

I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

Truth for a People of Love

TEXT: MATTHEW 16:13-20 (ESV)



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Oak Hills Presbyterian Church,
Overland Park, Kansas

The Week After

Last week I announced that at the end of May I would be stepping down as the lead pastor of Oak Hills, and that my family would be moving to Nashville to serve with a church in that city. This has been and will remain a very emotional, personal and spiritual road our family is walking, as it is for many of you also. We love you.

Today I desire 1) to express my appreciation and love for this congregation and 2) to take us again, by the help of Holy Spirit, to our true source of strength, wisdom and confidence—God's Holy Word which is for us. Thank you for all the kind support you have offered us even in the rawness of our announcement. We are only beginning to process what we feel, and I know for our family, this has introduced a range of emotional responses. We love you and thank God for what He has done and is doing in and through Oak Hills. It is an honor to stand here.

The Lord is strong. I believe the Lord has made it very clear to me that my call today is to focus not on what we lack, but on Who we have—Jesus Christ, the Lord of His church on earth. So on this communion Sunday, let's remember who Jesus is over our lives and over His Church—this church, Oak Hills.

Matthew 16:13-20

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷And 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. ¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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 told them that **He would be one to build it**. This is Oak Hills' story. And it has been since long before her first members ever gathered together for worship. Jesus has been building the church out of His people, and His people into His church. This means us if we are His followers. The glorious and simple promise here is that Jesus has not and will not leave us alone. This is a promise made many, many times.

Today we stop to gather around a familiar, ancient table to participate in a sacramental act of worship instituted by Jesus Christ, the One devoted to building His church in such a way that not even the gates of death and hell can prevail against it. I am more convinced than ever that part of the reason Jesus instituted the observance of the taking of communion together as His church was so that we might regularly experience the pull of the bread and the cup—the two-fold call to remember and proclaim Christ that this table is given to awaken in us.

REMEMBER: My mom used to say a prayer over my brother and I every morning when we were kids that said: "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 the end, we had to say "Amen," which was our vow to get up and get ready. Every morning she prayed this 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 that called me to take every day as one God had ordained for me and meant to use.

There is a sweetness in remembering what's certain, especially when life changes. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper for His followers, He told us to observe this meal **in remembrance of Him**—and we know what He meant when we consider the elements of the bread and cup, which represent His body and blood given for us. He wants us to come to this table with His sacrifice on our behalf on our minds. He calls 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, then, 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. Ever. He'll never fail here.

When Jesus 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 situations 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 gives us a gift: He calls us to stop and remember Him and then He helps us in this by giving us a multi-sensory ceremony to participate in together with Him—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 calls us to take time to consider and remember when we come to this table.

PROCLAIM: Paul wrote: “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Cor 11:26) So along with remembering, we’re also called through this table to proclaim Christ’s death until He returns—a reminder that we are not yet what we shall one day fully be. Every time you physically get up from your seat and come and partake of these elements, you are making a public profession of faith in Jesus. You are proclaiming that you rely on His broken body and shed blood alone to make you right before God—and that without true communion with Christ, you would have no communion with God the Father, and would be utterly lost for all eternity.

But also notice there is another side to this proclamation Paul describes. 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, ever. Scripture speaks of this as the wedding of a Groom to His bride, and that bride is us, His church on earth.

So when we come to this table to remember what Christ has done to make us His bride and to 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 or loss, and no more confusion or fear will grip her because of our sin. No 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**.

Jesus is Building You Even Now

This first Sunday of the month is 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 Jesus builds His church. He builds us. This is glorious. Christ never ceases to engage or delight in His beloved. Yes, we face seasons where we feel like the circumstances of life are prevailing against us. But beloved, through coming to His table, Jesus beckons you to come and be built up in the truth that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. What can prevail against Him?

He has chosen you as a Lover chooses His bride. Nothing can take you from Him. And nothing can 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) If Christ is building His church, it means He is building those who comprise the church that we might love, serve, worship and testify in peace where our hearts are otherwise troubled. He is building us up even now.

Men Worthy of Double Honor

Another way Christ builds His church on earth is by calling men to serve as elders and deacons. And I am compelled to testify of the great gift this church has been given in them. I have lived the last 7 ½ years working alongside and submitting to an incredible group of elders the Lord has raised up for this church—men of incredible strength, character and devotion to Christ.

I am always amazed by their wisdom, insight and love for the Lord and His church. Your elders have been working hard measuring the urgent and important needs of this body, refining our vision and direction. They’ve taken risks with each other in their honesty and have seen those risks rewarded with humility and progress for Oak Hills’ future good. The elders we have now are the elders the Lord has provided Oak Hills for such a time as this, and it is a holy honor to know them and walk alongside them even in this personally sad process we’re in now. I hold such deep respect for these Godly men.

And I deeply admire Oak Hills’ deacons too. These men humble me. I see in them such love and care for the needs of this body, and I see strength in them that gives me great hope for people in need who have these guys to care for them. The deacons we have now are the deacons the Lord has provided Oak Hills for such a time as this, and it is a holy honor to know them and walk alongside them as well. When Jesus said that He’d build His church so that that the gates of Hell wouldn’t be able to prevail against it, I believe He knew part of the way He would give such strength to His church would be through the elders and deacons He would raise up to lead her. They aren’t perfect, but they are, as Paul said “worthy of double honor.” (1 Tim 6:1)

Presence is Greater than Provision

This is what Christ promises: **He** will build His church. It’s a promise you can trust. The Gospel comes from Christ. He is building us now to worship and adore Him for all He is. May you come to this table knowing **His presence is always greater than His provision**. His presence is where He’s ordained His people to be for all eternity. As you come to this table, may you **remember** why He gave it, and may you delight in His call to **proclaim** His astonishing grace throughout the world. May this table arrest you and pull you deeper into 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. If you are a believer in Him, this means He is building you.

Notes