

The Church and You

BELIEVERS' BOOT CAMP

Matthew 16:18-19
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This is the sixth message in a series entitled *Believers' Boot Camp*. We've been pondering seven truths essential for walking with Jesus Christ, truths that are essential for fulfilling your purpose in life, truths that are essential for realizing the potential God has given you. We've considered five truths already.

First, we looked at *The Creation and You*, answering the pivotal question, "Who am I?" You are not an athlete, a farmer, a grocer, an addict or a diabetic. You may be gifted, involved or struggling with things; but that is not who you are. You are a child of almighty God. You may have gifts, chores, struggles and afflictions; but they do not define you. You may be estranged from God, but that just means you are a lost child. You are vulnerable and in danger, but you are still his child... and you are still loved.

Second, we considered *The Fall and You*, which speaks of the presence and power of evil. I've found no adequate explanation of evil outside the Bible. I've never heard an atheist adequately explain two things: the witness of Jesus and the presence of evil. Evil is so pervasive that every human being needs a savior and every relationship with God starts in repentance.

Third, we discussed *The Savior and You*. We found that Jesus doesn't just pardon us from guilt. He also removes the sin that causes the guilt. He takes the sins of the world away. That means he changes hearts and lives. If you walk with Jesus, expect change. Expect a lot of it to happen right here in this heart! Your whole attitude as well as actions will change.

Fourth, we examined *The Spirit and You*. When Jesus ascended, he did not just leave believers a Bible. He poured out on his followers the same spirit he had. They were born again with the same potential as he had. He even promised that anyone who has faith in him would do more than he did (John 14:12). You and I are to live born by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit and counseled by the Spirit. Then we are truly witnesses and messengers of the good news.

Fifth, we focused on *The Father and You*. The point of all evil is to separate you from your father in heaven and his amazing love for you. Jesus' mission was to reconcile you with your father and restore you in that love. More than anything else, Jesus modeled an intimacy with his father; and that is what we also are to enjoy.

Today, let's think about *The Church and You*. When I say *church*, I'm not talking about an impersonal institution. I'm not talking about a place or a building. I'm not talking of bureaucracies, organizations or denominations. I'm not talking about something that is mystical and universal. That is not at all what Jesus had in mind when he spoke to Peter in Matthew 16. Jesus said:

I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.
(Matthew 16:18, NIV)

In this single statement of Jesus' are three powerful truths that will reshape your thinking and behavior forever. Truth #1 is unveiled in the words *you are Peter*.

The disciple and apostle we call Peter was named Simon at birth. His parents knew him as Simon. His siblings knew him as Simon. His friends knew him as Simon and his wife knew him as Simon. However, Jesus called him Peter. Why? Why would you give somebody a new name?

One time I was very frustrated with an individual. I knew that if I kept talking about the repetitive behaviors and problems that were bugging me, the individual could begin thinking that

those things defined him. I did not want to reinforce that notion. That happened to me. I had bought into lies that had degraded and handicapped me. I wasn't going to do that to another. I decided to address the person as if he had already accomplished the goal we had discussed. For awhile the individual thought I was teasing. He even became annoyed. However, sooner than I imagined, he consistently exhibited the behavior I had hoped for. The new name led to new attitudes, actions and outcomes. It led to a new destiny.

Jesus gave Simon the name Peter, not because he was already a rock. No instead, he would become a rock. In that name was the attitude and actions that would birth a new destiny. Simon would constantly evaluate himself by that name, and soon it would shape him.

Truth #1 is that when you join Jesus' church, which means you put your faith in Jesus, **you receive a new name and destiny.** You receive a whole new identity. You are born of the Spirit. You are a new creation. You no longer are an unbeliever. You are a believer with a whole different set of expectations. You are no longer a sinner. You are a saint. That is your identity and calling. You are holy and set apart. Don't betray it with foul language and bad attitudes. You are called to be pure. You also are a priest and priesthood with other believers. You are an ambassador of Christ with ambassadorial responsibilities. Your behavior, all of it matters.

So have you joined Jesus' Church? Have you told Jesus that you are truly sorry for your sins and you don't want to live in them any more? Have you asked him to both forgive and change you? Have you welcomed his Spirit to come into your life and lead you? If not, do it now. Every intimate and lasting relationship requires a covenant of some sort. However, it is not the covenant, but what results from it that is so thrilling. I am not unashamed of the gospel because it is so logical, easily understood or well accepted. No, it is hated and ridiculed. I am

not ashamed of the gospel because of what happens when people believe. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). It brings such profound change and divine blessing when believed. That is why the Apostle Paul willingly sacrificed and suffered so greatly. I am not ashamed of it. As you believe it, you receive a new name and destiny.

Truth #2 is seen in our relationships when we believe Jesus. Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church.” Jesus told Peter that he, Jesus, would build his church on the new identity he gave Peter. That new identity would be foundational.

The church that Jesus and his apostles led never owned a piece of property or laid a single brick. Jesus was constructing people, not buildings. His church was all about people and all about relationships. Believers grew from the new identity and from the relationships formed around that new identity. St. Paul said that we are like parts of a body that belong to one another. We depend upon one another to grow. That is because the Spirit works through you to bless others. He gives you gifts that strengthen others.

This just doesn't happen naturally. Sins lead individuals and entire groups of people astray. Parents often worry about the friendships their children form with unsavory characters, but they also suffer from unhealthy friendships themselves. Listen to the words of Psalm 1:

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with scoffers. (Psalm 1:1, NLT)

Everyday some of your friendships build you up and some tear you down. Because we all sin from time to time, we all suffer from error and bad attitudes; and this destruction is reinforced by some of our friendships. However, it is on the rock, on this new identity that Jesus builds his church. In other words, every one of us needs friendships that are faith-based, faith-focused and faith-developing. **Truth #2 is that Jesus builds you through on-going friendships that are based on the new identity he gives you.**

Jesus will build your life as you develop friendships that are based and focused on your new identity. Friendships can begin, but will not develop through mass activities. As you worship here today, you can begin some friendships that are faith-based, but you won't develop them in this setting. You'll need to get together beyond these worship services on a more personal basis. That is how Jesus will build you.

Then why gather together in crowds to worship?

Truth #3 is revealed as we look at what Jesus calls us. He calls us *my church*. The Greek term is *ekklesia*. It is a compound word that joins the word *ek*, meaning *out of* or *from*, with the word *klisia*, which means *called*. The church is the people who are *called out of* or *called from*. That certainly is appropriate for a people who are given a new birth and a new identity. However, when Jesus spoke these words to Peter and when Matthew translated Jesus' Aramaic into Greek, the term *ekklesia* carried little of that understanding. Instead, Greek speakers used it to describe an assembly, a people who gathered together.

Gathered together we become the temple where God acts on behalf of the world. Gathered together we are the body of Christ where the Spirit directs and Christ continues his work. "Wherever two or three assemble in my name," Jesus promised, "there am I in their midst."

How can you be the church if you don't assemble with others? You can't. You can't grow, serve or obey because you can't be his assembly isolated and alone. The word means to gather, to team, to assemble. You can't sit at home and call yourself an assembly. **Truth #3 is that Christ assembles you with other believers.** You resist him, or you'll gather. Church is not an option. He assembles you if you walk with him.

Don't resist the Spirit of Jesus. Assemble together for his honor and your growth.