

Matt. 16:18 I will build my Church – The use of Means

Jesus says, ***“I will build my church.”*** Two weeks ago, we considered this amazing statement, particularly that Jesus takes responsibility for doing what ONLY God can do. And we know He can say this because He is God in the flesh. And the OT spoke of his day. Zech. 6:12 says, ***“Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord; Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”*** This prophecy looked forward to Jesus’ day as the one who would build the “temple” of the Lord.

Now, is this prophecy referring to the Temple in Jerusalem, or is it referring to a time still in the future. YES! In their day, the physical temple in Jerusalem would be rebuilt. But, ALL the temple building in the OT was a picture of the true temple of God’s people, particularly the Church in the New Covenant. In Eph. 2:19-22, we read: ***“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*** As the Church, we are the temple of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles.

With this in mind, I want to speak today about the means Jesus uses to build his church. Consider a contractor who is hired to build a building. I think of the large building in center field at the ballpark in Kannapolis. They’ve been working on it a while now. But think about all that goes into the building, and all the means needed to build (framers, masons, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, etc.). In the same way Jesus uses means. And, as we’ve seen (v. 17) these means are not ***“flesh and blood.”*** They are not the things of this earth. So, what are they? They are the Word and the Spirit.

1. Jesus builds his church by the Word of God. Brothers and sisters, we have NOTHING . . . we know NOTHING but for the Word of God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. How did He do this? He spoke . . . ***“Let there be light. Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters . . . Let the earth sprout vegetation . . . Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens,”*** etc. And later, after creating the man and the woman, God SPOKE to them, telling them about himself, and telling them what they needed to know in order to know how to live, how to relate to him, and how to obey him. He revealed himself through his word. Think back to Peter’s confession. Jesus says, ***“Flesh and blood”*** did not reveal the truth about Me, Peter, God did this. We’ll come back to the spiritual part of this revelation in the second point. But, God revealed Jesus to Peter through the Word of God.

Peter didn’t just wake up one day without any knowledge of Jesus and say, ***“You are the Son of God.”*** After Jesus called him from the fishing lake, he spends day after day with Jesus. And this entire time, what does Jesus do? He speaks with him (and the disciples), teaching . . . explaining .

. . . revealing God's will . . . And as the very "WORD" of God (John 1:1), ALL his words were the powerful words of God. And, all of this time, building Peter into the great leader of the Apostles.

The primary means Jesus uses to build His church is the eternal Word of God. Jesus told his disciples to "**go and make disciples . . . teaching them everything I have commanded you**" and "**go and preach the good news** (the gospel) of the kingdom of God. As the Apostle Paul explains to us in Rom. 10:14, "**How shall they hear unless there is a preacher.**" We come to faith through the word of God. Rom. 10:17 says, "**Faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of God.**" Also, we grow (we are sanctified) as we study and learn the Word of God.

Look with me to 1 Peter 1:22 ff. to see this truth. Remember, these are the words of Peter the Apostle, as he looks back at his own life and time spent with Jesus and thinks about the church. "**Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for All flesh is like grass and its glory like the flower of grass, the grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you.**" Now move down to 2:4: "**As you come to him, 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.**" Brothers and sisters, Jesus is building his church, and this is through the Word of God.

2. Jesus is building his church by the Spirit. So far, we have only spoken about the power of the Word of God in the building of his church. But let me ask, "*What gives the Word power?*" "*What makes the Word of God go out into the world to accomplish the purposes of God?*" It is the Spirit. Now, we know that in the essence of God . . . in the being of God . . . we cannot separate God from his Spirit. Back in Gen. 1 we read that God created the heavens and the earth (v. 1). But, in v. 2 we read: "**The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**" Though mysterious, this means that as God spoke creation into existence, it was the Spirit that powerfully created. We say that GOD created the heavens and the earth. At the same, this powerful creation was carried out by the SPIRIT . . . which cannot be separated from God. And since this true, we can say that the Spirit is the means God uses to powerfully bring about his will, whether that be creation, or the saving of sinners, or the keeping of those He has saved.

Think back to the OT. What gave the prophets authority and power to speak the Word. To Isaiah God says, "**My Spirit is upon you and my words are in your mouth**" (Is. 59:21). With David, what gave him authority and power as king? It was the Spirit of God, even as he prays in Ps. 51 that God not "**take the Holy Spirit from me.**" In the OT, over and over we see that the Holy Spirit is the powerful means to work in saving his people and keeping them, as well as God's works even among the nations.

When we come to the NT, nothing has changed in principle. (Now, there is a difference from the OT to the NT as to the fullness of the Holy Spirit. In the OT, the Spirit was given to particular folks as prophets, as kings, as priests, etc. And, the Spirit was given to various men and women for certain tasks. In the NT, ALL of God's people are given the Holy Spirit.) But, in principle, as far as our truth about the means God uses to build his church, it is still and will always be the power of the Holy Spirit, until the Lord Jesus returns. This does not and will not change!

Zech. 4:6 sums up the work of the Spirit of God **“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”** With this in mind, I want to mention one major truth and then conclude with some very important applications for us.

TRUTH: The Word and the Spirit go together . . . always! If God does not make his word powerful, there is no church, there is no people of God . . . in the OT or in the NT. The means God uses are always the Word and the Spirit. **“Faith comes by hearing and by hearing the Word of Christ”** (Rom. 10:17). And, it wasn't just “hearing.” Many people throughout history have heard the Word. And most . . . so far . . . have not believed. Why? There are many reasons from various perspectives. But, at the core, it is because the Word did not come to them in power. This is why Jesus says to Nicodemus, **“The Spirit blows where He wills . . .”** And, **“you must be born again.”** This is why Paul says to the Thessalonians: **“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction”** (1 Thess. 1:4-5).

Application: It is the power of God through the Word and the Spirit that you are being saved . . . and will be saved! Think of your sins, brother and sister. (I think, *“How am I still here.” Why am I still a Christian? Why am I still a pastor? Why am I still a Christian parent or grandparent?*) It is because **“salvation belongs to the Lord.”**) I can only give glory to God for his powerful working in me. In fact, Paul prays for the Ephesians (as I pray for you), **“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places . . .”**

Application: Since the Spirit and the Word go together as the means God uses to build his church, we must preach and teach and deliver the Word of God in this world. I think of Spurgeon's famous illustration as he compares the Word to a Lion. He says, *“you don't have to defend a lion, just let it out of the cage and see what it does.”* I think of Jonah and Nineveh. Jonah knew this principle. He knew that if he preached the Word, Nineveh would be saved. For us, we must preach the Word! I must be faithful as a preacher to “preach the Word” in and out of season. Parents, Grandparents, friends, co-workers, etc. We must let the lion out of the cage.

Application: The Word and the Spirit are the primary means God uses to build his church. This means we must trust the Word going forth in the Spirit. So what does this look like in your life?

When Jesus was tempted in the dessert by Satan, what does he say, “**Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God**” (Matt. 4:4). This means that the word is powerful to help you in EVERY need! Example: This week, I as I considered my sins (especially the recurring sins of omission) and I wonder, “*Can God forgive me again?*” And then I remember the Word in 1 John 1:9 which says, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” Or, if you feel the weight of your temptation or your testing at this time and you are on the brink of saying, “this is too much” go to Heb. 4:15 which says, “**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**” Parents, if you are concerned about your wayward child, pray and ask God to move, and when he does not in your timing, trust his great promise in the Word: “**Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it**” (Prov. 22:6). When your marriage is going badly, go to Eph. 5 and consider it is a picture of the Gospel and believe and truth the truths and commands found there. If you are anxious, consider 1 Cor. 10:13: “**No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**” (Proverbs 22:6). If you want revival in your heart and in your mind, go to the powerful Word of God. On these truths of the Word, through the power of the Spirit, you are being built up, into the most beautiful of all buildings. But, ONLY by the Word and by the Spirit!

Application: The Building of the church is a spiritual endeavor. Jesus says to Peter, “***Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you . . .***” Yes, we are physical beings, and this world is physical. But, it is the power of the Word and Spirit that are the effective means. This means the building of the church is a spiritual endeavor. The less “spiritual” we make the church, the more we will be concerned with the things of this world. The less “spiritual” we make the church, the more we will less content we will become. The less “spiritual” we make the church, the more we will grumble and complain in both our actions and in our hearts. The less “spiritual” we make the church, the more complicated we will become. The less “spiritual” we make the church and think it must be run like the businesses of this world, the more we will fail in our task to make “true” disciples. Zech. 4:6 says: “**Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts . . .**”