

Title: *The image of the Church as a "Building"* No. 201409

Venue: Tyrrell Baptist Church

Date: July 27, 2014

Scripture: Matthew 16v13-18; 18v15-20 other NT refs to "church"

Call to Worship: Psalm 122

All Scripture is from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated

## Call to Worship

Psalm 122

- 1 *I was glad when they said to me,  
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"*
- 2 *Our feet have been standing  
within your gates, O Jerusalem!*
- 3 *Jerusalem—built as a city  
that is bound firmly together,  
4 to which the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the Lord,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.*
- 5 *There thrones for judgment were set,  
the thrones of the house of David.*
- 6 *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!  
"May they be secure who love you!*
- 7 *Peace be within your walls  
and security within your towers!"*
- 8 *For my brothers and companions' sake  
I will say, "Peace be within you!"*
- 9 *For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,  
I will seek your good.*

(Matthew 16v13-18, NIV)

- 13 *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"*
- 14 *They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*
- 15 *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*
- 16 *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*
- 17 *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.*
- 18 *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

(Matthew 18v15-20, NIV)

- 15 *"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.*
- 16 *But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'*
- 17 *If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*
- 18 *"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be[e] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be[f] loosed in heaven.*
- 19 *"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."*

(Matthew 16v13-20, ESV)

- [13] *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say 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 replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered 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 tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [20] Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

## Series description

We have spent the last three Sundays on the top line of the grid looking at three themes starting with the letter "A."

<p><b>All</b> (of us)</p> <p><i>"You must be born again"</i> (John 3)</p>	<p><b>Altered</b> (lives by the Spirit)</p> <p><i>The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God</i> (Romans 8v16)</p>	<p><b>Aligned</b> (with Jesus Christ)</p> <p><i>And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."</i> (Luke 9v23)</p>
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Now, I want to make clear when I say "All," I am not suggesting that all will be saved. That is a teaching called "universalism" and is not supported by the Bible. When I say, "All," it means that all those who belong to Christ have been born again and that is a foundation for Christian life and ministry.

Today, we will continue working through this grid of themes on the foundation for life and ministry with the first block in a line of Bs.

Line A had the personal aspect of being born again, being altered and being aligned with Jesus. Line B is about the corporate aspect of life in Christian community and the three images of the church that we find in the New Testament.

<p><b>Building</b></p> <p><i>" . . . built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"</i> (Ephesians 2v19-22)</p> <p><i>"I will build my church . . ."</i> (Matthew 16v18)</p>	<p><b>Body</b></p> <p><i>. . . so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.</i> (Romans 12v5)</p>	<p><b>Bride</b></p> <p><i>for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready</i> (Revelation 19v6-8)</p>
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## Child's game



*Do you remember this rhyme?*

*Here is the church  
Here is the steeple  
Open the doors and  
Here are the people!*

## Letters to churches

In the New Testament times, letters were written to churches in different parts of the civilized world. Places like Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi—cities way over on the other side of the world in the area of the Mediterranean Sea. These letters have become for us, books of the New Testament.

Letters were sent to churches in those cities but when the writer would start off by saying, *“To the church in [whatever the place name was],”* he was not thinking of a building. The church didn't have its own dedicated building then. Using the expression “church” always meant the people.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for church is *ἐκκλησία*. That is where we get the expression “ecclesiastical” and that means “related to the church.” For example, a seminary professor might refer to “ecclesiastical history” meaning “church history.”

But the actual use of the word *ἐκκλησία* in the time of Jesus and the apostles referred to a group of citizens who were called together for the purpose of joint decision making. The *ἐκκλησία* church was always about gathered people not about physical structures.

So, if we are to do this finger model properly, we would say:

*Here is the building  
Here is the steeple  
Open the doors and  
Here are the people who are the church!*

I know it doesn't rhyme but it is what the early church focused on—the people who were followers of Jesus Christ.

## A movement not a building program

Our Lord Jesus said that He would build His church. For this and the next two Sundays, we'll look at the three images in the Bible that are used to describe the church—the images of a building, a body and a bride. Today we'll look at the description of the church as a building.

First, let's look into the intent of Jesus in the words that we had read.

We know that Jesus was raised by Mary and Joseph, the carpenter. I have no doubt that Jesus was skillful in carpentry because the first-born in a household often took up the father's trade. So when Jesus said that He would build His church, I think that He could have built a real, physical structure in which people could meet.

But was that what He was pointing to in His response to Peter?

In the three years of public ministry, our Jesus moved about like an itinerant teacher. He said of Himself, *"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* (Matthew 8v20)

Jesus called His twelve disciples unto Himself and then they embarked upon trips throughout the region. In fact, it was at the extreme northern border of Israel at Caesarea Philippi that Peter made his confession that *"You are the Christ, the son of the living God,"* and Jesus declared, *"on this rock I will build my church."* What Jesus did there was not to start a building program. Rather, He healed the daughter of a Gentile woman—quite something for a Jewish rabbi to do!

In the gospel account of Luke, we see the purpose and plan of Jesus' mission. He has been heavily involved with healing people and driving out demons and we read this:

*And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. (Luke 4v42-44)*

Jesus was intent upon going to places where the people could receive His ministry. He didn't set up a structure and expect the people to come to it. Rather, he sent out a message and sent out His messengers to search out people where they congregated.

## References to “church”

In the four gospel accounts—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—there are only two references to “church” We read those two passages this morning. You’ve seen that, in both cases, it was our Lord Jesus who spoke of the church and both references are to be found in the gospel of Matthew—a gospel written primarily for a Jewish audience. Jews were already meeting in synagogues and in the Temple in Jerusalem. Was Jesus proposing another place for meeting and for worship?

In the reference to “church” in Matthew 18v17, Jesus is talking about correcting a brother or sister who is in error and He said, *“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”* Obviously, He is not instructing us to tell it to a building. When He spoke of the church, He obviously meant the people.

Then in the other passage, Jesus commends Peter for his profession of faith.

Peter would be the first spokesperson for the gathered cluster of Jesus followers. In Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them—just as had Jesus promised—Peter proclaimed:

*Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—[23] this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (Acts 2v22-23)*

*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” [38] And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2v37-38)*

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2v41)*

Peter’s message should still be the message of the church today. They practiced believer’s baptism and souls—actual people—were added to the church.

Well, earlier I said that we would look into one of the images of the church that is given to us in Scripture. So, let’s do that now.

### Peter's words

Beyond the ministry of the apostle Peter in preaching to the early church and providing leadership, he wrote letters to believers who were dispersed throughout Asia Minor.

In his first letter, he encourages the persecuted and suffering Christians with these words:

*4 As you come to him [Jesus], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

*6 For it stands in Scripture:*

*"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, [again > Jesus], and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." (1 Peter 2v4-6)*

### Paul's words

The apostle Paul further reinforces this image of the church as a "building" of living stones when he writes in Ephesians:

*18 For through him [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2v18-22)*

Paul also wrote to the church in Corinth referring to them with this image of a building.

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3v16-17)*

## Application

What does this mean for us today?

We heard about the first three thousand souls that were added to the church in Jerusalem—those who believed Peter’s message and repented and were baptized. Have you believed the message about Jesus Christ and repented and been baptized?

The foundation of the church was properly set with Our Lord Jesus Christ as the cornerstone—the stone of ultimate reference. Then the first run of foundational bricks in the apostles and prophets and their teaching went out from the cornerstone. That foundation was of true lines and fit to bear all the following rows—row upon row, generation upon generation, people group upon people group.

Jesus Christ has been building His church with all of these “living stones”—row upon row going back to those first believers. We are a “run” of those living stones and we have been laid upon the run of previous generations of followers of Christ.

Question: Now, what happens if a run or row of bricks is out of alignment?

Answer: Each subsequent row cannot be properly aligned.

I know that we are not yet perfect and so our local churches on the landscape of this globe are not perfect.

Nonetheless, it is our sacred responsibility to stay true and aligned with our cornerstone—Jesus Christ—and with the teaching of His apostles and prophets.

I say that it is a sacred responsibility, not only for our good, but also for the good of adding more living stones to this temple that God is building—a sacred responsibility for different people around the world, in our own community and for any generations that follow us.

Never forget: *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

It is a high calling to become a follower of Jesus Christ! He has called you to Himself and He has called you to be a living stone in something glorious that He has been building.

Oh, one final thing—I guess that if Peter’s image of us as “living stones” is correct, in this modern age, we are all “rock stars” in God’s kingdom purposes.