

Building God's Church

#0414B

Study Given by W.D. Frazee

Now, our text this morning is in Matthew the 16th chapter. This week is the week of prayer in our churches throughout the world, and the messages which have been prepared by our world leaders have to do with the church, its foundation, its name and relevance and membership and mission and unity, its youth and its triumph.

I hope you all are getting the *Review and Herald*. I hope you all have read some of these messages already. I hope you'll read them all. And some of you will have the opportunity of hearing some of them read.

But I find that it helps us to get the combination of looking at something and listening to something.

"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy..." Revelation 1:3.

The combination of reaching the mind through the eye and the ear is probably the best. So, this morning we're going to work with our eyes and our ears both, and here in Matthew 16, we're going to notice something that Jesus said in the 18th verse.

First, let's think of the setting. Jesus is up in Caesarea Philippi according to the 13th verse. This is in the northern part of the land in which Jesus lived.

And as He was there, He asked the disciples, "Now, who do the people say I am?"

"Well," they said, "some of them say you're John the Baptist risen from the dead, some say you're Elijah come back. Some say you're Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

Then He said, "Now, who do *you* say I am?"

And Peter, speaking for all of them, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus, in the 17th verse, in effect says, "That's right, Peter. You're telling the truth. You didn't learn it from men; you learned it from God" [a paraphrase of Matthew 16:13-17].

Now, the 18th verse:

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will...” Matthew 16:18.

Do what?

“...I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” Matthew 16:18.

Interestingly enough, the word “Peter” means a stone. In the Greek language, it has the idea of a little stone, a rolling stone. But the word that Jesus uses here for “rock:”

“...Upon this *rock* I will build My church...” Matthew 16:18.

...has the idea of a great ledge of rock. I suppose we could think of it like these great cliffs on Lookout Mountain, those mighty aggregations of thousands of tons of rock.

Jesus says, “Peter, you have just expressed your conviction that I am the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This is true. Peter, you’re just a little stone, but on this Rock, you’ve just been talking about, I’m going to build My church” [a paraphrase of Matthew 16:13–18].

Is Peter a part of it? Yes, he’s a part of what’s built on the Rock. But the Scripture itself makes it very clear that the Rock is Christ.

Let’s turn over and listen to Peter himself on this, writing by the Holy Spirit as he put it down here in his epistle:

“If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones...” 1 Peter 2:3–5.

That is, living stones.

“...are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” 1 Peter 2:5.

To whom does he compare Jesus in the fourth verse? A living what? A living Stone. Men rejected Him, but God chose Him. And He says that coming to Him we, in the fifth verse:

“...are built up a spiritual house...” 1 Peter 2:5.

As what? What kind of stones? Lively or living stones. Christ is the foundation Rock, and you and I, Peter says, are built on that.

Sixth verse:

“Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief Corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded” 1 Peter 2:6.

Then, if we’re building on Jesus, we’re safe.

Now, let’s think of our text in Matthew again. Jesus says, “You’re Peter and upon this Rock, I will...” do what?

“...I will build My church...” Matthew 16:18.

We’re already read in Peter what it’s built out of. What’s it built out of? Living stones—people, in other words, people.

Now, a building like this is built of lumber or of bricks or blocks. Take these blocks that make up the wall of this building. I wonder how many we’ve got in this building, Brother Saylor. How many blocks? About 1500 blocks. Quite a building! It would be quite a church that had 1500 people in it, wouldn’t it? Yes.

But now, the difference between these blocks and the material that builds the church, these blocks we might say they’re dead, that is they’re lifeless. But the blocks with which God builds His church are what? They’re living or lively, as Peter says there. They have some life in them. I’m glad about that. Aren’t you, friends? Oh, I’m so glad!

But my point is this. The only way these blocks can make a building, a church, is to be put together. What holds these blocks together? Mortar, cement, some bonding agency; there has to be some plan. Just dumping the load here on the lot and then dumping some mortar on top of them, we wouldn’t have anything, would we? No, we’d just have confusion.

There is a special place for every one of these blocks, is that right? Well, this is much more so with people because each person is different. These blocks are pretty much alike. It wouldn’t make any particular difference whether the block that’s over there were on yonder side of the building or not. These blocks can take the place of one another quite easily.

But that isn’t true with you and me. Anybody else like you, Joe?

[Brother Joe] No.

[Elder Frazee] Well, that means then, the Lord can’t get along without you. Is that right? A special place for you.

What about you, Bud? Is there anybody else like you? No. There’s a special place for you. Is that right? That’s right.

Sister Crane, can anybody else take your place? I don’t think so, either. I think you’re very important in filling the particular place God has for you. All right.

Now, in the reading prepared for today, the first sentence says:

“Christ has a church in every age” *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, Volume 6, page 1079.

This is taken from the Spirit of Prophecy comments in the sixth volume of the commentary, page 1079.

“Christ has a church in every age” *Ibid.*

Then, did the church start before the cross? You remember when Stephen was talking to the Sanhedrin, talking to those priests and rabbis, he spoke about the church in the wilderness. Yes, when God had His people there in the desert of Sinai, He had a what? A church.

The word “church” is an interesting word. It means “the called out,” “the called out,” “ecclesia,” “called out.” You see, when God’s people were down there in Egypt, God sent Moses down there to do what? Call them out.

Down here in these last days, He sent the preachers of the third angel’s message to call His people out of what? Out of Babylon. Way back there, long before Moses, you remember that God sent a message to Abraham and called him out of Ur of the Chaldees. That’s that same Babylonian country.

All down through the ages, God’s been calling His people *out of* the world, out of sin, out of lawbreaking, *into* a fellowship. And that fellowship is the church.

“...Upon this Rock I will build my church” Matthew 16:18.

Now, I want to ask you something. Was there a time when this building was only half-built? Oh, yes. And then, there was a time when the blocks were clear up as high as they were ever going to get, but the roof still had to be put on.

Do you suppose that the Lord is entirely through building His church? Well, I’ll tell you, folks, if He were all through building His church, we could stop doing any missionary work. Is that right? But the truth of the matter is God sees people out here all around us that to Him are precious stones, precious stones. And He wants them to be built into His church.

Do they have a choice to make about the matter? Do they? Oh, yes. Did you have a choice to make? Do we not only have a choice to make in *coming* into the church, do we have a choice to make in *remaining* with it? Do we? Or is it once in, always in? No. As Paul says:

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we...”
Hebrews 3:14.

Continue.

“...if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” Hebrews 3:14.

Yes, God had a church back there in the beginning in the Garden of Eden, and He’s had a church all the way down through the Old Testament times. Then, in the New Testament times, Jesus was establishing the New Testament church.

Now, I notice something very interesting in our reading. Some of you are acquainted with it, but not all of you, perhaps. So, I’m going to read it. Listen carefully.

“The Jewish tabernacle was a type of the Christian church” *S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, Volume 7, page 931; *Signs of the Times*, February 14, 1900.

“The Jewish tabernacle was a type of the Christian church” *Ibid.*

Now, that particular statement is taken from the *Signs of the Times*, but you’ll find that in the commentary, too. My point is this. When Moses made the sanctuary back there, he was not only giving us an object lesson here on earth of the tabernacle in Heaven. God was revealing in that structure a type of what? The Christian church.

And so, the New Testament speaks of the church as the temple of God. Well, doesn’t God have a temple up in Heaven? Yes. But can’t He have one on earth, too? Yes. And what is God’s temple on earth? The church. And then, beyond that every individual Christian is a temple of the Holy Ghost, isn’t he? Isn’t that what Paul said?

These lessons we’re having in the Sabbath school on health, we’re learning that our bodies are what? The temple of God.

Now, a temple or a sanctuary is a dwelling place for God. Does God dwell in the temple in Heaven? Does He dwell in my heart? If I let Him, He does. And oh, besides that temple in Heaven and beside this little individual temple, He has a temple, a sanctuary, here in this world which is what? The church.

“...Upon this Rock I will build My church” Matthew 16:18.

It’s a wonderful thing, dear friends, to be a part of an organization that is the temple of God on earth, God’s dwelling place.

“Well,” somebody says, “I see a lot of hypocrites in the church.”

Well, I’ll just tell you this, folks, the building isn’t finished yet. Did you ever go around a great big building halfway through construction? There might be a lot of things around there that, at the moment, could confuse you. But the builder has in his eye the *completion* of the building. And he’s not worried because there’s some debris lying over here or something over there.

Then, I'll tell you another thing about a building. Now, I remember when we were putting up this building, you had some scaffolding here, didn't you, Brother Saylor? Do you suppose they needed some scaffolding to get these blocks up there?

Where is that scaffolding now? It's gone, it's gone.

My dear friends—and don't miss this—God has two types of members in the church. You can decide which one you're going to be, for we have choice. Boards and blocks don't have choice, but you and I have choice.

In the church are two types of members, people that are going to be incorporated into the building forever and those that are just temporary, like the scaffolding. But does a builder use even scaffolding? And listen, God is using people in the church, even those that may not go all the way. Don't forget that. He has some use for them.

If no other use, friends, they may be the means of getting the blocks that are going to remain up to the elevation that the builder has planned. Do you see what I mean? God is using members in the church that may trouble you, that might irritate you, they might confuse you. God's using them to help you get placed where He wants you. Let Him do it. What do you say? Will you? Will you?

Or will you say, "Oh my, I think I'll get out of here"?

Well, I'll tell you, friends, if one of these blocks should decide to leave, I suppose one block leaving wouldn't topple the whole building, but what could the block do? What could the block do out by itself? And Jesus is seeking to teach you and me that no matter how much He lives in us personally, there are some things that He wants to accomplish by having a group.

May I tell you what it is? I'd just like to talk to you a little about this, this morning for a few minutes—what God is trying to do with the church. He's trying to demonstrate what love can do in getting people to work together that don't have to. That's what He's trying to do.

Now, there are some places in this world where people work together pretty fast because there's a man with a gun that stands back of them. I think I'd move too if a man with a gun was behind me. Wouldn't you? That is, if it was something that it wasn't wicked to do. And I can think of all kinds of work that I'd get at very fast if a man with a gun was at my back. Wouldn't you? But I'm so glad I'm not in that situation.

Then, there's another way that gets a lot of people to work and work fast. That isn't a gun at their back. It's a paycheck in front of them. That's right. If you pay people enough money, some of them will move pretty fast. And there's nothing wrong with that.

But God is in the business of demonstrating that there's something that will push people more than a gun and pull them more than a paycheck. What's that? Love. This is the demonstration that He's making in the church. This is the demonstration that He's making in the church.

And as soon as He gets His people to that point where they're cemented and joined together by love, He's going to take the whole tabernacle up to Heaven. The whole temple is going to be moved from this world.

"Well," you say, "how in the world could He move a building?"

Well, listen, at the end of the thousand years, isn't He going to take the New Jerusalem down from Heaven to this world? Well, if He can move *that* from Heaven to this earth, can't He move this temple from the earth *to* Heaven? That's what He's planned. What a space trip that will be!

The whole church from Adam and Eve and Abel on down through Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Moses and Samuel and David and Daniel and Peter and Paul and Mary and Martha, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Joseph Bates, James and Ellen White, Stephen Haskell.

And Sister Tatum, you and I are going to get in on that, too, aren't we? Won't that be a wonderful trip? And friends, we're going not as a mob, not just as a crowd of people that happen to get together. We're going as a body fitly joined together. We're going as a building that the great Architect has planned.

Now listen, suppose this building were made of rocks instead of these blocks. Suppose we'd gone up here to the mountain and picked out rocks of various kinds and brought them down here together, and we're trying to put them together in a building that will hold up and look beautiful. Do you think that any of those rocks might have to have their shape changed a little?

Now, I want to ask you. If Jesus is in the business of fitting you as a stone into His church, would you be willing to be chipped on a little? Chiseled on a little? Shaped up a bit? Would you?

I'll tell you a little secret. No matter how rough and irregular you were as a stone, if the builder would change every other rock enough, you wouldn't have to change at all. Is that right?

Think of it. Think of a strange, irregular-looking rock, and the builder looks at it and thinks, "Well, if I'll just take off this corner over here, or this protuberance over here, that'll fit there."

But suppose the rock says, "Why, no. Leave me like I am. Change all the other rocks around so they'll fit with me."

Could it be done? Well, it could, but it might be a different-looking building than the builder planned.

And I want to tell you something, friends. There's not going to be a single stone in that building, but what has had the chisel and hammer on it. That's right. And besides, that has to be polished. We're to fit together so close that the Devil won't be able to get a tiny wedge in.

I marvel at the strategy of God as He tries to get us chiseled and polished so we'll fit together.

Now, you know what I'd like to do? I'd like to pick out all the people that fit easily with me, and I'd like to go somewhere, and we'd just fit together by ourselves. Or did you ever get a thought like that?

Do you think, "Why, there's Mary and Alice and Jenny, if I could just be with them, we'd just be like this"?

Or "There's Harry and George and John, my, what a team we could make."

Why? Well, we just fit together. I wonder why Jesus ever lets us get around people that don't fit with us quite like that. He has His reasons, friends. I think we had better let Him do the building. What do you say?

What did our text say?

"...Upon this Rock I will build My church" Matthew 16:18.

He's building it, friends. He's pulling us out of the quarry of this world, chiseling us, polishing us and fitting us together.

Remember this, friends, it cost Him everything to make it possible to do this. It cost Him Calvary, didn't it? What do you think it's going to cost us? Everything. That's right. Is it worth it? Thank God. All right.

Now, I'd like to hear your witness this morning. Are you thankful for Jesus and His love for you? Are you thankful for His church? And is it settled in your heart this morning that you're going to let Him chisel on you, polish you and get you to the place where you can fit into His wonderful plan?

[Testimony service followed]

[Elder Frazee made the following comments during the testimony meeting.]

God bless you, sister. Well, I already know of some things you've done to help the church, sister, I already know of some. And Jesus has written them down a lot more.

Do you know one of the things you're going to be enjoying a thousand years from now? You're going to enjoy looking over the records that Jesus kept of all the nice things that He wanted to remember about you and what you've done to make Him happy in His church.

So you can be happy right now, right now. Jesus appreciates your desire to live for Him and help Him.

And I'll tell you another thing. In the days to come, and I mean right away you're going to have some more opportunities to help Him in His church. You just keep asking Him day by day, and He'll open up something that I don't know, and you don't know this morning. I know it.

Anybody else?

[Testimony meeting continued.]

Thank you, brother. That's a beautiful illustration.

All right. Now, some of you folks that didn't speak this morning, would you like to give a silent testimony? I'm talking to the folks that haven't spoken but would like to give their testimony that they love Jesus this morning and are thankful to have a part with Him. You just stand if you'd like to. That's right.

Well, let's all stand together, shall we?

“Praise God from whom all blessing flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.”
Seventh-Day Adventist Hymnal, #694.

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