

## **Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### **Your Responsibility to the Church, Part 5**

Scripture: Matthew 16:15-28

Code: 81-12

It's not easy to look out over the landscape, the church landscape in our time, and figure out what a church is. All kinds of places, all kinds of organizations use the name. It's unclear if you just scan all of that exactly what an ordinary, a normal, a standard issue a biblical church should be. So I thought the best thing to do is go back to the very beginning, back to the start, and that takes us to Matthew 16 where our Lord introduces the church by saying in verse 18, "I will build My church. I will build My church."

This is new. This hasn't happened before. Yes, God redeemed people through all of human history and they'll all be with us in heaven, but the church is something new and it will be built He says. It actually began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts, chapter 2. This then is a promise: "I will build My church."

What did He include in the instruction and the information about His church that helps us to understand it? Well, it's all here. This is a very seminal kind of passage, a very foundational passage, so that we can understand the character and the marks of a true church. Let me read to you from verse 13 down to the end of the chapter, and I'll read through it quickly; you can follow along.

"When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and other, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven' and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.' Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ, or the Messiah.

"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.'

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? for the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds. Truly I say

to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

This is a powerful and critical portion of Scripture. Let's go to the heart of it, which is His statement: "I will build My church. I will build My church." That is the great purpose of creation and human history. In the Old Testament, it was the gathering of the redeemed people. In the New Testament and beyond until He returns, it is the church, it is the church. Human history is the story of the Lord gathering His redeemed people; and in this era, from the arrival of Christ until His return to gather His church into heaven, the purpose of history is the church, the gathering of a people for Himself.

In Ephesians, chapter 1, He tells us the reason for this, Ephesians 1, 6 and 14 repeats three times that it is for the praise of His glory, for the praise of His glory, for the praise of the glory of His grace. In other words, the purpose of history is to gather the redeemed into heaven so that they can forever praise and glorify God. The only reason God created the universe, created the earth, created humanity, is to gather a redeemed people into eternal glory to everlastingly praise Him. That is the reason for human history. And in this era, between the arrival of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the rapture of the church, this is Christ's historic purpose to build His church. And it is a powerful plan, a powerful purpose that cannot be thwarted. Even the gates of hades will not stop it – and that is death itself. The gates of hades is simply the gate that allows people into the place of the dead. It speaks euphemistically of death. Death, the weapon that Satan possesses cannot stop the church from being built.

I'll say it again: history has no other goal than the gathering of God's chosen and redeemed people into eternal heaven to glorify Him forever. Again, that is why He created the universe and the world and humanity. And now He is building His church, and He will accomplish it. All the resistance of hell itself cannot prevent it. Luke 12:32 our Lord said, "Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Fear not, He will give you the kingdom."

So those of us who are the redeemed, those of us who are believers, those of us who make up the true church are the very reason for the existence of the universe. You go back in history and you mark out great civilizations, great empires: Egypt, Babylon, Medo-Persian Empire, the Great Greek Empire, the Roman Empire, England when it was an empire of massive proportions sweeping across the globe in its colonization, Europe in its many forms, Russia, China, United States – those are not the true great empires in human history, none of them is. The great lasting empire is the church. The church endures forever. The church endures forever. Those empires have come and gone, and empires will continue to come and go. The church remains, and it will be built until it is complete, and then gathered into eternal glory.

When we think about people of influence in history, you might go back and think about pharaohs, Caesars, emperors, kings, prime ministers, presidents, whoever it is up until our modern time; they are not the real history makers. All world rulers and all leaders combined are not the great determiners of human destiny. They're only temporal, they come and they go. They live and they die, and their influence lives and dies with them. They're not the architects of destiny; they're not the forces of history. The one great empire is the church, and the one great force is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is building His church. History then is His story. He is Lord of history gathering His redeemed people to glorify Him through all eternity. We are that church.

Now the church is a spiritual body. It is a spiritual entity made up of all believers who have come to

faith in God through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross through all of human history. They will be all gathered into heaven. The church is one church, one body, but manifests itself in many congregations, many locations. This is one expression of one manifestation of in a local place the one true church.

So we've been talking about what the church. What is an ordinary church? It's so hard for people to find what they feel is a real church, an ordinary church; and by ordinary, I mean a biblical church, standard issue church that goes by the book as the Lord of the church has designed it.

What are the characteristics of a church that the Lord is building? Well, a lot of is right here in the text that I read you, as you already know if you'd been with us. There are marks here that identify the church, so let's review just a few.

Number One we saw that there was a discussion with our Lord and the disciples about who He was. "Who do the people say that the Son of Man" – referring to Himself – "is?" And they gave them the answers that the Jewish people had come up with: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets. But He said to them, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter answers on behalf of all the disciples, "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Now this is the first and essential element of a true church. They make the confession concerning Christ. They make the great confession, the great confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Or in the words of John 6, "We know that You are the Holy One of God." Or the common Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord." The true church is established on an accurate understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. It is the church's Christology that is its foundation, what we believe about Christ. That's why we have to say that if you have an erroneous view of Christ, you may call yourself a church; you're not a church and you're not a part of the church. If you believe as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses and many other cults that Jesus is a created being and not the eternal God, then you don't have a church, because you don't believe in the true Christ. Any deviation from a biblical Christology is heresy and is not the church, it is the anti-church – belongs to Satan.

The great confession: "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of the living God, the Holy One of God. Jesus is Lord." That is the foundation of the church. First Corinthians 3:11, "No other foundation can be laid than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." That is the great confession of the true church. And every local expression of the true church makes that great confession. It is a Christ-centered assembly of redeemed people.

Secondly, the church is marked by a great communication, and that comes out in verse 17. Peter makes the confession, "Jesus says to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah' – or Jonas – "because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" The church knows what it knows, believes what it believes because of a divine revelation from heaven. For Peter, the revelation came in the incarnation of Jesus, in the humanity of Jesus, God in human flesh. For Peter, the revelation was in the truth incarnate.

For us, the revelation is in the truth inscripturated. It is in the truth written down so that they knew what they knew because of the revelation of God in Christ. We know what we know because of the revelation of God in Christ then recorded and explained to us in Scripture, in particular in the New Testament. So the church is committed to the exaltation of Jesus Christ and the authority of the

Word of God that comes down from heaven, Holy Scripture.

Now when we have Holy Scripture, we hear this in verse 19: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." In other words, when we have divine truth from heaven in the Word of God, we now have the keys to opening the kingdom. Literally heaven comes down. What has been determined in heaven is now able to be executed on earth. We can open the door to the kingdom. How do we do that? Not by some personal authority, but by the fact that we have the word of heaven in our hands. And in the Scripture is the truth that opens the door to the kingdom of heaven and defines for us life in the kingdom in every aspect.

So a church, a true church is marked by the great confession of the identity of Jesus Christ. It is marked by the great communication. In other words, its life is circumscribed to the revelation of God in Scripture. That's why Paul says the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. So if you're looking for a church, and you walk in and you find some people who are exalting Jesus Christ, acknowledging Him as Lord and God, and are listening to the Word of God, and submitting their lives to the proclamation and exclamation of the Word of God, that's a church, that's a church.

There's a third thing that is noted here in this text along with the great confession and the great communication, and that's the great contrast in verse 20. This too is essential in understanding the church. He warned the disciples they should tell no one that He was the Messiah. That sounds counterintuitive, as I told you a couple of weeks ago.

Why does He do that? That's not the Great Commission, that's the great restriction. A little while later He says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Why does He say, "Don't tell anyone that He is the Messiah"? The answer: because they had a wrong view of Messiah.

The Jews had decided that Messiah would be a military political social leader. He would be a man, a powerful man. He would overthrow all their enemies. He would produce all of the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. He would bring the nation of Israel to a flourishing dominating place in the world. He would make them all sort of wealthy and prosperous. That was going to be the messianic work.

That was wrong. But that motivated them when He fed them in John 6. They immediately rushed Him, John 6:15, after He created food for thousands of people, and they tried to make Him a king by force, because He met what they assumed would be the social power that they never could have dreamed of. Creating food; that's beyond what they ever imagined. And Jesus avoided them, disappeared and went away by Himself. He wasn't going to be forced to be the kind of king they wanted. To Pilate He said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

This is the great contrast that you have to understand about the church. The church has no connection to the world. It has no connection to the human system, to any government. What happens in this nation or any other nation has nothing to do with the progress of the church. It's not tied to any kind of political power, or any kind of military might, or any kind of educational accomplishment. The church has no connection to the world, that is why Jesus said, "If My kingdom was of the world we would fight."

But we don't fight. The church is an alien kingdom alongside the kingdom of the world, and the kingdom of the world belongs to Satan. So we live in this hybrid reality. We are in the world physically, humanly. We are creatures of the world; we have to function within the economies of the world. But at the same time, we are citizens of another kingdom all together, and the two never merge, they never merge.

Our Lord says, "Don't say anything about Me being the Messiah yet, because you're going to confuse them. Wait." Wait for what? "Wait until My death." And that's why He says in the next verse, "I'm going to be killed and I'm going to rise."

After that, He meets with them and says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Go tell everybody. Tell them now that the Messiah they are anticipating came not to set up a social political military powerbase in Israel, but He came to die for sinners and rise again, having conquered death and sin and judgment." Until the gospel story was complete, they didn't have the message to preach, so there's a restriction on them: "Don't go out with a partial message."

And what I told you at the time is this: our message is not political, our message is not military. We don't conquer nations, we don't conquer tribes of people; that's not what the church does. We have no interest in the world. We are not here for all of the purposes of social welfare, although we want to love people and meet their needs. We are here for the proclamation of the gospel. And wherever you see a church that has abandoned the gospel and turned itself completely into social issues, you now have a false church that is part of Satan's kingdom.

And then, fourthly, we said the church is marked by a great conquest. But, again, we don't fight and we don't conquer nations, even though in the past, in the name of Jesus Christ, horrific things have happened, horrific things. There were times when the Catholic church was slaughtering true believers and nonbelievers. There was a time when Protestants went to war, when Protestants went to war.

John Owen, the great Puritan theological mind gospel preacher, went with the English to Ireland to kill the Catholics. We don't do that. We don't make war, because the conquest of Christian church is not of nations, it's not of cultures, it's not of groups of people. Our triumph is not the triumph of traditional values. Our triumph is not the triumph of Judeo-Christian ethics. The triumph and the conquest that we celebrate is the cross of Jesus Christ, verse 21, where He was killed and raised on the third day and conquered sin, conquered sin. That is the great triumph of the church. That is the great conquest of the church.

All that the cross involves – sin, righteousness, judgment, grace, mercy, compassion, love, atonement, substitution, imputation, resurrection, exaltation – all of that is the heart and soul of the great conquest of the church. The church is not involved in conquering nations, even though coming out of the reformation they got swept up in that. And that's where infant baptism came from. Catholics had decided to baptize everybody in a certain country like Italy or France, and then everybody was subject to the church and there was no difference. There was no separation at all between the church and the state.

The Protestants came along with the gospel, which is an individual thing, not a collective thing, you come one soul at a time to salvation in Christ. But they began to fear that the power of the Catholic

nations would overwhelm them, and so they decided to have Protestant nations. And that's why the Protestants began to baptize babies, because then automatically if you're baptized as a baby you're in the Protestant church; and they were trying to do nation-building in the name of the church. That's not the church. That's not the true church. And it led to all kinds of wars, and all kinds of conflict, and all kinds of heresy. The true church understands that there's one great conquest, and that's the conquest of sin. And cashing in on, if you will, that conquest is coming to Christ for salvation, and entering into the victory that He won over sin and judgment for all who believe in Him.

And then last time we also mentioned to you the church is marked by a great conflict, verse 22, really startling. Our Lord has just introduced that He's going to build the church. He's just said, "I will build My church." And immediately what happens is Satan gets in the gears, and he does it by using Peter. "Peter pulls Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him," – can you imagine rebuking the Son of God – "saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You. I've got a better plan; you're not going to die.' He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You're a stumbling block to Me; for you're not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's interests.'" Man's interests always, always go in the opposite direction from God.

There's a great conflict in the church, there's a conflict with Satan. I told you last time, he raises up inside the church perverse men to lead people astray. He attacks the church from the outside. Paul said, "I know that after I leave" – in Acts 20 – "perverted men are going to come at you from every angle and try to undo the work that I have done." He wrote back letters to them wondering to the Corinthians if everything he had done was going to be undone by false teachers. False teachers abound, and warning about false teachers stretches all through the entire New Testament. The church is always in a great battle against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies, Satan and his adversaries propagating their lives through false teachers. So the church is known by a great conflict.

You could say this: when you find a true church that understands the conflict, you're going to see a church that fights the battle for the truth. If you go in a church where everything feels warm and fuzzy, it's probably not a church in the true and pure sense. If you go into a church and you begin to realize that this church is battling against error and fighting for the truth, you've found a church.

Number Six in my list: The church is marked by a great contradiction, a great contradiction. It's a paradox, if you will. Churches today, just the typical preaching that you hear on television, offers in the name of Jesus health and wealth and prosperity. That has just become massive. The largest churches in our country population-wise, so-called churches propagate this. They offer people the fulfillment of their dreams, their desires, their longings, their hopes, their ambitions. They tell people, "You need to identify what it is you want, you need to visualize what it is you want, and then you need to speak it into existence. And you have the power to create it, because you are little gods." This pulls God down and makes Him the servant of carnal desire. This is typical. And churches are filled with people who think by going there they're going to be able to have God give them everything they want, fulfill all their desires.

But listen to what it says in verse 24. Let's get something straight at the beginning. "Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me,' – you want to be a part of this – 'he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.'" It's just the opposite. You want to come to Christ; deny yourself. Deny yourself what? Deny yourself yourself, and deny yourself everything yourself desires. Deny yourself. It's not about self-fulfillment, it's the opposite of that. It's the opposite of every

warped promised that so-called churches make to people today. What our Lord requires is complete self-denial, the opposite of what false preachers and false churches are offering.

One Puritan writer said, “Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be taken high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite heart is the joyous heart, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess everything, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive.” And then he said, “Let me find Your light in my darkness, Your joy in my sorrow, Your grace in my sin, Your riches in my poverty.” And he ended by saying, “Your life in my death.” That’s the great contradiction. We’re calling people to die to themselves. We’re not saying, “Come join the church so you can have everything you want.” We’re saying, “Come join the church when you want nothing but forgiveness of sin and salvation; you’re down that far, that low.”

“If any man will come after Me, here are the three conditions: he must deny himself.” The verb means to disown, to refuse to associate with or have companionship with. It’s not just you need to refuse to associate with bad people, it’s you need to refuse, first of all, to associate with you. You’re done with the you that you have been. More than, “Lord, deliver me from bad people,” it’s, “Lord, deliver me from me.” Denying self; denying the natural, depraved, impotent, sinful, lustful flesh in which dwells no good thing, no good thing. It’s like saying, “I disown myself. I give up all my desires, all my dreams, all my ambitions, all my efforts. Everything is filthy rags.” This is true conversion; self is completely cast away.

The attitude is communicated perhaps clearly as anywhere in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 – I’ll just read a couple of them. Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

What kind of an attitude do you see there? Jesus is saying, “This is the attitude of those who come to Me.” They are bankrupt in spirit; they are brokenhearted and mourning; they are meek and humble, having nothing to offer to accredit themselves; and the only thing they hunger and thirst for is righteousness. Those are the people who are satisfied; those are the people who receive the kingdom.

Being poor in spirit is the foundation of all virtue, and it is the first step in all salvation beyond hearing the gospel. In other words, being poor in spirit, the word “poor” here is abject poverty. It’s the word that means the severest poverty that leaves you a beggar. What is it saying? It is saying that a poor in spirit – not poor in money, not poor in possessions, poor in spirit. That is to say the inner person is bankrupt. I’m in a condition of begging. This is the carcass out of which comes the honey. The term has to do with total disgust over one’s own heart condition.

Psalms 34:18 said, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, You will not despise.” Like the publican beating his chest in Luke 18, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” That is denying self. You take Christ on His terms, not yours. You offer no terms, no conditions, no wishes, no desires. You cannot have Christ and your own pleasure, Christ and your own covetousness, Christ and your own immorality; you come bankrupt. And then as you grow as a believer, you grow downward, in a sense.

Growth in grace is a growth downward. It is the forming of a lower and lower and lower estimate of ourselves. It is a deepening realization of our utter nothingness. It is a heartfelt recognition that we're not worthy of the least of God's mercies. And the longer we walk with Christ, the more unworthy we know we are. It's the pathway down that is the pathway up. It's that direction before it's elevated. That's why I read Colossians 3: "Consider the deeds of the flesh as dead." You died with Christ, you are dead. "Lay aside the old self," Ephesians 4.

What does it mean to die to self? Here's some thoughts. When you are unforgiven or neglected or purposely set aside, and you sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is happy being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self. When your good is evil spoken of; when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loving silence, that is dying to self. When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any annoyance; when you can stand face-to-face with things that irritate and agitate and endure it as Jesus endured it, that is dying to self.

When you're content with any food, any offering, any clothing, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or record your own good works or itch after commendation; when you truly can love to be unknown, that is dying to self. When you see your brother prosper and have his needs met and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, and never question God why your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self. When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself, and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion, no resentment rising in your heart, that is dying to self. So you want to follow Christ? Deny yourself, die to self.

Secondly, take up your cross. What does that mean? What did a cross do? It was an instrument of torture and execution. It's not talking about anything but actual death. Your mother-in-law is not your cross. Your neighbor's not your cross. Your teacher's not your cross. This is talking about serious things. This is talking about crucifixion. This is talking about persecution, shame, reproach.

Moses you know accepted the reproaches of Christ and counted them as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. This is being willing to be treated like your master. In Matthew 10 our Lord said, "You don't think they're going to treat you any different than they treated Me, right? If they hated Me, they're going to hate you. If they persecuted Me, they're going to persecute you. You think you're better than Me? No. The servant is like his master."

So if you're going to come to Christ, realize the price is extremely high. That's why Jesus so often said, "Count the cost. You have to hate yourself; and perhaps the people around you that you love the most, you have to be willing to be completely alienated from them."

The love of Christ overrules the instinct for self-preservation. The cross is the symbol of suffering. Now it's probably not likely that in this country you're going to be tied to a stake and burned. But some places in the world, that happens, and even worse things.

I received an email. It says, "Yesterday a brother named Isaac was martyred in Cairo. Isaac leaves a

wife and two children. Isaac was a faithful preacher of the gospel. His throat was slit. His cousin lad is also a faithful proclaimer of the gospel and teacher of true, a friend and co-laborer. lad” – this is the cousin who’s still alive – “is the moderator of Through the Bible TV and known all over Egypt in the Arabic world. He teaches on TV using his Arabic McArthur Study Bible. Pray for this family. May the Lord use the death of His servant to advance His name and cause in Cairo, throughout all of Egypt.”

Faithful preacher of the Word had his throat slit, which for him meant instant glory, didn’t it? One hymn writer said, “Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No, there’s a cross for everyone, and there’s a cross for me. The consecrated cross I’ll bear till death shall me free, and then go home, my crown to wear, for there’s a crown for me.” If you really want to come to Christ and genuinely be converted, ask yourself if what He offers in eternal salvation is more precious to you than your own life.

And then, thirdly, “Follow Me.” That’s pretty simple: “Follow Me.” Or literally, “Let Him be continually following Me.” You’ll enter into a life of constant obedience. “If you continue in My word,” – John 8 – “you’re My real disciple, you’re My real disciple.”

So this is the great contradiction. The Christian message is good news, but the good news begins by saying, “You have got to deny yourself, be willing to give your life if the Lord asks for it, and set off on a life on the narrow path, a life of complete obedience to Christ. You die; He lives in you.”

And then a warning: “Whoever wishes to save his life” – you want to hang onto what you’ve got – “will lose it. Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” Take that phrase: “Whoever loses his life.” That’s a synonym for coming to Christ. It’ll cost you you. It’ll cost you your life. You lose your life. And by losing it, giving it to Him, you find it forever. By hanging on, you lose it forever. And then our Lord says, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” I mean that’s basically how the world works; whoever has the most stuff is supposed to be the happiest.

So, okay, you’ve gained the whole world, it’s all yours. You’re the ruler of the world, and you’ve fulfilled all your natural carnal desires, and you’ve forfeited your soul. What are you going to use to buy back your soul when you face God? All your riches are useless. What are you going to do to buy back your eternal soul? You lose your soul, that’s hell forever. You lose the life you so desperately wanted to gain. And like the rich man who had it all, and died and went to hell and was tormented in the flame, all that you had here in this wispy life, long gone forever.

This is a strong warning. If you will save your life, keep it the way you like it, you’ll lose it forever. If you’re willing to lose it for Christ’s sake, you’ll find it forever. It’s not going to do you any good to accomplish things in this world, they’re not going to be able to buy back your eternal soul, and you’re going to have to face that hour. Verse 27, “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then repay every man according to his deeds.” That’s the final point about the church.

The church is marked by the great confession: Jesus is Lord, Son of the living God. Great communication: Comes under the authority of the word from heaven inscripturated. Lives as a great contrast to the kingdoms of the world. Rejoices in the great conquest of sin through the death and resurrection of Christ. Is engaged in a relentless conflict with the kingdom of darkness. Calls for

people to make the great contradiction that the way up is the way down, and the way to life is death. And, finally, is known by the great consummation. The church looks forward to the great consummation, which is the coming of our Lord, and He comes in judgment on all. He will separate believers from nonbelievers. Believers will enter into the joy of the Lord, eternal bliss in heaven; unbelievers will be cast into everlasting fire. Whatever they had in this life will not be able to buy back their eternally doomed souls.

This is the message of the church: self-denial, cross-bearing, loyal obedience to Christ. I just do not hear preachers preaching that. And then to the disciples our Lord says, "Look, it may seem far off and you may not be sure it's really going to happen when I tell you that I will come again in glory, the glory of the Father with the angels. So I'm going to give you a preview." Verse 28: "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Wait a minute; does that mean some of them are going to live until the second coming? No, they were just going to live till the preview of the second coming. They were going to see second coming glory. When did that happen? Chapter 17, the 1st verse: "Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, led them up to a high mountain by themselves. He was transfigured before them; His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." When you look at pictures of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Olivet discourse in the gospels and in the book of Revelation, the whole universe goes black. He comes like the blazing sun, and He's robed in white. This is a preview of the second coming.

And even Moses and Elijah appeared there. He transfigured before them, literally pulled the veil of His human flesh aside, and the shekinah glory, blazing glory shone. "They fell face down to the ground" – verse 6 – "and were terrified." This is a preview of the second coming. A true church is always looking for the blessed appearance of our great God and Savior. They're not caught up in this world, they're looking for the next. They're not looking for the undertaker, they're looking for the upper-taker.

We live in the light of the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we warn people. Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, because when He comes He'll come in judgment. The person who selfishly clings to life as he likes it is a pauper forever. A person who gives up his life, abandons it to Christ, is a prince forever. That's the choice that every person needs to make.

So summing it up. How do you recognize a real church? Architecture; no. Ritual; no. Tradition; no. Liturgy; no. Style of music; no, no. Good feeling; no. Good parking? How do you tell a church? You tell a church, because you find people who are passionate publicly and privately in the exaltation of Christ, the Scripture; who understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of salvation; who proclaim the cross and resurrection; who pursue holiness and purity in doctrine and practice; who are self-denying, humble, and obedient to the Word of God; and who live in anticipation of what is to come as promised by the Lord in His wonderful return. That's what marks a church; no wonder they're hard to find.

Father, again, thank You for our worship this morning. Thank You for Your Word. We feast on its glorious truths. They are, to us: joy, hope, peace, promise, strength, wisdom, knowledge, understanding – all leading to worship. Lord, I pray for those who are at this church, but not in Your church. Lord, may they be drawn to Christ today. May Your Holy Spirit bring them to self-denial,

willingness to pick up the cross, bear the reproach of Christ, and follow Him. And bring us, Lord, into Your eternal presence, accomplish Your plan so that we can praise and glorify You forever, we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

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