

What Jesus Believes about the Church
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 Bo Weaver at The Bridge
 Wilder, KY

As we continue our series on **what Jesus believes**, today we are going to look at **What Jesus Believes about the Church**.

I've got to confess to you that when I first considered this subject, I thought this would be a message that would not interest a lot of people.

My first thought was that this is a topic for preachers and theologians.

I thought maybe only Whitney could appreciate a sermon about the church.

But as I began to delve into the subject of the church I quickly changed my mind.

I determined that if the subject of the church does not interest people – it is only because preachers have done a poor job of explaining what the church is all about.

I want to go on record as saying that apart from God Himself, the church of Jesus Christ is the single-most exciting entity in the Universe.

When we are finished today, if you do not leave here with a higher view of the church, if you are not truly excited about being a part of this thing we call "the church," if you don't have a greater love for and appreciation of the church then I will have failed because there is nothing more exciting, nothing more important in this world than the church of Jesus Christ.

I am going to base my remarks about the church on **five simple words** found in **Matthew 16:18, five words that have changed and are changing the world and effecting the eternal destinies of untold millions of people**.

For the sake of context we will begin with verse 13 of chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew 16

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

¹⁴ So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build My church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

I want to **build my remarks around four questions:**

- **What is the church?**
- **To whom does the church belong?**
- **Who is building the church?**
- **Why is the church being built?**

1. What is the church?

The word “*church*” in the Greek language is *ekklesia*

Pronounced: **ek-klā-sē'-ä**

Originally, the word **ekklesia referred to any assembly of people.**

It comes from two Greek words:

ek – *out of, or from*

kaleo – *to call*

A company of people called out (of their homes, for instance) for the purpose of assembling in some public place like a town square.

The work *ekklesia* came to be associated with the gathering of people for the purpose of religious services.

The primary thing I want us to see is that:

The church is the people of God – gathered

The formation of the church began in the Old Testament.

In case you may have forgotten, this planet was formed for people, people who were created to enjoy fellowship and relationship with God.

As a result of sin, this relationship with God was broken.

After the fall of man, God set in motion a plan whereby He could restore fallen men and women back to Himself.

He did this by first entering into a covenant with a man by the name of Abraham.

This covenant was to include all of Abraham’s descendants, which came to be called **the nation of Israel**, or **the Jewish people**.

The nation of Israel was called in Scripture the people of God.

They were, in actuality, **the church of the Old Testament**.

If you wanted to relate to God you had to do so through the covenant people of God.

You had to become a Jew.

Tucked away in the Old Testament, or Old Covenant, as it may be called, was the promise of a day when God would open the door of relationship to Gentiles as well as Jews.

This would be accomplished through God sending a Savior into the world, One called in Scripture, The Messiah, which means "anointed One.

Isaiah 42 is what is known as a Messianic prophecy, a passage that speaks of the coming Messiah.

In this passage God refers to the Messiah as "**My Servant.**"

**"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
- Isaiah 42:1**

In the Hebrew language the words "**justice**" and "**righteous**" mean the same thing.

This verse speaks of bringing Gentiles to righteousness.

**"... I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles,
7 To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.
- Isaiah 42:6-7**

This Jesus did through His atoning death on the cross.

Though Jesus came to this earth as the Jewish Messiah, He came and died for the sins of the whole world.

His death and resurrection made it possible for all people to be forgiven of their sin and be brought back to a restored relationship with a Holy God.

Because of what Jesus did on behalf of the world, a person does not have to become a Jew to be made right with God.

Ephesians 2 speaks of the uniting of both Jew and Gentile in one body – the church.

Ephesians 2

¹¹ Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— ¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being **aliens** from the commonwealth of Israel and **strangers** from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus **you who once were far off** have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace,

¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and **members of the household of God**, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

This is as good a description of the church as I know.

We are members of the household of God.

We are a holy temple, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The church consists of those who have been forgiven of their sins, restored to a right relationship with God are regenerated and thus indwelt by His Spirit.

Under the Old Covenant when you wanted to connect with God you had to go to a physical place, the temple.

Today, under the Old Covenant we are the temple of God!

This is what Jesus had in mind when He said:

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

– Matthew 18:20

As wonderful as the incarnation is, God coming to earth in the form of a man, the church, in some ways is even more amazing because we who were once enemies of God, separated from God by our sin, held captive by the kingdom of darkness, are now the actual dwelling place of God in the earth.

When we gather in His name we become a dwelling for His presence.

The church is wherever redeemed men and women gather in the name of Jesus, whether to worship, to hear teaching from God's Word, to partake of the Lord's Supper or to serve the poor.

The church is not an institution – though there is nothing wrong with institutions that exist for the purpose of doing the work of the kingdom of God.

The church is not just high church, characterized by formal and time-honored liturgy and traditions.

But neither is the church anti-high church and anti-traditional.

The church is people anywhere and everywhere who have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

This can take place in a beautiful cathedral with stained glass windows, or in a renovated warehouse.

It's not the venue that matters it is the people and the purpose of the gathering that matters.

By Mark Hensch , Christian Post Reporter *January 6, 2012|9:26 pm*

A Michigan church has a very unusual ministry outreach – a tattoo parlor housed in its church building.

The Bridge, a non-denominational church in Flint Twp., Mich., opened a tattoo parlor within its building last month.

Titled Serenity Tattoo, church members say it's showing people living an alternative lifestyles an avenue toward the Gospel. It's just one of many unusual ministry efforts that The Bridge's eclectic congregation believes is helping to evolve evangelism in the area.

"There's a huge misunderstanding in the American church today that the church is a building," said Steve Bentley, The Bridge's lead pastor. "It's not a physical location. The church is us. We use our space for whatever we can to serve the Lord and our community."

Bentley said he began The Bridge in 2009 to reach the estimated 300,000 people in his church's Genesee County that have never attended a worship service.

Opening a tattoo parlor, he said, is just the latest shape that the original mission of appealing to the unchurched has taken. Other non-traditional outreach efforts The Bridge is involved in include poetry slams, pro wrestling events, mixed martial arts classes and even a motorcycle group.

Bentley said all that matters is leading people to glorify God.

"We're making inroads into this subculture," said Bentley, who had his wedding band tattooed around his ring finger and then got an original design of Jesus holding up a bridge on his back. *"Love God, love others, disciple all. We try to make sure everything we do encompasses that."*

You don't have to be traditional to be the church.

But you certainly don't have to be non-traditional or anti-traditional to be the church.

The church is the people of God, people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation that gather in the name of Jesus to worship and serve the One who died to redeem them to God.

2. To whom does the church belong?

That's easy.

Jesus said quite clearly:

"I will build My church..."

This is so obvious you would think it would be impossible to miss.

But the truth is, down through the ages, right up to the present time, people get this completely wrong.

- **Some mistakenly think the church belongs to a local board of elders.**
- **Some believe the church belongs to a denomination, or to the one in their group vested with the greatest ecclesiastical power.**
- **Many churches in this country are modeled after our democratic form of government and are "owned" by the people, the members.**
- **Some pastors have come to believe that the church they lead belongs to them.**

They are all wrong!

The church belongs to the One – and only the One who died in order to give it life.

Certainly, there is a need for some form of government in churches.

And yes, God has ordained leadership in the church.

But whatever form of government a church takes – those in positions of leadership would do well to remember that the church belongs to Jesus and no other.

Things get really out of whack when people get confused on this issue.

The church is called in Scripture, *“the body of Christ,”* and Jesus is clearly identified as the Head of that body.

The last time I checked, my body and my head were connected – and it is my body that takes its lead from the head.

Jesus is the head of His body, too.

The body takes its instruction from the head and not the other way around.

In fact, **the body exists to serve the will of the Head.**

We, the church, the body of Christ, exist to obey Jesus and glorify His name.

Some get this backwards and think Jesus exists to obey them and glorify their name!

These five simple words in Matthew 16:18 make it very clear that Jesus views the church as His possession.

“I will build My church...”

- **The church is His people**
 - **The church is His possession**
- 3. Who is building the church?**

Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18**:

“I will build My church.”

I believe this is my favorite part of these five words!

I take great comfort in these words.

I’ve been a **senior pastor** for approximately **29 of the 56 years I’ve been alive.**

For the first 23 years of those 29 years I would sometimes get confused on this point of who was building the church.

Intellectually I knew that Jesus was the builder of His church, but in reality I felt like it was up to me.

I carried the weight of things much more than I do today.

Something happens as you get older.

You get tired.

You don't have the energy at 55 that you had at 25.

In the economy of God that is often a good thing.

Just as God spoke to Paul:

"My strength is perfected in weakness."

When we feel strong and we feel as if everything depends on us – we take on the burden for building the church.

That is a burden Jesus never asked us to take.

Jesus said in **Matthew 11**:

²⁸ Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

I used to think these verses applied to everybody but pastors.

I used to think everybody else got an easy yoke and a light burden, but we pastors – we got stuck with the hard yokes and the heavy burdens.

I'm so glad I got over that!

I'm having so much fun letting Jesus build His church.

I've discovered He's a lot better at it than I am anyway.

He knows what's He's doing.

I just have to stay in step with Him, hang out with Him, enjoy Him and watch Him work.

The cool thing is it's not hard for Him.

He's really good at it.

Over the past five years we've watched God do incredible things here at The Bridge.

We started five years ago with virtually no assets and very few people.

If you could have seen our very **first "launch meeting,"** which was attended by about thirty people – you would have said, *"These people have no chance!"*

It was not an impressive group of people.

We had no sound system, no equipment of any kind.

But just as we were ready to start the meeting – an old friend of mine who lives out of state walked in the room.

He had flown into town for the express purpose of showing his support.

Before he left to return home he had given us a check for **\$20,000** to help us get started.

Every time we have had a need – God has met the need.

After we had outgrown the Marquise where we had been setting up every Sunday for services we signed a lease on this building.

This was an open warehouse that required about \$150,000 to be turned into a useable facility.

I know it doesn't look like much now, but you should have seen it before!

It was a welding shop where they used to manufacture awnings.

We opened a construction account with \$3,000.

Before leaving the bank we wrote the first check for materials and promptly emptied the account.

Each week we took in just enough money to keep going – but just barely.

I would come here on Friday to pay the workers.

Hap Wade would give me the amounts for each person and I would write out the checks.

One Friday when I had finished doing payroll we had less than a dollar left in the account!

When we needed a youth pastor, **Greg and Bambie Holland** showed up.

The same week I found out Greg and Bambie were going to leave to start a new church a lady in our church stopped me in the lobby and asked if I knew of any church that might need a youth pastor.

I said, *"Tell him to send me his resume, I might know somebody."*

Next week we'll be introducing our new youth pastor.

Jesus is building this church, folks.

We see it every week!

- **The church is His people**
- **The church is His possession**
- **The church is His priority**

It's what Jesus is doing in the world today.

For that reason the success of the church is inevitable.

Jesus said,

"I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

Ever since the church was birthed on the Day of Pentecost, Satan has sought to destroy it.

From the earliest days of the church the Jewish religious leaders opposed the church, telling Peter and John to ***"stop preaching and teaching in this name."***

Peter said, ***"You judge whether it is better for us to obey God or man."***

And they didn't stop.

They said, ***"We'll beat you."***

Peter said, ***"We still won't stop."***

So they beat them.

Afterward Peter and John left rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus!"

What are you going to do with people like that?

When **Nero** started killing Christians the church kept growing.

The more they persecuted Christians the faster the church grew, causing **church father Tertullian** to say:

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

- Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225 a.d.)

David Crabtree, a pastor in North Carolina said this about the inevitable nature of the church.

God has always had a people. He will always have a people.

From the beginning, his kingdom has advanced in spite of adversity, and from the beginning, the devil has worked to deceive and destroy. He has not faltered in his dogged pursuit of his highest goal—to deceive all nations and rob God of the glory due his name.

Through all manner of evil, Satan has attempted to destroy God's people. He has employed tyrants and lunatics to wipe the church off the map. But the church has proven to be particularly stubborn.

God has put within us a divine, holy stubborn streak that causes us to rise up and say: You can't have the church. You're not going to steal what's been done.

God is raising up a remnant. He is raising up a people who believe there is power available in the name of Jesus to build the church victorious and not listen to the lies of the adversary.

Out of the ashes and chaos of the genocide in Rwanda, a church has risen—Tutsi and Hutu, former warring tribes now ministering side by side in the name of Jesus.

Seventy years of denial could not erase God from the Russian psyche. They don't want another dictator. They don't want another tsar. They are looking to a king named Jesus and a hope beyond capitalism.

Every philosophy based on the denial of Christ will ultimately be denied and ridiculed among men. Every ideology that ignores him finds no enduring truth with which to sustain itself.

And every empire that has set out to crush the church has itself been ground to dust. Gibraltar will crumble before the church is conquered.

She is inevitable, invincible, inescapable, enduring. She is overcoming. She is endowed with power. She is entrusted with redemption. She is encouraged by the Holy Spirit. She is equipped unto every good work. God is calling her to be particularly stubborn in this dark age.

Our culture is in a downward spiral, but the culture shall not prevail. Our nation is at a spiritual low, but Christ's kingdom advances against the night. His Word has not lost its power to conquer. His covenant endures, and his church shall yet rise to trample the gates of hell and declare his inevitable glory.

He will build his church.

Jesus is building His church because the church is His priority in the earth.

It's what He's doing.

It's what He's about.

Through two millennia every attempt to destroy the church has failed.

After Mao Zedong burned a Christian seminary to the ground in Nanchang, China he arrogantly proclaimed:

***"The name of Christ will be forever buried here – never to be recovered."* – Mao Zedong**

Today, the church of Jesus Christ is thriving in China and it is Chairman Mao whose embalmed body remains very much dead after his death in 1976.

The success of the church is inevitable because It is Jesus Himself who said:

"I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

In case you didn't know it, **"gates"** in ancient times **referred to the seat of government of a city.**

The city fathers or elders would gather at the gates of the city to discuss issues relevant to the city.

The gates also formed the last line of defense of the city when under attack.

We've all seen the images of **the fall of Saigon** when a tank manned by North Vietnamese soldiers crashed through the gates of the presidential palace on **April 30, 1975.**

This signaled the end of South Vietnam.

It was all over when the gates were crashed.

Jesus said, in the end, it will be the gates of hell that will come crashing down.

It is the church that is on the offensive against the forces of darkness.

Gates are not offensive weapons, my friend; they are the last line of defense of a city under siege.

It may at times look as if they culture is prevailing.

It may at times appear as if the church is getting weaker and sin and darkness is going to win – but don't every forget it is none other than the Son of God who says:

"I will build My church – and I don't know how to lose!"

- **The church is His people**
- **The church is His possession**

- **The church is His priority**
- **The church is His passion**

The last point answers the question:

4. Why is Jesus building His church?

I think we all know we have been commissioned to take this gospel to the ends of the earth.

It is the mission of the church to preach the gospel and make disciples.

I recently received the following email that lets me know God is accomplishing this mission through The Bridge.

Dear Bo,

I have been attending The Bridge for the past couple of months. I just wanted to take a moment to thank you, and tell you what God has done in my life recently through you and The Bridge.

Without going into all the details I will just say that I have been going through a very rough time recently and the past couple of years have been the darkest in my life.

I had wanted to get back into church but honestly felt undeserving of God's love and forgiveness. I was persuaded by a friend to attend The Bridge and it was like lightning struck. Almost immediately, but steadily increasing over the past few weeks, I felt God cover me in peace.

I have been out of church for about 10 years, but even before that I never fully understood the power of God. Now, the first thought I have in the morning is that I love God and the peaceful feeling that He loves me, too. I could give you many examples of how God has shown me His love in recent weeks but that would be like writing a book. So, I just wanted to say that I am so grateful that God brought me to The Bridge and that He continues to touch me through your words.

...even if you do not see it, you are helping God touch those that need Him.

Sincerely,

This is why we exist as a church.

This is our mission in the earth.

But what is the purpose beyond the mission.

It might surprise you to learn that the story of the Bible is a love story.

It's about how the Father is taking a people out of this world and fashioning them to be a suitable bride for His Son.

For this I quote from a book by **Paul Billheimer** called **"Destined for the Throne."**

The universe, including this planet, was created for one purpose: to provide a suitable habitation for the human race. The human race was created in the image and likeness of God for one purpose: to provide an eternal companion for the Son.

After the fall and promise of redemption through the coming Messiah, the Messianic race was born and nurtured in order to bring in the Messiah. And the Messiah came for one intent and only one: to give birth to His Church, thus to obtain His Bride.

The Church, then – the called-out body of redeemed mankind – turns out to be the central object, the goal, not only of mundane history but of all that God has been doing in all realms of eternity.

From this it is implicit that romance is at the heart of the universe and is the key to all existence. From all eternity God purposed that at some time in the future His Son should have an Eternal Companion, described by John the Revelator as "the bride, the lamb's wife.

- Paul E. Billheimer (Destined for the Throne)

This is confirmed by what we read in **Revelation chapter 21**.

This chapter describes events that are to take place at the end of this age.

Revelation 21

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God.

A city is people – the people of God, those redeemed by the Lamb and made suitable to be the eternal companion of Jesus, the One who died to make us holy and acceptable to God.

What should be the takeaway from all this?

Three things:

- 1. Know you were created for a high and holy purpose – to be a suitable companion for the Son of God.**
- 2. Be grateful to be part of this beautiful, holy thing called the Church of Jesus Christ.**

It's not through anything you have done to merit this.

You were simply chosen to be His bride and pursued to that end.

- 3. Love the church, serve the church, honor the church because Jesus loves, serves and honors His church.**
- The church is His people**
 - The church is His possession**
 - The church is His priority**
 - The church is His passion**

This is what Jesus believes about the Church.