

**Scripture Reference: Matthew 16:13-20 / Focal vv. 13-18a**

**Date: January 19, 2014**

**Title: "What Makes a Church?"**

**Focus: What a Church is (What a Church is Series 1 of 10)**

**Intro:**

1. Parallel Passage Luke 9:18-27.

2. One day Jesus asks his disciples two direct questions; "*Who do people say I am?*" and "*Who do you say I am am?*"

3. Their responses, "*John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or someone else,*" prompted the second question. But, it was Peter's answer to that question, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" that caused Jesus to make a statement that has disrupted society to some extent.

4. Jesus said, "*I . . . say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.*" Some have seen this event as the establishment of the church. If it is, then we really need to examine what is taking place here. Why, what a church is will define its purpose for existence.

## **What Makes a Church?**

How does one recognize a church? When can it be said that a church exists? This question can be asked for many perspectives, organizational, financial, political, etc.

But, it needs to be asked from an existential perspective. Why did Jesus establish the church?

This is the first occurrence in the English Bible of the word church. Prior to this, those assembled, as followers of God were either known as *Israel*, *God's People*, or *Jesus' disciples*. But, in this instant, Jesus chooses to use the word "ekklesia," to describe the assembly of those identified with Him.

In Jesus' time, "ekklesia" described an assembly. It could be of people or animals. In the Septuagint, the OT translated into Greek, this word was rendered "assembly" (Deut. 31:30).

However, this assembly was not just a group of people, a crowd. An *ekklesia* was people gathered together for a purpose.

1 Sam 19:20; *"Then Saul sent messengers to take David, but when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing and presiding over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul; and they also prophesied."*

Therefore, from Jesus, we understand *church* as a gathering of people, not structures or organizations. As a matter of fact, churches as buildings and organization did not exist until 300 years after the ascension of Jesus.

In addition, church is *people*, not a person. A person cannot be a church anymore than a person can be a family, crowd, or team.

A church transcends external factors. It exists even if there is no outward sign of religious symbology, particular dress, leadership, practice, or buildings. As long as there are people, regardless of the setting, there can be a church.

But, these people must have a *purpose, a focus, an intent*

## **Did Jesus Say this Intent Would Be?**

Jesus told Peter His church would be built upon, “*this*.” What is the, “this,” He was referring to. This is where the dispute begins.

The first clue is the word, “this.” “This” is a thing.

Notice Jesus did not say, “upon you” or “upon him.” Jesus WAS NOT building His church on Peter, the disciples as a whole, or any other person (In Greek, “this” is a feminine word, “Peter” is a masculine. Jesus would not refer to Peter using this syntax).

There is a feminine word in close proximity to “this,” it is the very next word, “rock.” Jesus said “this rock,” is what would be the purpose of the gathering of His people.

That begs the question, “What rock?”

The answer is found earlier in their discussion. Remember, the entire discussion took place around Jesus’ initial two

questions to the disciples, “Who do *people* say I am?” and “Who do *you* say I am?”

Jesus is responding to Peter’s profession that He is Messiah, the "*Son of the Living God.*" Peter’s profession is the rock upon which His body would be built.

He did not say His gathering of people would be build upon a flawed and finite person (Peter didn’t figure out who Jesus was - v. 17), some particular religious practice, or doctrinal creed

Instead, His church would be those who were united in the bond of His Lordship.

1 Cor. 3:9-11; “*We are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*”

The church, God’s people, Jesus’ Disciples, is those united by faith in Jesus.

**Closing:**

1. What makes a church? People are the church. But, not just *any* people, people who share a common faith in Jesus as the one promised to take away sin, the Son of God.

2. People can attend a church. They can meet with those united in their faith in Jesus. People can also engage in the actions that a church does—more about that next week.

3. But, doing such things does not make one the church. A person must *become* the church through faith in Christ.

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