

A Church in the Gates of Hades

Matthew 16:13-20

For the past weeks we have been looking at the universal, mystical, Body of Christ called “the Church.” Today, I want to close this series by talking to you about “The Church in the Gates of Hades.” Jesus made this promise in Matthew 16:18, “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,” signifying the Church would always have to battle the forces of evil – *but in the end the Church prevails!*

There are many denominations in the world today but there is only one true Church. The Church is called by many names in the Scriptures to designate its *origin, relationship, responsibility, and destiny*. It is called “the body of Christ,” “the bride of Christ,” “God’s building,” “God’s husbandry,” “God’s temple,” “God’s household of faith,” “The flock of Christ.” It is called the “church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven,” “a peculiar people,” “a chosen nation,” “a royal priesthood,” “a purchased possession,” “the salt of the earth,” “the light of the world,” “the innumerable company of saints,” composed of every “nation,” “tongue,” “tribe,” and station and color.

But most of all, the “church” is a “body” of born again, baptized believers, as seen in 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” **In other words, the church is made up of born again believers no matter what the color or nationality; whether you are rich or poor doesn’t matter, what matters is that you have truly accepted Christ as your Savior.** Being saved by faith in Christ, we are made partakers of His divine nature, as seen in 2 Peter 1:2-4, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to

us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” As members of His body we are part of Himself, as seen in John 15:4-7, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” **Child of God, the “vine” can do nothing apart from God, for He is the God of eternity, the God of heaven, the God of earth, and the God of the Church!** Therefore, as we look at **“The Church in the Gates of Hades,”** there are some things we need to see.

First, the Church in the Gates of Hades is a fixed Church. Jesus made this statement in Matthew 16:18, “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.” The Bible doesn’t leave us in the dark concerning this “rock,” as seen in 1 Corinthians 10:1, 4, “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea ... and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God, which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” In 1 Peter 2:1-6 Peter, in no uncertain terms, tells us that Christ was “the living stone,” “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men,

but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

Among the many figures of the Church, both Peter and Paul uses that of a “building” or “house” and that takes us back to Matthew 7:24-27 where Jesus warned, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” **Child of God, you don’t have to worry about beating down the Church of the living God, for it is founded on the “Rock” and His name is Jesus!**

I like what the Bible says in Psalm 112:7, where we are told, “He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.” The word translated “steadfast” means, “confidently trusting,” “focusing on,” or “looking intently.” Listen carefully to this statement: *we are never going to see and end to rising and falling of church members, until we can come to the place of “focusing on,” “looking intently” “fixed on” Jesus!*

The problem in our churches today is we have far too many people “fixed” on the pastor, or on some doctrine, or on some program, or on some tradition, or on something else. But when we, as the Church, can stay “focused” on Jesus, then we will start to see what responsible Christianity is all about! The church standing in the Gates of Hades is a “fixed” church for it is founded on Jesus Christ!

Second, the church in the Gates of Hades is a fighting church. Look again at verse 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.” The picture here is *not building some great defense and trying to hold our ground*, but **the church in this passage is to be a militant and victorious church.** The word “militant” means, “having a combative character,” and “aggressive for a cause.” The word “victorious” means: “being the winner in a contest or struggle.” It is the picture of a “battering ram” storming the “forts of darkness.”

We are living in a time when we’re fighting Hell by the acre. I talk to *pastors* and *church leaders* and I see people *whose lives are being seared with sin*, and *beaten down by Satan*, and all the while they are saying, “Well, we’re holding our own, we haven’t gained any, and we haven’t lost any.” **My friend, that is a bunch of garbage that has been born in Hell and raised by the devil, and the time has come for the Church of the living Lord to realize we are in a “battle zone” against Satan and the demonic forces of Hades.** Ephesians 6:11-12 reminds us, “Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” I’m afraid we’ve let the world take our “stinger” out, and our modern-day Christianity has gained the reputation of having a pretty good “bark,” but not much “bite” left anymore!

But I stand before you today to tell you the Church in the Gates of Hades has been commissioned to be a fighting Church, an overcoming Church, and a victorious Church! Romans 8:35-39 reminds us, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” **Child of God, our victory does not come by**

our striving to overcome. Victory does not come by our abstaining from evil things. Victory does not come by our holding out or holding on, or even doing the best we can. I am proud to proclaim to you today - victory comes through the Victor – Jesus Christ our Lord!

Third, the Church in the Gates of Hades is a firey Church. John the Baptist said this in Matthew 3:11, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Today we are hearing much talk about the Spirit filled life” and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but why is it very few people ever talk about the “fire”? The Bible has a lot to say about “fire.” The word “fire” is used 549 times in 506 verses throughout the Word of God, but one of the more familiar places is in Acts 2:1-4, “On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.”

There was no doubt that something new was happening. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was both *audible* and *visible*. Acts 2:6 says, “And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.” Not since the time before the Tower of Babel had humanity been able to understand each other as clearly as they did that day. God's Holy Spirit was reaching out and reversing the curse of separation and confusion. Through the Holy Spirit we today can experience *unity* and *understanding*.

The antidote for apathy, indifference and lack of power in our churches is not more organization or more programs. It is not better music or even better motivational messages. It is not becoming more emotional. The antidote is very simple - it is the fullness of the Holy

Spirit. The antidote is asking the Holy Spirit to unleash His holy fire into our hearts and lives. And that, my friend, is something no one can do for you but you!

The Holy Spirit desires to make us whole - emotionally, socially and spiritually. Through the fire of Holy Spirit we can enjoy a right relationship with God, with ourselves, with others and with all of creation. Through the fire of the Holy Spirit we can experience a restoration of that which was lost in the Garden of Eden - the image of God. Through the Holy Spirit we can experience what it means to be a Church in the Gates of Hades.

But there is another “fire” I must share with you and that is the “fire” of Hades, as seen in Luke 16:19-31, “There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’ Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise

from the dead.” **While that passage of Scripture may sound offensive and not be politically correct or seeker sensitive it is nonetheless an eternal reality.** Somewhere out in our imminent future every human being **will either continue to enjoy the cleansing and purifying fire of God's Holy Spirit or, because of the refusal to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they will be eternally assigned to a place of torment, anguish, and hopelessness forever and ever.**

So, this morning, instead of having to experience a life of failure and a future of everlasting torment we can choose to experience a life of fullness through the fire of the Holy Spirit. We can choose today to ask the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and bring us the fullness of the New Birth. **We can surrender our hearts, our minds and our souls over to the Holy Spirit and be filled with the fire of His Holy Presence.** We can chose to live a life of salvation and sanctification.

If you have never been saved why not today?

Lease stand for prayer.

Father,

Your Word is true. I want to be part of a Church that is willing to stand in the Gates of Hades and to be all that You have called us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.