

Annual Focus Kickoff: “My Church”

Focus Passage: Matthew 16:13–20

Other Passages Referenced: Matthew 5:13a; Acts 4:32; Romans 12:10b; 13:8; 15:14; Galatians 5:22–23; 6:2; Ephesians 3:20; 5:25–30; Philippians 2:3; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 2:9;

Comments to Leaders

- Please review your group’s information on the Groups app, particularly, the member roster, the group day/time, group description, and calendared dates. If you have questions, contact me at dsouth@wcchapel.org
- If you need a Zoom account because your group will not be meeting in person, please let me know.
- Please keep in mind that this year, we will be having a Chapel-wide study at the beginning of 2022 rather than in the fall as we have in past years.
- The annual focus from September 2021–June 2022 will be, “Jesus’ Church is Jesus’ family on Jesus’ mission.”

Sermon Recap

The words, “my church” in Matthew 16:18 indicate that the Church belongs to Jesus. When we say, “my church” we are referring to the local church with which we associate ourselves. When Jesus says, “my church” he is talking about his possession of the entire Church, everyone who has put his/her faith in Jesus as God’s promised Messiah-King. Jesus bought his Church back from slavery to sin and death at the price of his own blood. Therefore, we must define *church* in whatever way Jesus and his word describe it.

If the church is whatever Jesus meant when he said the word, “*church*,” we need understand what he meant. While the first-century *ekklesia* originally referred to a gathering of citizens, the New Testament moves away from the language of the state and begins using the language of family relationships. Christians are **called out from their communities to gather**, and **then they are called out from the gathering back into the community**. There is a weekly rhythm of gathering as an assembly of Christ-followers and then scattering back into our communities. The big idea throughout our annual focus is that “Jesus’ Church is Jesus’ family on Jesus’ mission.”

The advances of technologies that allow people to customize music, video, news, and other inputs according to their individual preferences potentially bleeds over into individuals wanting to create their own playlist church that aligns with their individual preferences for music, preaching, style, time, etc. Jesus’ Church is his family on his mission. The challenge is to participate fully in all that Jesus calls us out from and all that he sends us into. We do not have the option of picking and choosing just the parts or the people to which we are most drawn. Jesus is the only one who can truly say “my church.” We are part of his Church and since we belong to Jesus, we do not have the option to pick and choose our personalized elements of Church. The pastor used the illustration of a clearance-priced box of items for a low price, but the catch was the buyer had to take the entire box and could not pick the things she found most desirable. As member of Jesus’ family on Jesus’ mission, we need to “take everything in the box.”

Throughout church history, including the reformation, Cyprian’s quote “He who does not have the Church for his mother cannot have God for his Father. Where are we in the Church? We are surrounded by that which belongs to Jesus, those whom he bought with his crucifixion and resurrection. We are part of a called-out gathering. We are united into Jesus’ family.

Interpretation Helps

- *Ekklesia*, which often gets translated by the English word *church*, means “to call out and gather.” In the first century, this referred to a group of citizens called out from their homes to gather and conduct vital community business before returning to their towns. Being called out from the world to gather and being called out from the gathering back into the world, is at the heart of the dynamic tension of what Jesus meant when he first said, “my church.”
- Caesarea Philippi – “City about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, at the base of Mount Hermon and near the source of the Jordan River.”¹ It was a Gentile city outside of Israel and was a center of worship for the Greek god Pan. It is worth noting that Matthew first recorded recognition of Jesus as Messiah occurred in a Gentile area.

Group Gathering

Group Check-in — Care, Celebration, Encouragement (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. Informal conversation to allow individuals to catch up with one another.
2. Ask if anyone would share how they’ve been hearing and obeying God’s direction.

Allow the Word to Speak — Be Hearers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

READ Matthew 16:13–20

1. What from the passage or sermon was most impactful to you?
2. Were you left with any questions or confusion about the passage or sermon?
3. What were some of the public’s incorrect assumptions as to who Jesus was? (Matt 16:13–14)
4. Upon what truth did Jesus declare that He would build His Church? (Matt 16:16–18)
5. In the phrase, “... the gates of hell shall not prevail against” the church, who is on the attack and how is that significant?

Put the Word into Practice — Be Doers of the Word (About 1/3 of meeting time)

1. How do you see yourself fitting into the rhythms of the Church gathering from the world to be sent back into the world?
2. In your own life, do you see any tendencies toward a *playlist Church*—picking and choosing elements according to your individual preferences? If yes, how so?
3. How do you see yourself relating to other members of the church as family?
4. How do you see yourself participating in Jesus’ mission?
5. If you have not yet recognized Jesus as your Redeemer and King, what is keeping you from taking that step of faith?

The Big Question: What do you sense God's Spirit saying to you and what concrete action will you take in response? Share your answer with the group or another trusted Christian and ask them to pray for you.

What We Hope Members Glean from the Passage

1. No set answer.
2. No set answer.
3. John the Baptist ... Elijah ... Jeremiah ... one of the other prophets.
4. Peter’s claim that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
5. Since the gates of hell are defensive and they will no prevail or stand against the Church, the Church is on the offensive, storming and conquering the very gates of hell.

¹ John D. Barry et al., [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 16:13.

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES: Click [here](#) for some good opportunities.