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## The Invincible Church

Matthew 16:13-19 and 24

"What is wrong with the Church?" A London newspaper offered a prize for the best essay on that subject. The prize was won by a minister in Wales. He wrote: "What is wrong with the church is our failure to realize and wonder at the beauty, the mystery, the glory, and the greatness of the church".

Our hope is in no one less than Jesus Christ, our living resurrected Lord. The Bible states: "Christ in you, the hope of glory!" But if our hope is in Christ, Christ's hope is in his Church.

The church is God's one redemptive body placed upon this earth to witness to Christ's saving grace. It was for the church that Jesus died. It is in the church that Christ dwells. It was to the church that Jesus gave the great commission. It is through the church that Jesus brings the message of salvation to the world. It is for the church that Jesus will one day return, rapture it and take his church to heaven.

Never forget that the church with all of its faults will remain upon this earth until Jesus comes again. He promised: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. "The church is invincible! Christ loves the church and gave Himself for it. We need to love the church and give ourselves to it. It is His called out assembly, His bride, His body!

Nigh onto 2000 years ago Jesus said: "I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it". The church has stood for 2000 years. It has survived the testing of Pharisees and Sadducees, dictatorship and democracy, prosperity and poverty, ritualism and emotionalism, war and peace, popularity and disfavor. Satan with all of his schemes cannot destroy Christ's church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it! The church is invincible. What makes the church invincible? Jesus gives the answer in Matthew 16.

I. The Church is invincible because of the transformed nature of its membership.

Every member of the church is to be a transformed individual. Every member of the church is to have two births--one of the flesh and one of the Spirit. Indeed that is the message, mission and mandate of the church. The church takes sinners and teaches them the way to become saints. It takes children of wrath and makes them children of God. It takes those dead in trespasses and sins and introduces them to Him who is the resurrection and the life. The church leads the lost to be saved. It helps those in darkness find Christ who is the light of the world.

Jesus led his disciples to the border of Gentile territory, Caesarea Philippi. his days on earth were numbered. The problem was, was there anyone who understood him, recognized him, and would carry on his work once he went to heaven? That was the crucial problem. it involved the very survival of the Christian faith.

At Caesarea Philippi Jesus asked his disciples: "Whom do you say that I, the Son of Man am?" Here is a dramatic picture. Jesus is a homeless, penniless Galilean carpenter with twelve ordinary men. At that very moment his death was being plotted. What a backdrop. Caesarea Philippi was scattered with fourteen temples of the ancient Syrian Baal worship. By Caesarea Philippi there arose a great hill and there was a deep cavern that was said to be the birthplace of Pan, the Greek god of nature. In Caesarea Philippi there was a great temple of white marble built to the Roman godhead of Caesar. Caesarea Philippi was a center of Greek worship, Syrian worship, and Roman worship---and there of all places, this amazing man, Jesus, asked: "Whom do you say that I am?"

This is life's ultimate question--what do you think of Christ?

Peter articulated the deepest conviction of his soul: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" What a statement! "Christ"--he was the anointed one, the Messiah. This was a reference to his work. "Son of the living God"--is a reference to Jesus' person. Jesus is God incarnate. Peter confessed two glorious things about Jesus. As to our Lord's work Jesus is the anointed Messiah, the Saviour. As to His person Jesus is God in human flesh.

Jesus is God incarnate! Our lovely Lord Jesus was totally human and totally divine. Jesus was human enough to be born of a woman but divine enough that the woman was a virgin. He was human enough to be baptized by John but divine enough that God spoke from heaven saying "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". He was human enough to be tempted by the Devil but divine enough to say "get thee behind me Satan." He was human enough to attend a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee but divine enough to turn the water into wine. He was human enough to ask a woman at the well for water but divine enough to give her the water of life eternally quenching her thirst. He was human enough to fall asleep in a boat in a storm but divine enough that he could command the storm to cease. He was human enough to weep at Lazarus' grave but divine enough to command "Lazarus come forth" and a man dead four days was brought back to life. He was human enough to pray in Gethsemane "let this cup pass from me" but divine enough to say "not my will but thy will be done". He was human enough, while on the cross, to say "I thirst" but divine enough to pronounce to a penitent thief "today shalt thou be with me in paradise". He was human enough to die but divine enough to be raised from the grave and now He lives forever seated at God's right hand with all authority in heaven and in earth.

That describes the **person** of our Lord. He is the Son of the Living God!

Peter also said: "You are the Christ". That describes Jesus' **work**. He is God's anointed deliverer. Someone has said that in the Bible there are 633 names and titles attributed to Jesus. I cannot vouch for the veracity of that number. I do know, however, that :

To the Artist Jesus is the altogether Lovely

To the Architect Jesus is the sure Foundation

To the Banker Jesus is the hidden Treasure

To the Biologist Jesus is the Life  
To the Botanist Jesus is the Rose of Sharon  
To the Carpenter Jesus is the door  
To the Doctor Jesus is the great Physician  
To the Educator Jesus is the master Teacher  
To the Engineer Jesus is the New and Living Way  
To the Farmer Jesus is the Lord of the Harvest  
To the Florist Jesus is the Lily of the Valley  
To the Geologist Jesus is the Rock of Ages  
To the Horticultist Jesus is the True Vine  
To the Judge Jesus is the great Judge of all mankind  
To the Juror Jesus is the faithful and true Witness  
To the Lawyer Jesus is the Lawgiver, Mediator, Intercessor, Advocate  
To the Minister Jesus is the true Servant  
and to the Sinner Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Regarding that Peter confesses "you are the Christ". Jesus is God's anointed Son come to deliver us from our sins.

One Sunday morning a young lady lingered at the front door of the church after almost everyone had left. By her side was a blond headed boy four years of age. "Pastor," she said, "I want to thank you for what this church means to me and my son. And I wanted to remind you of what a special day this is. Exactly one year ago today I became a Christian. You baptized me that Sunday evening. I have tried to be faithful to the church ever since I was saved."

She continued: "When this church led me to Christ I was hooked on dope. I had been a prostitute. I started coming to church. The church witnessed to me. I experienced God's love in church. You told me how to become a Christian. Jesus saved me."

Then tears filled her eyes and she said: "You will never know what this Church means to me. My life has totally changed!" That is what makes the church invincible----the transformed nature of its membership. We passionately believe that Jesus is "the Christ, the son of the living God!" That belief can transform any life. It transformed mine.

Rembrandt could take a piece of canvas dab his paint on it and it became a masterpiece. We call that art. Shakespeare could write a play on a sheet of paper and we call that genius. John D. Rockefeller could sign his name on a check and it became a fortune. We call that capital. A skilled workman can take a piece of metal, shape it, mold it, twist it, and bend it and it becomes a creation of usefulness and beauty. We call that craftsmanship. But only God in Heaven can take a sinner and make him or her a Saint and we call that salvation. That is what makes the church invincible--the transformed nature of its membership!

II. The Church is invincible because of its dynamic relationship to Christ.

Matthew chapter sixteen is the most controversial passage of Scripture in the New Testament. When Peter confessed that he believed Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God Jesus announced for the first time God's plan to build His church. Jesus said: "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 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. And 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 earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:17-19)

### 1. The church is built upon Christ.

The church is dynamically related to Christ because the church is built upon Christ. Jesus said: "Thou art Peter and ~~upon this rock~~ I will build my Church." A first year Greek student knows this is a play on words. Jesus said, "You are Peter, **petros**, and upon this Rock, **petra**, I will build my Church. Peter, or petros, is like a brick while Rock, or petra, is the cornerstone.

The Psalmist wrote in 18:31 "Who is a Rock save our God?" Simon Peter himself wrote in I Peter 2:6-8 "Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture; behold I lay in Zion, a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded." And the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ our Lord." (I Corinthians 3:11) The hymn is correct when it says: "On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." Small wonder that the church is invincible because the church has its foundation in no one less than Jesus Christ. He is the Rock upon which the church is built and we, like Peter, have become living stones that rise into a holy tabernacle of God in the Spirit.

### 2. The church is built by Christ.

Jesus announced: "Upon this rock, **I will build** my church". Not only is the church built upon Christ, the church is being built by Christ. Nineteen hundred years ago Jesus walked the shores of Galilee and chose Andrew, Peter, James and John, building His church. That Same Jesus saved you in this twentieth century and placed you in his church. Just as he chose those first disciples he chose you and me!

~~The world saw Simon Peter as a young fisherman, but Jesus saw the Pentecostal preacher. The world scorned the traitor tax collector Matthew while Jesus saw the gospel writer. The world saw a harlot at the well in Samaria but Jesus saw the first home missionary. The world saw an angry Pharisee making havoc of the church but Jesus saw his greatest missionary, the Apostle Paul. The world looks at you and sees a human being. God looks at you and sees His child, a saint with limitless potential. Jesus can take our frail lives, transform them, and make us a vital part of a holy temple--His church!~~

If the church is built by Jesus two truths are evident. First, God put you <sup>in His Church</sup> ~~on earth~~ at this time providentially. He has a special place of service for you! You and I live in the last part of the twentieth century, and hopefully into the next millennium, by the providence of God. Your life is not a biological accident. Jesus said: "You have not chosen me but I have chosen you." Have you thanked God you are alive and standing on the brink of a new millennium as a member of Christ's church? He has a special place of service for you.

Second, if Christ builds the church we must not, we cannot, reject those Christ has chosen and placed in his church. There are no perfect churches because there are no perfect church members. A visitor talked with Charles Haddon Spurgeon about joining ✓ Spurgeon's church. He said, however, that he observed some hypocrites in Spurgeon's church. Spurgeon responded: "In the first church one of its <sup>members</sup> leaders, Thomas, doubted the resurrection. Peter, its leader, cursed and denied his Lord. The treasurer of the church, Judas, betrayed Christ and committed suicide. The first church was not perfect and since that day there has not been a perfect church. But if you find a perfect church, for heaven's sake, do not join! When you become a member it will no longer be perfect!

<sup>CHRISTIAN</sup> ✓ We are called to respect, love, accept, and honor one another. We must not reject those Christ has chosen and placed in His church. Together we are the body of Christ. Every member is a vital part of Christ's Body, the church.

✓ A husband was asked by his wife to buy her a bra at the department store. The embarrassment husband dutifully approached the saleslady. He said: "I would like to buy a brazier for my wife." The sales lady asked: "What kind of a bra do you want?" The husband responded: "I did not know there was more than one kind."

✓ The sales lady then said: "We have Catholic bras, Salvation Army bras, and Baptist bras." The curious husband asked: "What is the difference?" The lady responded: "Catholic bras cover the masses. Salvation Army bras lift up the fallen. Baptist bras make mountains out of mole hills." Could we resolve not to make mountains out of mole hills with fellow church members? We must not, we dare not reject those Christ has chosen.

No one less than the Apostle Paul wrote: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations."

Years ago my young associate pastor came to me with a problem. He explained how one lady in the church was giving him a difficult time. In fact he said she was pestering and criticizing him constantly. I responded, "Gordon, she is the most important member in the church to you. Thank God for her! She is helping you." I could tell he was puzzled by my response. "How can you say that," he questioned. I responded, "Gordon, if you can love her you can love anybody!"

The church is built by Christ. It is His body and every member is important in its ministry.

### 3. The church is successful through Christ.

Jesus now makes one of His strongest statements regarding the purpose of His church. "And I say 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. And I 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 shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19)

This is the most controversial statement in the New Testament. It reveals what the church is to do and how to do it. When I was a college student I pictured the forces of hell, or gates, attacking the church. Jesus said even Satan could not destroy Christ's church. That is good doctrine but this verse states another truth. Here the church is not on defense but on offense. The gates of hell cannot stand against the attack of the church. Indeed the church batters down the gates of hell and snatches men and women bound for perdition from sin. By conversion they are snatched from hades and given passage to heaven.

✓ The church is to ever be on the attack. I am glad we have taken "Hold the Fort" out of the hymn book. We have no forts to hold. Our theme song is "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war" The best days of Christ's church are before us. We must get our eyes off our tail lights and onto our headlights. Faith is the key to all we have done or ever will do. The biggest churches have yet to be built. The greatest victories have yet to be won. Remember Jesus' promise: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church." *The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.*

~~Read about a man who~~ dreamed one night he ate twenty-five pounds of marshmallows. When he awakened the next morning his foam rubber pillow was missing. All things are possible to the one who believes.

A tourist was visiting Rome. The guide showed him the empty field where the Circus Maximus once stood. The guide described the beautiful marble columns and statues that once graced the stadium. "This is where the Christians were killed," he said. A curious tourist asked: "What happened to the marble columns and statues?" The guide responded, "The Christians carted them away and built churches out of them." The gates of hell cannot prevail against Christ's church!

Jesus went on to say: "I 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 shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This is a future paraphrastic construction. Properly translated it reads: "Whatsoever you bind on earth **shall have already been** bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth **shall have already been** loosed in heaven."

In other words Jesus is saying: "Get your orders from heaven!" The church does not tell God what to do--God is commander-in-chief and He has told us what to do in His holy inspired Word. Anytime you or I do something that conflicts with the teachings of the Bible we need to change and conform to God's Word. This has been, is, and will continue

to be a major problem in the Church. Someone comes along and thinks he or she knows more than Holy Scripture and is smarter than God.. Stick to the Bible! Get your orders from heaven. Jesus had more trouble with the Pharisees and Sadducees than any other groups. In fact they had him crucified. The Pharisees believed too much--they added to God's Word. The Sadducees believed too little--they subtracted from God's Word. Let us resolve to do neither. Just accept God's Word and try to live by and teach its eternal truths. Let us not be guilty of substituting **our interpretation** of the Bible for the Bible.

Jesus goes on to say: "I give unto thee (plural) the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." This is one of the interesting metaphors used in the New Testament. Jesus frequently used metaphors to teach. He told His disciples "you are the light of the world." He charged them to be salt in a corrupt society. He taught He was the bread of life. And He was the water of life. Indeed He said He would baptize with fire. Now Jesus tells his disciples, "I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." What do salt, light, bread, water, fire, and keys have in common? One thing--- Penetration!

Salt penetrates meat and it is preserved. Light penetrates darkness and the darkness disappears. Bread penetrates the body and gives it strength. Water penetrates the ground and a harvest comes forth. And fire is dependent upon penetration for its very existence. A key penetrates a lock and a door is opened. So it is essential that our Lord's church penetrate the world in which we live with God's message of love, grace, and salvation

Evangelism is the essential if we are to be Christ's church doing his work. It was an historic day when Jesus met with his disciples on the Mount of Olives just before He ascended into heaven. He had just conquered death by his resurrection. This is his final business meeting with the church before he went to sit at the right hand of the throne of God in glory. While angels are parking their taxiclouds along the boulevards of heaven awaiting the coming of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords Jesus meets with his church. There is only one item on the agenda. It is evangelism ~~and~~ world missions. Jesus commands: "All power has been given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.-Amen."

This must ever be the mission of Christ's church--- to seek and to save those that are lost. The gates of hell cannot stand against the church as we take the keys of the kingdom and open the doors of heaven to the unsaved. Peter took those keys on the day of Pentecost, opened the door and three thousand were saved. In Acts 10 he opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles. Cornelius and his household were converted.

A five year old girl asked her mother after breakfast on Monday if they could sit at the piano and sing the hymns sung in church on Sunday. Knowing a daughter was more important than washing dishes the mother left the kitchen, sat at the piano, and together they sang the hymns. They went through the whole morning and evening order of



worship.. The little girl became more excited. She said "Let's do it again!" Reluctantly the mother agreed.

Finally finishing, the mother closed the hymnal. "Mommy, can we do it one more time?"

"No, Honey, I am sorry. Mommy must clean up the house." "Ok", the disappointed daughter said. "But let's sing one more stanza of the invitation, and if no one comes we will close."

I like the spirit of that five year old girl. That is the spirit of Christ's church. We do not want to stop the invitation until the last lost person has come to our loving Lord. That is Christ's church. It is built **upon** Christ, built **by** Christ, and is successful **through** Christ. The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church with a transformed membership that has this dynamic relationship to Christ. Remember He is the vine and we are the branches. Without Him we can do nothing. We plant and water but God **alone** gives the increase

III. The church is invincible because of the unique spirit in which it does its work.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that He would go to Jerusalem, suffer many things of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed and be resurrected the third day. This is Jesus' first mention of his impending death and resurrection. Peter did not understand. He rebuked Jesus saying: "Lord, this shall not happen to you!"

Jesus responded: Peter, a moment ago you were talking like God, now you are talking like Satan. Then Jesus said unto His disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." This is the unique spirit in which we are to do God's work in Christ's church.

We must deny self. This is the road to success in any field of endeavor, self denial. Water never boils until it reaches 212 degrees. Grapes do not become wine until they are crushed. Wheat cannot become bread until it is ground asunder. In four years of therapy I have been repeatedly taught "no gain without pain". And we cannot bless until we bleed. Jesus said you and must deny self.

More than that, we must take up our cross. In Gethsemane's Garden Jesus prayed, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done." Jesus said "no" to self--not my will. Then He said "yes" to God--thy will be done. A cross is not a decoration on top of a church. It is not a beautiful piece of jewelry around one's neck. It is not taking care of an aged parent, or even some physical disability. Your cross is an absolute "no" to self--not my will-- and an absolute "yes" to God--thy will be done! That is what it means to take up your cross.

God help us to be like the great missionary David Livingston. Every night he would get down on his knees, read the Bible and pray. The last day of his life he knelt, prayed and



read the Bible--then wrote in his diary: "My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All--I again dedicate myself to thee."---and he died.

But beyond that we must follow Jesus. Jesus said: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." When we follow the best person we know there is the possibility that individual will fail to lead in the right way. Following Jesus poses no such risk. He is not only our Saviour, not only the founder and foundation stone of the church, but also our perfect example. We are to ever look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Perhaps Sundar Sigh was the most dedicated Christian Tibet ever produced. On one occasion he and a friend were in a blizzard in the Tibetan Mountains. They came upon a man fallen in the snow, freezing. Sundar said to his companion: "Help me lift this brother. We will carry him to the next village."

Sundar's companion replied: "If we try to carry that man, we will die. You and I will be fortunate if we make it to the next village in this blizzard. Leave him!"

"I cannot. You go on and I will follow with this man." Sundar's companion quickly began to walk toward the next village in the freezing snow-storm.

With great effort Sundar lifted the stranger from the snow. Placed the man's arm around his shoulder and the two of them struggled up the snow capped mountain. Walking together their bodies warmed each other. The near dead man began to revive. Reaching the pass and observing the village two miles below Sundar saw a crumpled body in the path. It was Sundar's friend who had gone ahead. He had frozen to death.

Struggling with the man he had rescued Sundar walked toward the village. He said: "I thought of the words of my Master. 'Whoever shall save his life shall lose it. But whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it'."

We who are Christ's church must not, we cannot, let the world down. We are the light of the world, the salt of the earth, we have the keys of the kingdom of heaven. God help us to be faithful in sharing his message of love, grace, reconciliation, and forgiveness. The church, you and I, are entrusted to spread the gospel--God's good news.

Ben was a young child who attended a church in Tennessee. He loved going to church but always occupied a seat on the back row of the church. The church worship service was the one bright hour of Ben's week. You see he was an illegitimate child when that was a real stigma. He had a mother but not a dad. The church called a new pastor. The first Sunday he preached he stood at the front door of the church greeting the congregation as they departed.

When young Ben walked out the pastor bent down to shake Ben's hand. He said: "Now who's son are you?" Ben shuddered--the church was the one place that gave him, an

illegitimate child, hope. Would he have to quit coming to church? Before Ben could answer the question the pastor smiled and said, "Oh, I know whose son you are.... You are God's son!"

Ben said that changed my life. Young Ben was Ben Hooper, who became a lawyer and was elected Governor of Tennessee (January 26, 1911) serving two terms--changed by the affirmation of the church--"You are God's son!" Let's not be saying: "Look what the world has come to". Instead let us proclaim "Look Who has come to the world!" Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church.