



Church Today

Matthew 16:18 NIV

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

What Are You Going to Do About This Church?

When I came to this church, I was spiritually broken. I had taken some pretty rough blows and was not certain that I belonged in professional Christian ministry. I did not have a lot of confidence in the church and was not certain I still belonged. Mary Jo and I were invited to join this congregation and the pastor and members wanted me to help develop a youth ministry. I was pretty messed up psychologically and had a hard time being around other pastors. I felt disconnected from God and lost professionally. The right sorts of people were a part of this church though. I was welcomed with open arms and the acceptance I received had a healing effect on me. Kindness and encouragement came in bunches and over the course of the next three years, the Lord used this church to heal my wounds and bring me back into ministry. In a sense, this church saved my life.

I am not sure what might have happened to me if this church was not here. Perhaps God would have had a different group of Christian people for Mary Jo and me, but I cannot say. The church back then was small and several of the key people in the group could have easily given up on it. There was nothing particularly exciting about the church, no reason to use it as a model of how a church should be but it was there for me when I needed it. And it has been here for you too when you needed it! Now we are at a similar place. The church is small. We are limited in our ministries. We don't have many children or youth which is the typical benchmark used to decide if a church is healthy or not. So, the question comes, and we must at least admit it is one that could be asked. Why does God keep our church going? What is it about this church that matters so much to Him? There are plenty of churches that close their doors. Many new church starts cease. There are a number of churches in our city that have sold their land and disbanded. So, what is it about our church that God keeps it going? Is it because through Christ some of you have been spiritually healed or even saved when God used this church to give you a whole new life? Maybe it is the Lord's mercy because like me, this church means the world to you and it would crush you if it no longer existed.

To you, to those of you who cherish this church and want it to continue to heal and build up people and bring honor to Christ our Savior, I ask this question. What would be your dream for this church? How would you like to see it go? Don't look at your neighbor and wonder what those around you would say but ask yourself this question. What is your dream for this church? What sorts of people would you like to have a part of it? What personality do you dream of this church having? How would it feel if this dream of yours came to pass, how would it be for you and others to be a part of this particular dream church?

Before the church ever really came to be, Jesus made a prophetic statement in regard to the Church in general and it was all encompassing, taking in every big and small church that has been since. **And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.** (Matthew 16:18 NIV) There is much that has been written about this short statement of Jesus but here is the point for now. The term translated Hades is just that. It is Hades and not Hell. The Lord was not telling us that the Church goes up against Hell and Hell cannot stop her. Hades back then meant death. It was the place of the dead and that was its most important idea. Jesus was telling you and me that death cannot stop the Church. It is not held back by death and it is not shut down by death. Death is no barrier to God or the Church. The Church is an unstoppable force of salvation and new life.

There is another verse that is important and must be considered. **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.** (Ephesians 5:25-27 NIV) Obviously this passage is about families and the way husbands are to be with their wives but there also is a critical piece of information about the Church that God wants us to get. It says that Christ loves the Church and has specific plans for every church. The Greek term translated "church" is *ekklesia* and means, "called out ones or "brought together ones" formed into a congregation. It is the term for an assembled group of people. This passage and the same for when Jesus spoke of the church not being held back by death is addressed to the assembly, the Christians who meet together; not the ones who are scattered about and have "church" in front of a TV or radio. It is the body of Christ put together in real places and meeting with each other. That Church is loved by Christ and being made holy and blameless. It does not mean that Jesus does not love Christian people who don't gather with the Church but there is a special affection and blessing the Lord has for those Christian people who meet together.

There are two more long passages to think about and then we shall close with some essential thoughts about your church. **...so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.** (Romans 12:5-8 NIV) The second one is similar in its teaching. **Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.** 1 Corinthians 12:7-13 NIV

To summarize them both, Christian people need each other. We must be around one another if we are to gain all the benefits of having Christ as our Savior. It is not just a bonus; it is critical to our well-being spiritually and emotionally. The Spirit gives certain abilities to specific people within the church that are necessary for us to be at our best. All together these "gifts" or "powers", when we have access to them through the Church, make us better and more "Christian" than we ever could be without them. You need the Church to thrive. You need the Church to know God best and for Him to build up your life. The church, this church, is how God builds your life and the lives of those in your family.

Here are some thoughts about serving and helping this church prosper. 1. You might gain a life-long friend in the process. I met my wife in the church. Others have had the closest people they have ever known

meet them when a part of a church. 2. It will brighten your day. You will have a fresh bounce in your step knowing you did your part to help your church be a better and happier church. 3. There is great value in being a part of something lasting. This church will not go away. It will continue forever because Christ has already said it will. Death can't stop it. What else has that kind of lasting value? This church and what it does as a group will always bring joy to God and bless His people. 4. Christ can make a big deal out of what you do. He can reward you with everlasting benefits. He can give you a salary that has infinite value and will only go up in its worth as you live forever with Him. Of course, there are risks you take by not serving and helping the Church. 1. You might miss out on the most important part of your life and if you quit on the Church you will never know what it would have been. 2. God could rebuke you for not obeying Him in supporting your church. Do you remember what Ananias and Sapphira faced for not being honest about their giving? 3. It does something to you psychologically and emotionally when you know you haven't given it your best, and even more so when we are talking about God's church. I have known many people who suffered from unexplainable depression, financial stress and family troubles and if you trace it back, it began when they stopped giving their best to support their church.

What are some goals for your church? Let's list three for Warm Springs Church. By October 27, we will have at least fifty attending one of our worship services. Second, we will collect one hundred presents this year for Operation Christmas Child. Three, we will have by the end of May 2020, not including Easter, at least one hundred in one of our worship services. Perhaps you have other goals for your church. Maybe they are bigger than these, more glorious than these and if the Lord has put them in your heart, then take them seriously! Decide today, or at least by the end of this week, what you will do about helping your church prosper! If each of us do this, imagine just how much joy this will bring God who clearly puts much thought and care into the Church and died to make the Church come alive and thrive.