

The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail

1. Warm-up Question: Sunday's sermon began with a list of "Things You Never Hear Said in Church." One of them was, "Hey, it's my turn to sit in the front row!" Most of us have a tendency to always sit in the same place in the sanctuary. If you tend to be a same-place sitter, why is that? If you tend to sit in different places, why is that?
2. August marks the 32nd anniversary of the founding of our church, so on Sunday we talked about why God raised up our church. We began with a Gospel passage where Jesus announced his intention to launch a church. The Greek word there is ekklesia [ek-lay-SEE-uh], which means an "assembly," as in a group of people who come together for a common purpose. Read Matthew 16:13-21, as printed on p. 3
 - a. This Gospel passage raises a number of interesting questions that weren't our focus on Sunday. Let's briefly tackle a few. As best you understand, what is the rock upon which Jesus intended to build his church?
 - b. To whom did Jesus give the keys to the kingdom of heaven and what does that mean?
 - c. Why didn't Jesus want his disciples to tell people he was the Messiah?
3. On Sunday our focal point from our Gospel passage was Jesus' strategic intent to launch a church movement that would share his message and ministry throughout the world. Jesus accurately anticipated that the "gates of hell" would be thrown against his church movement in an attempt to destroy it.
 - a. Jeff said the best strategy for destroying the church movement would not be a to launch a frontal assault from the outside that everyone would see coming and resist, but rather subtle attempts to corrupt the church from within by twisting Jesus' message into something it wasn't. Jeff noted that I John 2:18 warns that "many anti-Christ" would appear in the world. Jeff suggested an anti-Christ is a person or organization that claims to speak for Jesus while twisting his message into something antithetical to what Jesus actually taught. What are some ways churches in our world today tend to twist Jesus' message?
 - b. Have you ever been part of a church that you feel twisted Jesus' message? Tell us about that experience and how it affected you and others.
 - c. Why is attacking and perverting the church from within Satan's best strategy for destroying the Jesus movement?
4. Jesus promised that attacks on the church would never ultimately prevail. We've seen that throughout the ages. Again and again, the church has gone through cycles of decay, but each time God has raised up a renewal movement within the church to call it back to its authentic roots in Jesus. Jeff said he believes that's what's happening today. God is seeking to create the church of the future by raising up cutting-edge

churches like ours. Jeff suggested several core traits that will characterize churches of the future. ***No. 1 – Churches should be safe, theologically open-minded, yeshiva-like spaces where we can learn and grow in grace.***

- a. Jewish rabbis typically organized their disciples into close-knit conversational groups who engaged in ongoing dialogue about how to apply their rabbi's teachings to everyday life. Jesus used that same model, rather than a more top-down, shut-up-and-let-me-give-you-all-the-answers approach. Why do you think Jesus made that choice? What makes the yeshiva approach so desirable?
 - b. Why are so many churches today reluctant to take a more open-ended yeshiva-like approach?
5. ***No. 2 – Churches should be places where we experience belonging.*** Jeff shared how, when his family moved to Colorado, he was thrown into a new high school and was painfully alone without a community of friends. He described that painful feeling of eating alone in the cafeteria.
- a. When in your life have you felt most alone? Describe how you felt.
 - b. Do you feel a genuine sense of belonging at LifeJourney? Why or why not?
 - c. The Cheers theme song reminds that we all need a place “where everybody knows your name and they’re always glad you came.” Even Cliff, the dorky mailman, felt like he truly belonged when he was at Cheers. What are some concrete things we can do to make our church even more like that?
6. ***No. 3 – Churches should be places where we pool our resources to work together to make a powerful difference in a hurting world.***
- a. Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” Do you buy that? Why or why not? What does it take for a small group of people to be powerful change agents?
 - b. Jeff shared the story of Philip Stargate and his organization Crossing Lines Africa. He told how we’re partnering with Crossing Lines to help transform churches and attitudes across east Africa and south Africa. When you heard this story, what were your thoughts and feelings?
 - c. Jeff said the greatest resource we can offer Jesus’ work through our church is the gift of our consistent presence. Why is the gift of presence so critical?
 - d. On Sunday Jeff challenged each of us to renew our commitment to Christ’s work through our church. He listed options for greater involvement, including the gift of presence, serving on a ministry team, becoming a regular donor, and/or participating in an Oasis Group or the next round of Discipleship courses. Are you feeling called to deeper involvement in some way? If so, why and how?

Matthew 16:13-21

13 Now 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, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

¹⁵He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

²⁰Then Jesus sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. ²⁰From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.