

**"I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH:
FINDING COMFORT IN CHRIST'S
PROMISE TO BUILD HIS CHURCH"**

Matthew 16:13-20

I'd like you to get a picture in your minds, and since we are gearing up for the Super Bowl where my Pittsburgh Steelers are taking on the Arizona Cardinals please try to make the leap from the National Football League to the church. Are you serious? Someone might ask. You bet. Are you ready? Here goes- The church worship service is the huddle. We run the plays during the week. The game is not won in the huddle. Did you catch that? The game is not won in the huddle. Need I say more? And so the question for us is this- how are we doing with our play calling during the week? Are we making ground, are we getting first downs, why, are we scoring any points- a touchdown, a field goal, and maybe even a safety?

In keeping with the sports motif, this morning's sermon is sort of like a pep rally as we look forward to beginning our *70 Days of Vision Campaign* this coming week by way of the numerous small groups that will be studying the book entitled: ***Discover Your Windows***. And so today we are going to get all geared up, all psyched up, in sports terms, for a wonderful adventure we are starting. This is all the result of the church consultant who has been working with us since this summer, Dr. Kent Hunter of Church Doctor Ministries who, as a part of his consultation, recommended that we do this very study, and so we are. As a matter of fact, the leadership is very excited as he shared 151 recommendations with us, many we are preparing to address, as the first drafts of Action Plans have been written and the final drafts will be sent to Dr. Kent Hunter on January 30th. His recommendation to participate in the *70 Days of Vision* is one that the leadership of our church fully endorses and encourages everyone to get on board.

Anyway, for the next 10 weeks many of us, and let me just add I hope you are one of the many and if you aren't, there is still time to sign up today. For we will be studying a chapter during the week and then, the upcoming Sunday, I will preach on what we have just studied as a way of reinforcing what we have already discussed and focused on during the week. So let's get started and set the tone this morning for our *70 Days of Vision* as we *Discover our Windows*.

General Electric once ran the following advertisement that read:

"Sometimes you have to see things differently in order to do things differently." How we view things drives what we do and our worldview drives our behavior. And what we want to do the next 10 weeks is speak to a Biblical world view.

I want you to stop and write down on your bulletin or, using the sermon outline, write the first word that comes to your mind when you think about our church.

In other words, **when I think of First Presbyterian Church of Akron the first word that comes to mind is _____**. And let me just say that it is my goal this morning to, as college basketball commentator Dick Vital says in essence, "Get you excited about the church that Jesus built, Babaaay." For I hope this sermon will bless and strengthen you as I share words of encouragement and comfort. The bottom line of this message today is found in the five words that Jesus shared with His disciples in our passage today from Matthew 16 when He said, "I will build my church." And no matter what word you wrote down to describe your feeling about this church, rest assured and be comforted in the promise that Jesus made for He said, "I, Jesus, will build my church."

But there is something here we need to catch and that is that **the church is NOT an ethnic body, or a political entity, nor a moralistic association; the church is not a building, or a place, or an organization but a fellowship of the redeemed.**

And the lifestyle of the church is associated with Jesus' identity as

the "crucified Christ." And the "crucified Christ" is a stumbling block to

the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, as the Apostle Paul wrote in I

Corinthians 1:23. **And the vitality of the church is in the fellowship of**

the risen Christ.

I want to share 3 thoughts with you as it relates to the Christ building His church. First, **the foundation of the Church of Christ is unshakable.** Here in our passage is the foundational confession of the church and that is that Jesus is the Messiah or the Christ, the Son of the living God. Not that Jesus was a great and noble teacher, even though He was. Not that Jesus was a historic figure, which He was. But rather that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord of the church. That Jesus is Christ the King. That Jesus is Christ the great intercessor and He is the only way to the Father. And so Jesus is the essence of the proclamation of the church and the church's very mission and the reason it exists is to proclaim this crucial point: **Jesus Christ is the**

only begotten Son of God and the only hope for this world in which we live. And yet this truth, which has been proclaimed down throughout the centuries has been and is under attack in this post-Christian culture in which we live.

Friends, the reality is that it is politically incorrect to believe in one God who is exclusively revealed in Jesus Christ. I mean 40% of Americans believe all religions teach equally valid truth. 50% of Americans believe all people are ultimately praying to the same god. If you pray publically and call on a higher power, people will bow in reverence. But if you pray, as I have at a school function a few years ago, and pray in Jesus name, you might not be invited back to pray, as was my case, that is until this past year when I made it very clear in whose name I pray, and the person in charge said that that was my prerogative and if anyone had a complaint to see them. So we must not be confused. The church that Jesus said He would build is built on the understanding and confession of His deity, His

lordship, His sovereignty. Otherwise, the church will not be built at all. This must be our message and we must not allow it to get watered down in our churches, even if our culture wants to silence this truth.

Even if Jesus is not welcome in certain places in our culture He is needed in our culture. And if the church somehow begins to back down from this message, then who will step up and declare it? We are the only redeeming agency anywhere in the world. The church exists to exalt Jesus Christ and Him alone to a world desperately in need of Him. For He is the only hope for this world and the world to come.

Second, **the construction of the church is certain**. In our passage today, we find Peter making an unbelievable confession as to the identity of Jesus and it was not due to Peter's amazing insight or his I. Q. Jesus knew that Peter had not learned this revelation that he shared from any other person for Jesus says in verse 17, "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." And then Jesus says, "but my Father in heaven" has given you this

God-given revelation. And then Jesus goes on to say in His next statement of the certainty of the construction of His church when He says, "I will build my church." Folks, whatever we think about the church today, and even though only 18% of Americans are in church on any given Sunday, Christ is building His church and He will do it whether we do our part or not; whether the church seeks to reach out to a hurting world or not. Even though there are churches going out of business and closing their doors each day, and that is a sad thing, Christ will still build His church, even He builds it somewhere else where people are open and willing to come and learn. Jesus is committed to building His church and yet we know, there are times it seems like such a daunting task for those who roll up their sleeves and get involved in the church. But we need to remember who is doing the building and in whose power we participate in. Building the church is Christ's plan and He will use us all to accomplish this and He will use the *70 Days of*

Vision, and He will use anyone who is willing and able to grow and learn and seek to follow Him.

Friends, let me ask you- when you drive by City Hospital and you see all the expansion and building going on do you think those projects are costly? You bet. Building is costly, it eats up capital, it takes vision and hard work, doesn't it? The same is true for building His church. It takes commitment, it requires human capital, and it can wear down our spiritual muscles. And if God is not giving us what we need, if God is not renewing us, there is not a one of us who could do it.

Have you ever driven by an unfinished construction project that has been let go and the labor has stopped? Do you know that to destroy something you don't need a wrecking ball or a sledgehammer or even a match? To destroy all we have to do is nothing. Nothing! Don't lift a finger, don't get involved and don't even help. But God is not stopping, no matter what we do or say. If God says He will build His church, how can we sit back

or even walk off the job? It is as if Jesus is standing on the highest point in Akron with His hardhat on and His blueprints in His hands and He is looking over our city and surrounding cities, our schools and where we live and work and He is weeping for each location. Why? Because Jesus has a heart and desire for His people to join Him in His building. Will we listen to and heed His call? Are we going to be a part of His building?

And third and finally, **the character of the church is invincible.**

Jesus said to Peter in verse 18, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [or hell] will not prevail against it." Mr. Webster defines INVINCIBLE as "that [which] cannot be overcome; unconquerable". Friends, all the powers of the world combined and all the powers of Hell cannot conquer the church. So no matter what happens to the church or churches- churches that close their doors, churches that split because of theological differences, even churches that stand for and teach false doctrine and even churches that abuse people and

systems will not be overcome or conquered. The church of Jesus Christ will be victorious.

Friends, the devil, the Evil one has always had it "in" for the church and believers. He is the enemy that would like nothing more than to see the demise of the church. And he will try to destroy the church and God's people. The devil wants to wear us down; see us in turmoil; look and see a dead church. He will do whatever it takes. But the church has been and is tenacious. There will always be a remnant, there is always within God's people a divine, tenacious streak that causes us to rear back and say, "Devil, you cannot have the church of Christ. You will not ultimately win. The reality is that even over in war-torn Rwanda, a church is rising up. Tutsi and Hutu people are ministering together, arm-in-arm. Seventy years of atheism could not eliminate God for the minds of the Russian people and the same is true in China today as the church is growing by leaps and bounds

underground, in hiding. Christ will build His church and the gates of Hell will not win.

We read in I Peter 4:1-2 in Eugene Peterson's version called *The Message* that Jesus is the ultimate builder and our only hope for the future. And Jesus is the hope for a transformed culture and yet it begins with me, it begins with you. Peterson says it this way in I Peter 4, "Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like Him." That's it- **Learn to think like Him.** And that is the purpose of the *70 Days of Vision* that starts this coming week and the 9 weeks that follow- learning to think like Him. And that is our hope, that the Jesus that we all worship today will renew First Presbyterian Church of Akron and do it one person at a time. As we meet in small groups and as we worship the next 9 Sundays, we will focus on thinking like Jesus and as we do Jesus will free us and build His church, one person at a time. Pray this prayer over the next 70 days:

Lord, build your church, beginning with me. Amen.

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Introduction: I'd like you to get a picture in your minds...
The game is not won in the huddle

70 Days of Vision Campaign- Discover Your Windows

General Electric's advertisement- "Sometimes you have to see things differently in order to do things differently"

When I think of First Presbyterian Church of Akron the first word that comes to mind is _____

Matthew 16- Jesus said, "I will build my church"

The church is not an ethnic body, or a political entity, nor a moralistic association; the church is not a building, or a place, or an organization but a _____ of the redeemed

The lifestyle of the church is associated with Jesus' identity as the "_____ Christ"

The vitality of the church is in the fellowship of the _____ Christ

Three thoughts to Christ building His church:

First, **the foundation of the church of Christ is _____**

The church's mission and reason it exists is to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God and the only hope for this world

Second, **the construction of the church is _____**

Are we going to be a part of His building?

Third, **the character of the church is _____**

"And the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"

Conclusion: I Peter 4- "Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like Him." A prayer over the next 70 days: "Lord, build your church, beginning with me. Amen."