOUND IN HEAVEN; AND WHATEVER YOU LOOSE ON EARTH WILL BE, HAVING BEEN LOOSED IN HEAVEN.”

Heaven does the binding and loosing, heaven RULES, and godly leaders communicate heaven's will to earth

AND the binding and loosing is based on God's revealed truth, His word... the Bible

- 4. AND the power of BINDING and LOOSING He gave to all His disciples
 - a. In Matthew 18, in dealing with the issue of a sinning brother, the church had the power to discipline an unrepentant church member

Matthew 18:15-20 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. ¹⁸ "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

- b. There the “binding and loosing” has to do with the power of the church to keep itself pure, to evict from fellowship someone out who won't repent of his/her sin
- c. This authority stands over even the mightiest ruler on earth if he is a sinning church member

- d. Let's say the President of the United States is a member of a church and commits adultery... his local church has the responsibility to try to bring him to repentance... if he fails to repent, the church has the right and responsibility to discipline him, evicting him from church membership
 - e. BUT the church does not have the right to dictate policy to the President
 - f. This is the power of the church in this statement by Christ to Peter... and it is still in place concerning spiritual leaders making spiritual decisions; and it clearly extends to every Christian in the matter of dealing with sin
5. And the BINDING and LOOSING is most clearly connected with forgiveness of sins... which power the church still has as much as it ever had

John 20:23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

- a. This does not mean the church is now in the place of God
- b. Rather it means that the church has the right to declare a person forgiven or not forgiven

Illus. If you are talking with someone at work who claims to be an atheist, it is your right and responsibility to tell them that they are still in their sins, in danger of eternal judgment

If however a person hears you share the gospel and is visibly moved; they begin to cry and say "All my life I've been looking for Christ, and I didn't know it... I've been trying to earn forgiveness, and now just by believing in Christ I can be forgiven of all my sins." They pray and ask Christ to save them from sin... they then look to you. You have the authority to tell them, based on their confession of Christ, that their sins are forgiven

- 6. In the end, the church has the right to make spiritual judgments and decisions relevant to the advance of the Kingdom, and to proclaim in Jesus' name the full forgiveness of sins
- 7. In this way, Christ advances His kingdom; in this way, Christ build His church... by giving the church the power to make important spiritual decisions and declaring forgiveness of sins based on the gospel message

III. The Gates of Hades Will Not Prevail Against It

A. What are 'The Gates of Hades'?

- 1. In Greek mythology, Hades was both the name of the King of the dead AND the realm of the dead, the underworld, the place where dead people go after life; similar to the Hebrew concept of *Sheol*

2. The Dark Kingdom of Hades was across the River Styx and had powerful gates guarded by a vicious three-headed dog, Cerberus
3. In Greek mythology, famous Greek heroes would sometimes venture down into the underworld to rescue a loved one from Hades or to perform some great feat to prove strength
 - a. **Hercules** was sent to bring the vicious three-headed dog Cerberus up from the gates of Hades... he used his supernatural strength to do it
 - b. **Orpheus** was the most beautiful singer in the world; his beloved wife Eurydice died suddenly by stepping on a poisonous snake, Orpheus used his incredible singing ability to persuade Hades, King of Death, to release her; he did on condition that he not look back at her until he had lead her through the gates; at the last moment, Orpheus looked back to confirm she was there, and Hades instantly appeared and took her back down to his dark kingdom until Orpheus should join them later when he died
4. As Christ used the term, "Gates of Hades," I think it represents DEATH, and Satan as the King of Death, who holds the power of death

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

Thus Christ is mightier than **Hercules**, for he rescues a great multitude from the realm of death, AND destroys the King of Death, Satan, and His entire realm

Revelation 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

Christ is more skillful than **Orpheus**, for he actually succeeds in leading his wife finally from the realm of the dead to live with Him forever

BUT NOTE: Here Christ does not say the Gates of Hades will not prove stronger than Christ

NO... I will build my Church and the Gates of Hades will not prove stronger than IT... the CHURCH is going to defeat the Gates of Hades

But HOW?? Two ways... **Past/Present** Triumph in Missions advance;
Future Triumph in Resurrection

B. The Past/Present Triumph of the Church: Irresistible Attack on Satan's Kingdom

1. The Gates of Hades represents Satan's power of sin and death

- a. For most of human history, the strongest defense against a military attack was a stronghold... like a fortress or a castle or a walled city
 - b. The strength of the walls was a measure of the strength of the city
 - c. The Gates were the weakest point in the defenses, therefore, they were designed with special attention
 - d. Medieval castle gates were massive, and ingeniously designed to be death traps for the attackers... the attackers would be lured into a courtyard, a stone pocket of death, a portcullis would crash down and arrows would shower down raining down death on the invaders
 - e. It took all the strength an invader had to be able to crash through those gates
 - f. The Gates of Hades stand for Satan's power over sin and death
2. Within Satan's dark kingdom are souls languishing under the power of sin and death
 3. The Church is sent on a powerful rescue mission, led by Christ, our omnipotent Captain
 4. The expression "will not prevail" against it refers to the strength of Satan's Kingdom of death... this is an issue of POWER... who has more POWER

Luke 11:21-22 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²² But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

5. Christ has so much more power than Satan that He can send US, His church against Satan and Satan's gates will crumble
6. The rescue has been accomplished for centuries and Satan can't stop it

Colossians 1:13-14 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

7. Furthermore, the "building materials" for Christ's magnificent building project, the church, are "living stones"
 - a. Solomon's temple was built with fine stone and marble quarried off site and dressed by Hiram, King of Tyre's workmen
 - b. Notre Dame was made from gypsum, quarried from site immediately around Paris

- c. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome made from marble stones, polished shiny and brilliant at great cost in 1499
- d. Christ builds his building from "living stones" quarried from Satan's kingdom

1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

What an amazing image!! We are living stones in the wall of the magnificent temple

We are warriors going over the Gates of Hades to quarry new living stones through missions and evangelism

We are all of this, and formerly we ourselves we rescued from Satan's dark realm of sin and death... we were quarried from Satan's kingdom and rescued to adorn Christ's temple forever

See, then, the irresistible progress of Christ's magnificent building project, for twenty centuries:

- The early opposition of the Jewish leaders couldn't stop it
- The bloody persecution of the Roman Empire couldn't stop it
- The onslaught of the barbarian tribes that conquered Rome couldn't stop it
- The ensuing Dark Ages couldn't stop it
- The devastation of the Muslim onslaught couldn't stop it
- The violent attacks of the Vikings couldn't stop it
- The decay of theology and holiness under the Roman Catholic papacy couldn't stop it
- The persecution of the gospel by the Spanish Inquisition couldn't stop it
- The philosophical attack of the enlightenment couldn't stop it
- The evils of theological liberalism wrought by German Higher Criticism couldn't stop it
- The theory of evolution couldn't stop it
- The devastation of two world wars couldn't stop it
- The opposition of tribal chieftains in animistic cultures in the jungles of Africa, South America and Irian Jaya couldn't stop it
- The terrors of the atomic age couldn't stop it
- The Iron Curtain of communism couldn't stop it
 - And the materialism and pleasure-seeking of the decaying West, with the USA leading the way can't stop it either

Satan's Dark Empire has been fighting Christ in all these arenas for two millennia now, and still the church keeps sending in commandoes, scaling the Dark Walls of Hades and rescuing Christ's people

Vs. 18 I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

C. The Future Triumph of the Church: Irresistible Conquest of the Grave

1. A second possible meaning has to do with the future of the church... the fact that death cannot stop the church either
2. Hades is most naturally understood as the abode of the dead
3. Greeks believed everyone who died went down to Hades, got into a boat manned by a dark boatman named Charon, paid him his fare, and were shuttled across the river Styx, through the gates and either into Tartarus to suffer or Elysium to celebrate
4. From that place none could escape... death conquered all, the grave suffered no defeats, only one dark victory after another
5. This was all merely mythology... but that no one returned from the paths of the grave was clear to all
6. BUT Jesus declares that the building of His church would in NO WAY be hindered by death
 - a. Death would claim each Christian that ever lived
 - b. It would seem like the greatest tragedy as great heroes of the faith die...
 - i) BUT Israel didn't collapse when Moses died
 - ii) The Advance of the church didn't halt when the Apostles died
 - iii) The Reformation didn't end when Martin Luther died
 - iv) Reformation theology didn't disappear when John Calvin died
 - v) The modern missions movement didn't fold when William Carey died
 - c. DEATH cannot stop the building of Christ's church
 - d. Each and every one of the living stones Christ rescues from Satan's kingdom and sets in the wall of His temple will live forever
 - e. And their bodies will RISE from the GRAVE...

John 5:28-29 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out-- those who have done good will rise to live

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 15:54-55 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

In this glorious way, Jesus will build a church that not even death can defeat

Death has mocked every other emperor that has ever lived

Alexander died at the height of his power, at age 32

Roman emperors hired a slave to walk behind their chariot as the crowd in Rome cheered them wildly and whispered constantly into their ears that Hades will soon have all their glory

But Jesus will rescue every single one of his precious people from the grave

Vs. 18 I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

IV. Application

A. Come to Christ!!

1. Make Peter's confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"
2. Allow Christ to rescue you from slavery to sin and fear of death
3. Allow His blood to free you from condemnation for your sins

B. Be a Warrior for Christ... "Go Over the Walls of Hades"

1. Year's key verse: The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost
2. Nothing can stop us if we'll only trust Christ enough to be courageous
3. Vault the walls of Satan's dark kingdom

4. Speak up for Christ at your workplace, in your neighborhood
5. Invite a neighbor over for dinner and get to know them... look for an opportunity to talk to them about Christ

C. Proclaim in Christ's Name the Forgiveness of Sins...and REST IN IT YOURSELF!!!

John 20:21-23 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

D. Respect the Authority of the Church

1. The church has real spiritual authority given to it by Christ
2. There are still God-ordained leaders who make key decisions for the life and health and ministry of the church
3. The church has the authority and responsibility to maintain the purity of the church through church discipline
4. Satan is constantly duping us to rebel against God-ordained authority
5. Respect and honor the authority of the church

E. Don't Fear Death and Hades

1. Jesus has the keys, He's in charge!!

Revelation 1:18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

2. Someday both will be thrown in the Lake of fire

Revelation 20:14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.