

CONVENTION SERMON 1986
"The Church Triumphant"

(Matthew 16:13-20)

by Adrian Rogers

Thank God for the joy of speaking to you. The Scripture I have chosen today is Matthew, chapter 16, beginning with verse 13:

"...when Jesus came to the coast of Caesarea Phillipi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' But he saith unto them, 'But whom say ye that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered and said unto Him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on the earth shall be loosed in heaven.'"

The grandest organization that this world knows anything about, more than an organization -- an organism -- is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now there are those who tell us that the Church is on her way out, and they are right! Jesus Christ has called the Church OUT. Jesus Christ has sent the Church OUT, and one day soon He's coming to take the Church OUT. THE CHURCH IS ON HER WAY OUT! (applause).

Now we as Southern Baptists sometimes like to comparate ourselves with other denominations. And sometimes we as churches like to compare ourselves to other churches and we say, "We're not doing so badly."

I heard of two brothers who were shere reprobates. One of them died--a nortorious sinner and the other brother said to their pastor, "I want you to preach my brother's funeral and there's a thousand dollars in it for you if you will call my brother a 'saint'." The pastor said, "You've got a deal." There he was in the coffin. The preacher stood in the pulpit and he said, "I want you to know that the man in this casket was a liar, a thief, a drunkard, an adulterer, and a blasphemmer. But compared to his brother, he was a 'saint'."

I think it's time we stop comparing ourselves with one another. I believe we need to get back to the Bible, stop saying we're better than others, or worse than others, and compare ourselves to what God has said here in his Word.

The episode that I read to you from the Word of God took place about six months before the Crucifixion of our dear Lord. Jesus Christ had been teaching his disciples. They had been in that world's greatest seminary, and now the final exam has really but one question: "Whom say ye that I am?"

And on that day, Simon Peter got an A plus -- for he answered absolutely correct when he said of our Lord, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And upon that statement, Jesus made another statement about his church...the church that I call today "the Church triumphant." And I would have you learn today and remember some things that you already know today, four things about the church triumphant.

1. Think about the saving belief of the church. Here it is. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This must be the true authentic confession of every biblical Christian.

Think with me a moment. First of all, Simon Peter had what I call a personal conviction of Christ. Jesus said in effect to Simon Peter, "Peter, you're right! You got an A plus, but don't get puffed up about it. You didn't figure out for yourself, Simon Peter. Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Now I want to remind you that Peter had spent almost three years in the very presence of the Son of God Himself, and he had heard Jesus Christ teach. And as much as I believe the Bible is the Word of God the Bible alone is not enough. It takes the Holy Spirit of God to open your understanding to the truth of God's Word.

Simon Peter said (and he said correctly) that Jesus was the Christ. But God had taught him that. The Bible says we are witnesses of these things, and so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him. I try never to preach a sermon until I saturate that sermon in prayer. And I say, "Oh, my God, come. Anoint me; fill me. Use me." Listen, my dear friends, I can preach truth but only the Holy Spirit of God can impart truth. And anything I can talk you into, somebody else can talk you out of. But anything that God given you is yours forever.

Now, we preachers must say, "Oh, my God, I will NOT go into that pulpit unless I know that I know that I have that anointing upon me." There was a personal conviction of Christ that Simon Peter had. It wasn't something he figured out; it was given to him by divine revelation. And we'd better lay our intellectual pride in the dust and allow the Holy Spirit of God to speak. Not only was there a personal conviction of Christ, there was a personal confession of Christ-- a personal confession of Christ. Outwardly, publicly, openly, gladly--he said, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." The Bible says that if thou shall confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ...." Ladies and gentlemen, I beg of you without stutter, without stammer, without apology, without equivocation, let us say it gladly on television, in private, in public, in denominational meetings, that Jesus Christ is not the best way to heaven, Jesus Christ is THE ONLY WAY to heaven.

I read that somebody compared me to a pit bulldog. Now there's some things we ought not to be dogmatic about....there's some things we ought to be "bulldogmatic" about. And one of those things is that Jesus Christ is God's way to heaven. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Not only was there a personal confession of Christ, but thirdly, there was a personal conversion through Christ. Jesus Christ turned back to Peter and said, "Yes, and thou art Peter." Literally he said, "Thou art petra, a rock." Now we're going to see that this passage says that Jesus is that rock, Jesus is that foundation rock. But now Jesus says to Peter, thou also art a rock. Peter did not gain "a piece of the rock." Peter became a piece of the Rock. He had the nature of his Lord. Peter had become a partaker of the Divine nature. If you will, he was supernaturally formed again. He was changed. And what Jesus is saying to him is, "Simon Peter, you have changed" and we need to keep preaching that.

My dear people, if religion hasn't changed your life, change your religion for you do not have the New Testament kind. It is easier to get into some of our churches than it is a social club. We advertise the membership in the church is where everybody gets in and nobody gets out. What started out as a sheepfold is more like a zoo. And we had better go back again to preaching the new birth and believe that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be the Church Triumphant. It will be made up of people (1) who have a personal conviction about

Christ, who had personally confessed Christ, and who have had a personal conversion through the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, that is the saving belief of the church.

The second thing I would have you believe about the church today in this valuable time that God has given me is what I will call the sovereign builder of the church. The Sovereign Builder of the church. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "Upon this rock, I will build my church." He did not say, I will build your church. Nor did he say, you will build my church. Jesus said, "I will build my church." Flesh and blood therefore will not, and cannot, do it. Now Jesus Christ himself is the foundation of that church. When Jesus said, "Upon this rock, I will build my church," he used the word for rock which means a rock ledge, a slab of rock, if you will, a stone mountain. And Jesus said, upon this rock I will build my church.

The Church is not built upon Simon Peter, it is built upon Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul said, other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Christ Jesus. Now Jesus not only is the foundation of the Church, the architect and builder of the church, (listen to me, brothers and sisters in Christ), we are the building material, we are the stones in that church. Simon Peter understood this when he said in Chapter 2 and verse 5, "You also as living stones are building up a spiritual house." Now Peter knew when God gave him that nickname that he was "Rocky One." He was one of those stones. And I'm one of those stones. And so are you. And we're built upon Jesus Christ.

Now to say some things about that: Number one, we are bonded together. Nobody ever heard of a one-brick building. Now, that's wonderful. You know you can shove a brick around but it's hard to shove a building around, isn't it? So you see, we need one another. We are bonded together. What tremendous strength there is in our church, and yes, in our denomination when we are squeezed together, one stone upon another stone, standing with other stones--together in a beautiful temple. I believe this is a great house of the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program because, ladies and gentlemen, we are not just a lot of individual bricks out there on the ground. We have built a spiritual house, a spiritual building, as our individual churches are such--and I'm not trying to get into any phraseology, but there is strength in unity. And may God give us increasing unity.

Not only are we built together, we are bound together. I need you, and you need me. And we need everyone of you that names the name of Christ. We are not enemies; we are brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ. We need those who have gone before us. We need those who will come after us. My place in this building has placed me standing upon other stones that went before me. And I am standing with you; and you are standing with me. Each one is standing with another person. And we are bound together by a mortar of love. When we are dead and gone, if Jesus tarries, there will be others that will be built upon us. But thank God, we are living stones. Ladies and gentleman, I want to tell you that we are built together; we are bound together. We are in it together, like it or not. We are together in Jesus.

The third thing I want to tell you, folks, is we are blessed together. Peter said we are a spiritual house. Now why would God want to build a house? I'll tell you why He wants to build a house. He wants to live in it! That's why he builds a house. And so he built this spiritual house that He might live in us.

Now I'm not talking about a denomination. I'm still talking about the local church, and primarily about the local church in all that I will say. We are blessed together. We had better get back, folks, to preaching this matter of church attendance. Not forsaking the assembling ourselves together, in the manner that some do. Today, we have people who go to church for three major reasons--to be hatched, matched, or dispatched.

We need to come back to this matter of worshipping together. people say is it possible to be a Christian without the church? Well, the answer is "Is it possible to be a bee without a hive?" Is it possible to be a sailor without a ship? Is it possible to be a parent without a family?

Christ and the church are not identical, but Christ and the church are inseparable. He is the head and we are the body. He is the foundation and we are the stones. And Jesus Christ, who is the architect, is the foundation, and we who are the stones are a part of the church that will be built. Jesus Christ did not say I might build my church. He said, "I will build my church....it shall be built."

And I remind you that when Jesus Christ said that his ministry was never at a darker hour. In just a few months he would be hanging from that cross. The crowds were leaving him yet Jesus spoke of the church triumphant, and Jesus said, "The church will be built." I don't know about you, but I have some allegiance in my life that are nonnegotiable. And therefore there are some things that are settled, not up for negotiation. Some things are negotiable and we ought to negotiate. But there are some things that are already settled. The Word of God is not up for vote. It was settled in heaven. Amen?

The church is not up for vote. Jesus said, "I will build my church." Therefore, we have plan A and if plan A fails, I'm going to fall back on Plan A." Plan A is the church. And that plan will not fail.

Woodrow Wilson said, "I had rather temporarily fail with a cause that must ultimately succeed than to temporarily succeed with a cause that will ultimately fail." I want you to know those who stand with Christ and on that foundation, we cannot, we will not, we shall not fail. The church will be built. Amen? Praise the Lord.

Now the third thing I want to talk with you about is about the spiritual battle of the church. Jesus Christ at least inferred a battle when he talked about the gates of hell, and he said of the church, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now my brothers and sisters in Christ, my fellow Southern Baptists, we are in a battle, but God help us to know it--our battle is not with flesh and blood. We are up against mobilized, demonized forces of hell. That's where the battle is and it has always been--and it's always been the work of the devil to bring the people of God to get them fighting against one another so they'll stop bombarding the gates of hell.

Jesus says that we are to come against the gates of hell. I believe with all of my heart that the chief prayer of Jesus Christ is that they may be one--that the world believes. Amen? And if that's the chief prayer of Jesus Christ, I believe the chief strategy of the devil is in the in division. God is not the author of confusion. And God does not want division among his people. The devil does.

James, chapter 3, verses 13 and following:

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works, with meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

Where envy and strife is there is confusion in every evil work. But the wisdom that is above is first pure, then gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy, and the fruit of righteous is sewn in peace of them that make use.

Now I can truthfully say I could not stand up here and preach if I harbored any animosity toward any of you or any other person that walks the face of this earth. And I can say for if a man knows his heart for God, I have absolutely none and I would be afraid to stand up and preach if I did have any. It would be a sin against Almighty God.

Now I'm not trying to brag. I'm not trying to say look at me. That's not the unusual thing-- that ought to be normal and natural. Dr. Winfred Moore, sitting over here--I love Dr. Moore. He's my brother in Christ. He and I have firm convictions that we hold alike. I wrote him a letter before this Convention and I said, "Brother Winfred, I want you to know however this Convention comes out, I love you, I respect you, I admire you. You are a man of integrity. You are a great man and I believe that he is with all of my heart and soul. And I thank God for Dr. Winfred Moore. And he's said precisely the same thing to me, just in different ways.

And I'm grateful for that. My dear friend, the Bible says in Galatians chapter 5 and verse 15:

But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye not be consumed one of another.

That's Christian cannibalism, where we are eating up, devouring, one another. Sometimes we do it in such sanctimonious language. I heard of a man who was in the bush country and was attacked by a lion. He was down on his knees and being chewed up and he said, "Oh God, deliver me from this lion. And when he did, the lion kneeled down and folded his paws and bowed his head. He said, "Thank God, a Christian lion." The lion answered, "Don't get your hopes up, I'm just asking the blessing."

We sometimes pray and then devour one another. Now, I don't want to be misunderstood. Some of my conservative brethren think all of a sudden Adrian has gone soft. I have not. I believe there are some things we must stand for. I thank God for diversity and there are some things we ought to be diverse about. But there are some things we cannot be diverse about.

Romans 16:17-18:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

And then Jude verse 3 says:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Literally, once for all delivered unto the saints. Earnestly contend for the faith. Fellow Baptist, never, never, never default on the faith delivered to the saints. It's not up for negotiation. Our fellowship is not built upon that kind of faith. Our fellowship is built upon grace eternal, nonnegotiable truths, and let's remember that.

But suppose I find a brother with whom I disagree...and that wouldn't be hard around here. And there's some of you right now disagreeing with me on some things...and you're saying if I were up there, I would say it differently from what Adrian's saying it. And maybe one day you will be here. But let me say when you find yourself in opposition with a fellow member of this denomination, or in your church, I suggest that you ask some questions. First of all, you ask, "Is my opponent saved?" And if he is saved and I harm him, then I'm really harming me. because we are members of the same body. I cannot harm him without harming me. I have to live with him for all eternity, so I must get use to it down here.

Ask another question, perhaps he's not saved. Maybe I am arguing with an unsaved man. Then if he's not a saved man, then you are arguing with a blind man. If he's unsaved, he is a prospect for evangelism and we ought not to do or say anything that would cheat you from bringing him to Jesus Christ. So whether he's saved or whether he's lost, we need to be very, very careful in whatever controversy we find ourselves.

And I'll tell you a third thing, whether my opponent is saved or lost, there is an unsaved world out there watching and they don't understand a lot of these things. My dear friend, they are watching to see the way we conduct ourselves. I say let everything be done in a spirit of Christ and a spirit of love and a spirit of fairness. If I make an intemper statement, if am judgmental, in the name of Jesus please come and tell me so I can confess it and ask God to forgive and ask God to fellowship with me.

Let us build together a sense of love and trust in one another, that we might get the job done for Jesus Christ.

The battle is not with flesh and blood. We are coming against the gates of hell and we don't need to be on the offense. We need to be on the defense. It is the church that is to be on the offense. It's time we stop singing "Hold the Fort" and go on with "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

I am convinced there has never been a greater day, a greater age, a greater time to preach the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I was on an airplane trying to get a newspaper. There was a lawyer, dressed in a pinstriped suit with a button-down collar shirt and a spiffy tie. We were talking about newspapers. He wanted a ^{liberal} local paper. I wanted a conservative one. And so, he looked at me and said, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a preacher." He asked, "What kind?" I said, "A Baptist preacher." He looked me up and down and said, "Just what do you read?" I said, "Well, I read books and journals. I read the Bible a lot. Primarily I read the Word of God." He said, "Mister, is that all you read? Don't you read Playboy?" I said, "No." He asked, "How do you know what's going on? How can you stand up and preach to people, how can you even address the problems of this world if you don't read more widely than that?" I said, "Mister, man only has three problems." He said, "What are they?" I answered: "Sin, Sorrow and Death. Man has no other problems." "Oh," he said, "he has a lot more problems than that." And I said, "Alright, go off and think about it and come back and tell me a fourth one." He went off and came back and said, "Man, only has three problems." I hold this Bible up now to solve those three problems for man, because this book is the only answer to all man's problems.

The gates of hell, which are really the gates of Hades, the stronghold of sin, will not stand against the church of the Lord Jesus Christ....and we are not on the defense.... The gospel of Jesus Christ will go through the gates of hell like a white, hot cannonball through a crate of eggs. Thank God for the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me talk with you finally about the singular business of the church. Jesus Christ said to Simon Peter, "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.

What was Jesus talking about? "Then said he unto them, therefore, every slide which is instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old. Now when we are instructed in the kingdom of heaven, then we have the keys of the kingdom.

What are the keys of the kingdom? They are gospel ^{truths} ~~tools~~ found in God's Word. These are the keys of the kingdom and we are to take those keys and we are to bind Satan and we are to loose holds and whatever we bind on earth has already been bound in heaven. Whatever we loose on earth has already been loosed in heaven. Thank God, everyone of you who name the name of Jesus has been given a set of keys. We all have the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And our job, our joy, our responsibility is to use those keys.

In closing may I say something to our denomination. Our denomination needs to put our fussing behind and get on with Bold Mission Thrust....we need to get on with it!

Our primary job is not feeding the hungry. I believe we should feed the hungry, but what good will it do, my dear friend, if we feed people and while they have a full stomach they die and they go to hell. We must, and we are, telling them about Jesus.

I thank God for our resolutions against all manner of things. Take for example the matter of Communism. I am against Communism with every inch and fiber of my being, listen to me. Our job as a convention is not primarily to fight Communism. It is to preach Jesus Christ. You can make a man an anti-Communist without making him a Christian, but in my estimation, you can make him a real biblical Christian without teaching him the horrors of Communism. Communism is an idea, and you can't kill an idea with a bullet. The only thing that can shoot down an idea is a better idea--and that's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I believe in national defense so don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, our job is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ." I thank God for seminaries. I believe in intellectualism, I believe in studies. But you listen to me, our seminaries need not only to be teaching institutions but they need to be primarily incubators of blazing, passionate, emotional love for Jesus Christ and His Word and reaching lost souls!

I believe in the Church but our churches need not to be snooty social clubs with a steeple on the top. We need to be hard-hearted citizens, evangelists. A church that is not evangelistic is not meeting its needs. He has given to us the keys of the kingdom. Can you imagine 14 and one-half million soul-winners. What would that do to America and the world?

Andrew Murray said there are two classes of Christians: soulwinners and backsliders. God didn't call me to be a soulwinner; God called me to teach. God called me to sing. There's nothing wrong with you, mister, that a good douse of salvation and old-fashioned revival wouldn't cure.

Someone has said if there were only 5,000 Christians in this world, and those 5,000 would win only three others to Christ in a year, and each of them at the same rate, in ten years every soul on earth would be saved just winning them at the rate of three a year.

Christianity has not failed; it really never has been tried, ladies and gentleman. Let's get at the job of teaching and winning souls to Jesus Christ. I believe it is time for us to quit moaning and groaning and complaining and talking about the last days. What if these are the last days? Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

I can remember the soul I ever had the joy of winning to Jesus Christ. God saved me as a teenage boy. I went to Ridgecrest, North Carolina to a Baptist assembly. I heard a brother, and I don't even know his name, preach on soulwinning. He said, "How many of you have brought a soul to Jesus this year?" I thought, "My goodness, I thought he was going to say this week." I was sitting up in the balcony. I went back to West Palm Beach where I was raised, just a teenage boy playing football down there and it was the summertime. I was going down to the corner of Broadway and 40th Street where Albritton's Drug Store is. I had gone down without a shirt or shoes on, just in Levi's (we'd dress that way to show up our muscles, even though I didn't have many). I went down there to buy a jug of kerosene to wash some bicycle parts. A man came up to me with an extension chord in his hand. He had a white beard; he was an old man. He said, "Son, would you like to buy this extension chord?" I said, "No, sir, I don't need one. Why are you trying to sell it?" He said, "Well, son, I've been an old fool. I live on a pension check. When I got mine and cashed it, a friend and I spent all my money on liquor. Now it's all gone. Now I'm having to sell some of my tools to get some cash until I get another check." I said, "If I had some money I'd give it to you. But I only have about 16 cents to buy this kerosene with." And I turned to start to walk away but I felt the Holy Spirit starting to talk to me. And he said, "Adrian, speak to that man about his soul." I said, "Well, God, I can't do that. He's a man; I'm a boy. And besides that I don't have a shirt on, I don't have any shoes on." And besides that I thought I've been in too many street fights right on this corner. So I just started to move away but the Holy Spirit said, "Adrian, you promised. Now speak to that man." He said again, "Adrian, you promised." So I went back and said, "Sir, I don't have any money, but I want to ask you one question. Are you a Christian? Do you know Jesus Christ?" And when I said that, his chin started to quiver. Tears ran out of his eyes and down the canyons in his cheeks. Tears began to drop off that white beard. He said, "You know, son, I'm not." I said, "Do you want to be a Christian?" He said, "I certainly do. If I only knew how." He said, "I wish I had a Bible." I said, "I have one." I reached down into the lining of that old coat and brought out a little maroon Gideon's Bible and I only knew one verse I could find easily in that little New Testament. But I found John 3:16 and I told that man as best I knew how, of when God loved, he loved the world and when He gave, He gave his Son. And I said, "Mister, when I believed in him, he saved me. And he will save you too." And then he said, "Now listen, what should I do?" I answered: "I'm going to pray for you and while I'm praying, I want you to pray too." When I started praying for him, I started to cry. Folks, that amazed me. For the one thing I never did during those days was to cry., I was proud that I didn't cry. Fight, yes; cry, no! And I thought, "O Lord, I hope nobody sees me crying." I started to cry when I prayed for that man. Then I said, "You pray, and you ask Him to save you." And he started to cry. He prayed and asked Jesus to save him. And then I said, "Sir, did He save you?" He answered: "I believe He did." And then I said, "Okay, goodbye." I didn't know anything about followup.

Then the old man said, "Young man, come back." I came back and he said, "Young man, I'm an old man. I've travelled in about all the 48 states. I'm going to die before long. He- You are the first person to ever speak with me about my soul." He said, "Thank you, young man, thank you!" Ladies and gentlemen, when I went home that day, I was walking about four feet off the sidewalk. Praise God, that he let me lead a soul to Jesus Christ.

Jesus has given us the keys. If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus. You can say he died for all. Don't say there's nothing I can do, while the souls of men are dying and the Master calls for you. Let us as Southern Baptists unite around a love for the Lord, a love for his Word, a love for his Church and a love for lost souls. Grant it, Jesus. Amen!