

# I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH!

*A Promise from Christ...*

TEXT: MATTHEW 16:13-18 (ESV)



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June 3, 2007

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## *Clear the Mechanism:*

I love baseball. And I love movies. And it just so happens that baseball translates well into some really great films. One more recent baseball movie tells the story of a veteran pitcher pitching who may not only be his last game, but also his first **perfect** game. He's a Detroit Tiger at Yankee Stadium, and if you've ever wondered how a visiting pitcher could block out the jeers of the opposing team's fans, this film paints a picture that I am fascinated by.

As he prepares to pitch, amid the deafening noise of the crowd, he says in his mind, "*Clear the Mechanism,*" and the stadium goes completely silent and all he can see is the catcher's mitt and the strike zone. Now I'm not sure if this is even close to real, but pitchers do have to find ways to block out distractions around them. When I saw this film, I wanted that ability. Wouldn't that be great to be able to block out everything around you simply by developing a ritual of some kind that would bring your focus solely back to the most important thing at hand?

I believe Christ has given us something like that—worship. And within worship, He has given us something even more particular—the Lord's Table—which we come to today. But I suspect many of us can relate to the visiting pitcher standing on the other team's mound, only we don't know how to clear the mechanism. This time of the year, it seems, is hard on many of us. For many, school is out and summer is here, meaning kids are home—and more importantly, this requires a shift in routine—which as my mom said recently, is "upsetting."

For most of us, summer shifts things around in one way or another. And I perceive our hearts become burdened. We feel like we're mostly reacting to life. Work is consuming, home is draining, worship is difficult to enter into. People go their separate ways, busy in their own activities, which adds the feeling that we're growing distant from our friends—which makes us feel guilty, which makes us feel even more detached, and on it goes. My hope this morning is that one simple yet profound promise from Christ might arrest our hearts and clear the mechanism—however noisy your world might be.

## *Matthew 16:13-18*

<sup>13</sup>Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup>And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup>He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter

replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

## *The Pull of the Bread and the Cup:*

Jesus spoke these words to Peter before facing the cross. He was revealing to His disciples that they would not only walk with Him, but they'd become a church—His church. And what's more, He tells them that **He is the one who will build it**. He is building the church out of His people and His people into His church. This means you, if you are a follower of Jesus. The glorious and simple promise here is that Jesus has not and will not leave you alone, nor simply ordain for you a life of futility.

Today we stop to gather around a familiar, ancient table to participate in a sacramental act of worship instituted by Christ, the One devoted to building His church in such a way that not even the gates of death can prevail against it. And we come from all kinds of experiences over the past weeks. Some of us come hungry—longing to commune with Christ in this moment of worship given by Him. Others come burdened—hoping His burden is easy, because we feel ours aren't. Some remain at a distance—not necessarily because you don't know Christ, but because honestly you're not sure you're really close to anything at all anymore. You're just trying to stay on your feet.

I am more convinced than ever that part of the reason Jesus instituted the observance of the taking communion together as His church was so that we might regularly experience the pull of the bread and the cup—the significance of what this meal is meant to awaken in us—the two-fold call to remember and proclaim Christ and what these elements remind us about Him.

**REMEMBER:** I called my mom the other day because I wanted to track down a prayer she used to pray over my brother and I every morning when we were kids. It is the "Morning Prayer" from the old Episcopal Book of Common Prayer. It goes, "Almighty God, who has safely brought us to the beginning of this day, defend us in the same by Thy mighty power; and grant that all our doings, being ordered by Thy governance, may be righteous in Thy sight. Through Christ our Lord." When she got to that last line, "Through Christ our Lord," we were to respond with an Amen. And she would repeat that last line until we did. Our "amen" was our vow to her that we'd get up and get ready. Every morning those words were prayed over me, and now I remember that ritual as a part of how the Lord built me up in a relationship with Him. I'm grateful for that prayer, and mom's relentlessness in infusing my memory with such a routine.

There is a sweetness in remembering what's shaped our lives—especially when life feels like it's running away from us. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper for His disciples, He told us to observe that meal **in remembrance of Him**—and we know what He meant when we consider the elements of the meal—bread and cup—body and blood given for us. He wants us to come with His sacrifice on our behalf on our minds.

He wants us to take time to **CONSIDER** this—not just to acknowledge it, but to think long and hard about it. He wants us to consider who we'd be without His broken body and shed blood, and who He has made us by it. He wants us to remember the cross and how it was the means by which He took victory over death and Hell in such a way that they could never prevail against the Church over which He is the Head.

When He says He will build His church upon the truth that He Himself is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that because this is Who He is, nothing, not even death or hell can prevail against His church, He wants us to remember that there is no identity more true or lasting of any of His people than the identity we're given as His beloved. Our jobs will change, our kids will grow, our bank accounts will empty and fill, but none of these pronounce who we really are—none of them!

But we forget this, don't we. We're so prone to get caught up or knocked down that we forget who we are. And I contend we only do this because we forget Who He is first. So by His grace, He calls us to stop and remember Him. And He helps us in this by giving us a multi-sensory ceremony to participate in together—this table—that it might pull our hearts and minds back to the truth of Who He is and who that makes us in Him. All of this He wants us to take time to consider and remember.

**PROCLAIM:** We're also called, through this table, to proclaim Christ's death until He comes again.<sup>(1 Cor 11:26)</sup> You make a public profession of faith in Christ each and every time you physically get up from your seat and come and partake of these elements. You are proclaiming that you rely on His broken body and shed blood alone to make you right before God—and that without communion with Christ, you would have no communion with God the Father—and would be utterly lost for all eternity.

But also notice the other side of this proclamation Paul alludes to. We're proclaiming that our hope is that one day **Christ will come again** and we'll no longer commune with Him as a church around these elements, but as His bride in His presence for all eternity—never to be separated from His Holy Presence. Scripture speaks of this as the wedding of a Groom to His bride—and that bride is us—the church.

So when we come to this table to remember what Christ has done to make us His bride, and proclaim that we're eagerly expecting our final wedding celebration—we're looking forward to that time when the building of Christ's church will be complete, a time when there will be no more attacks upon her by the devil. No more grief will fall upon her because of death, and no more confusion or fear will grip her because of our sin. No more harsh words will ever come from our lips. Greed will never again entice us to lie. Lust will never again entice us to betray those we love. When we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord's death **until He comes again**.

*He is Building His Church Now:*

Today is a communion Sunday, a day when we stop to gather as one people around one table given by our One and Lasting true and eternal Groom. And this table is one of the ways by which He means to build us—His church. This is glorious. Christ never ceases to engage or delight in His beloved. I know you may feel like the circumstances of life are prevailing against you. Beloved, through worship, through coming to this table instituted by Him, Jesus beckons you to come and be built up upon the truth that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

As His Bride, He has chosen you as a Lover chooses His beloved. Nothing can separate you from Him. And nothing will be able to shake the rock solid truth that He is eternally who Peter confessed He was—the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and “*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” (Phil 2:10-11) He invites you to bow in worship before Him today.

If Christ is building His church, it means if you are a Christian, He is building you. He is building those who comprise the church that we might love, serve, worship and testify in power and peace reigning where our hearts are otherwise troubled. And it means He is building the church as a Body by which we might serve together to minister to the needs of a broken and hurting world. It is Christ's promise—He will build His church. It's a promise you can cling to. He's building His church now, and He's building you to worship and adore Him for all He is.

May you come to this table knowing that His presence is always greater than His provision, and that His presence is where He's ordained His people to reside for all eternity. May you, today as you come to this table, **remember** why, and delight in His call to **proclaim** such astonishing grace throughout the world. And wherever your heart may have wandered off to, may this table arrest you and pull you back and awaken in you the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is building His church in such a way that the gates of Hell will never prevail against it—and if you are a believer in Him, this means He is building you.

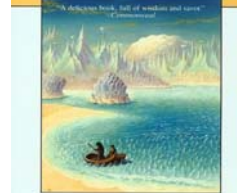
### *Library Builders: Summer Reading Edition*

The following suggestions are related to each other only in that I've enjoyed them, and think you might too. Reading sharpens the mind.

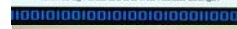


### *The "Other" C.S. Lewis Series*

**Out of the Silent Planet.** By C.S. Lewis, 1938

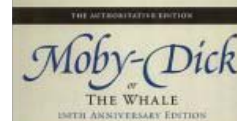


In case you didn't know, C.S. Lewis, author of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, also wrote what many call his "Space Trilogy." This, along with "Perelandra" and "That Hideous Strength" are just as engaging, symbolic and rich with the Gospel as the *Narnia* books. Not being much of a sci-fi guy, I didn't find them geeky at all.

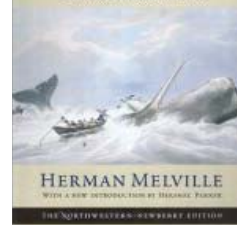


### *THE Great American Novel:*

**Moby Dick** By Herman Melville, 1851.

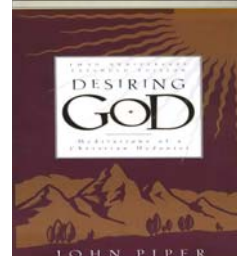


This classic saga of Captain Ahab's relentless pursuit of the great white whale "remains a peerless adventure story, but one full of mythic grandeur, poetic majesty and symbolic power." It may take you the better part of the summer, but by the end, you'll be able to say you've read *Moby Dick*—which ought to be on any devoted reader's life list.



### *Intro to John Piper:*

**Desiring God** By John Piper, Revised & Expanded, Multnomah Press, 2003



John Piper has been deeply influential in many people's understanding of God's "command" for us to delight in Him. This work is the best place to start, as it is his magnum opus. Everything else by him springs from this work.