

## Introduction

This would normally have been our breakfast Sunday but how we do church had had to change a bit since Covid 19. So I thought it would be a good idea to spend some time this morning thinking about what the church is, asking ourselves the question We won't get to a complete answer today but I hope we will be able to begin to see what Jesus meant when He talked about the church and maybe to put right any thinking that is not in line with what Jesus intended.

### Picture

How we see things depends on the angle from which we look at it. And that is particularly true about our question this morning...what really is the church?

If we ask this question to different people, the answer they give will depend on where they are at.

So if I ask someone who never goes to church, is not part of a church, they will probably answer by talking about a building or maybe say something about religion.

But if you ask people like us, people who are part of a church...no...not a building, not religion..the church is the people. Then if we start to think about our answer we might say, not just the people but people in relationship together, and that relationship comes out of their relationship with God.

Is that the right answer and does it agree with what Jesus said about the church?

What influences us most, the culture we live, our own thoughts, ideas and experiences or what Jesus said about the church?

So what angle do you and I take to understand and look at what the church is?

Jesus actually spoke very little specifically about the church but the best known passage is Mt 16, 13-20. It is a passage that people, and Christians don't always agree on, but let's try and pull out the main points of what Jesus is saying here.

Read Mathew 16, 13-20

So, to answer our question-What is the Church?-we will start by looking v 18 b

- **Jesus is the builder-intimate and personal** v.18, b *I will build my church*-This is Jesus speaking-it is **His** church, **He** will build it.

Jesus is talking about the church (worldwide) and we, this local church, are a part of that.

Jesus is the builder. That is a very good builder to have, as He is the Christ, the son of God v.14 , creator of the world, the one who made us, so He is more than capable of building it and completing what He sets out to do..

In other parts of the bible we learn how precious the church is to Jesus...( Ephesians 5) = His bride , it is his body (Colossians 1,24) so the building of the church is an intimate and personal activity that Jesus is involved in day by day. It is his church and he does the building, He is personally involved in building His church.

- **How does he build it?** Let's go back to the conversation between Peter and Jesus. Jesus has asked his disciples who do people say I am? V.13.

The disciples start repeating what they have been hearing...some say etc.

Jesus says-*who do you say I am?* Peter immediately replies- You are the Christ (messiah), the son of the living God. Jesus says to Peter that he didn't discover this on his own, but God the Father has supernaturally revealed it to him. Then, as I understand these verses, (v18) Jesus goes on to tell Peter that this truth of who He (Jesus) is will be the basis, the foundation/bedrock on which His church will be built.

So the church is built on ordinary people having an extra ordinary or supernatural revelation of who Jesus is.

- **How does a person have this type of supernatural revelation?**

Jesus said that Peter knew what he knew only because the father had revealed it to him. So, in Peter's case, knowing who Jesus is, did not come from seeing the miracles, and or from being with Jesus, which is interesting. It came as a revelation from the father. So we are not disadvantaged by not having had the opportunity to walk with Jesus and see everything firsthand. This type of revelation comes from the father and it is the base, or bedrock on which the church is built by Jesus the builder.

So the church is the people, but people who know that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God as supernaturally revealed to them by God the father

- **The new covenant**

If you were here last week, Les was talking about the new covenant that Jesus spoke about just before he went to the cross. The new covenant means that we are in a different position with God simply because of who Jesus is and what Jesus did. The previous covenant depended on us obeying laws and doing our best. This was replaced by a new covenant where Jesus takes our place and becomes the other party in the agreement, He stands in for us. But we can only become part of that new covenant when we understand who Jesus is. So you can see why people like Pete, and like us, need a supernatural revelation from God of who Jesus is.. Not a theological statement but personal revelation and experience.

So now we are beginning to get an idea of what the church looks like from Jesus angle, how Jesus sees the church. The church is His, not ours. He builds it with what Peter in 1 Peter *..living stones*. These living stones are people.-that's you and me- who know that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God.

- **The powers of darkness**

v.18 The gates of Hades shall not prevail...The powers of darkness will not be able to stand, will not be able to survive against my church, that I build. The future of the powers of darkness was already decided when Jesus died and rose again and although on the ground, as it were, the battle continues, the overall outcome has been decided. The church is going to play a key role in the yet to be finalised battle on the ground, as we will see that in the next verse but first Jesus assures Peter and those other disciples listening, that the outcome is already decided.

The future of the church is decided. It will survive, of course, given the builder but not just survive, it will have victory. The future of the powers of darkness is also decided, they will not survive as the church comes against it. We will look at how this happens in a minute, but first lets us look some more at v. 18-*I will build my church*

- **Church as *assembly (ekklesia)***

We are very familiar with this word Church. As we said at the beginning, even people who don't go to church have ideas about what it means. But in Jesus day, what we consider church would actually have been a synagogue, or a temple. When Jesus used the word *church (Ekklesia in Greek)*, it seems like he was deliberately moving away from any association with buildings or religion-his church was not going to be the "new" synagogue or the "new" temple but something essentially different. I understand that the word we use as church –ekklesia- is actually translated from the Greek as assembly . In Jesus day, the word ekklesia/assembly was recognised and used in the secular sense to mean a small group of people with legislative powers representing the ruling power which was not present in that place. In other words you could have a group of people in Israel, representing the Roman Empire, and having power and authority at local level there. This was a concept that the disciples were already familiar with, so our next verses would have been a logical step to them. Because in v.19 Jesus talks about giving them authority and power as they represent Him, the Christ, the son of God, on earth.

- **Power and authority**

v. 19. He says as my church, I will give you keys-what do keys do? They open things. If a person has a set of keys to a building they have both the authority and the power to open that building. The authority, because they have been given the keys and the power because the keys open the lock. By giving the church the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus is giving access to heaven, no more barriers between heaven and earth. And just in case they did not get the message, He explains what this means in practice- yes on earth is yes in heaven. A no on earth is no in heaven." Authority on earth to do heavens business, equipped by the power of heaven.

The church, then, is the people who have a God given revelation of who Jesus is and who are equipped by Jesus to represent heaven here on earth. What this means in practice is that the church continues what Jesus started, with the promise that He is still with us.....Mathew 18, 19-20

### **We need to know who we are**

Imagine peter and the disciples getting all excited, as they listened to this. Especially Peter! But then Jesus told them not to tell anyone. Jesus explained all this to them so that they would know who they were, their identity, their reason for being the church. It's the same for us. This truth is for us so that we know who we are as the church. It is essential for us to know who we are.

### **Summary**

So, to summarise, the church is people...but people who know that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. Everything to do with being the church is based on this understanding/ this knowledge from God. Without it we are a religious group. With it, we are what Peter calls *living stones* that Jesus is building together, making us into a spiritual house. This is how Peter described the church in..

I Peter, 2 9

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So that is what I understand is the angle Jesus takes when he looks at the church. In his eyes, that is His church.

## **But do we see the church this way?? What angle do we take ?**

Sometimes our angle can be skewed by the culture we live in. We may not see the church as a building but we have all asked the question...will the church have to close... It's not a big issue but it probably does say something about our real understanding of what the church is. Let's be careful with our words. Lets help each other to develop a biblical understanding of what the church is.

Secondly, especially in the current situation, it is easy to think that the church is under threat in some way. If that concerns us, it is useful to remind ourselves of the fact that the gates of Hades, representing the powers of darkness, will not be able to stand up, as in resist, against the church. We might think this is a difficult time for the church but in fact historically the church has always done well in times of difficulty. Almost as soon as it was established, the church went into a time of persecution and dispersal but grew at a tremendous rate and Paul said in Philippians that what had happened to him-imprisoned and tortured- had actually served to advance the gospel. And that has been the case in China and in other countries in our day where the church was persecuted. So there is no need for pessimism...Jesus has said that the powers of darkness do not have a hope of resisting His church.

And finally, it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that the church is on a sort of snooze button or gone into semi-hibernation while this pandemic is going on. How we do things may have changed, but who we are has not. So we might need to do things in a different way e.g. we cannot have breakfast but we don't have to miss out on fellowship. Invite someone for coffee or a walk on the beach. 2 or 3 people from the church could invite 2 or 3 non christians friends to the café and just talk about the Lord. It is not a social thing but where 2 or 3 gather in his name...not for the coffee...Jesus is there. It is heavens business. Meet with someone from Church and pray together. Don't wait for this to be over. Even if we cannot always have this big group on a Sunday, which is great but also great would be 7 or 8 small groups of 3 or 4 spread out from Odiaxere to Silves. Lest be creative in these times, confident of who we are.

So let's help each other to develop a more mature spiritual understanding of what the church is. These are certainly days when the world needs a church which is not about buildings and religion, but equipped and ready to be the true church of Jesus here on earth.

Finish by going back to what Peter said about the church- substitute *you* for *us* as we read it together.