

SPREAD OUT THINK BIG

Week One | February 18, 2018 | *The Church is the Hope of the World*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY:

Before your group meets next, meditate on the words of the great hymn, *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness seems to veil His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath His covenant and blood
Support me in the 'whelming flood:
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ the solid rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

When the last trumpet's voice shall sound,
O may I then in him be found.
Clothed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before his throne.

THIS WEEK

■ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The church is the hope of the world; the message of the Church is the greatest message of all time.

■ THEOLOGY APPLIED

We can trust that the Church is the hope of the world because God is the one who builds the Church, and the gates of hell cannot overcome the Church.

■ MEDITATE

“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.” (Matthew 16:18)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week’s lesson.

Q: *What comes to your mind when you hear the word “church”?*

Bill Hybels tells the story of sitting at an airport gate in Puerto Rico, watching a 9-year-old boy mercilessly beat up his 7-year-old little brother. After breaking up the fight and boarding his plane, Bill wanted to clear his mind and enjoy his flight back to Chicago. God would not let the scene Bill had just witnessed leave his heart and mind. God spoke softly to Bill that day and asked him, “Bill, what is the long-term outcome of that 9-year-old boy’s life?” Bill concluded that at 9 this little boy was using his fist, but as a teenager it would be a knife and as a young adult, a gun. His life would eventually conclude with prison and then most likely eternity in hell. God whispered to Bill, “What is the answer for this little boy’s life?” Bill knew that the only answer for the boy was the lifesaving and life-giving message of Jesus Christ. That little boy needs what we all need, the love and forgiveness of a savior. He needed the love and hope of Jesus Christ and that was the only answer to this boy’s troubled life. On his flight home from Puerto Rico, Bill, for the first time in his life, penned the words “the local church is the hope of the world.” Bill knew that the message of the Church was the only real hope for a broken and desperate world. Bill

has spent his adult life challenging the Church to shine brightly, because the message of the Church is the hope of the world.

🗣️: *Why do we often fail to see the Church and the message of Christ as the hope of the world?*

A couple of years ago Thom Rainer wrote, “In many ways, I see 2016 as a pivotal year for thousands of congregations. Unfortunately, many church leaders and church members will elect not to change anything. Those congregations will be among the 100,000 rapidly declining churches.” In an era of churches declining and many churches closing their doors we need to remind ourselves what Jesus taught about the Church. The Church is the hope of the world, the message of the Church is the greatest message of all time. May we remind ourselves what the Bible teaches about the Church. God will build His church; the Church will shine in the darkness, and the Church is God’s mouthpiece to a lost world.

🗣️: *Do you believe it is possible for the Church to thrive in a post Christian world? Why or why not?*

🗣️: *What must change in our lives and our churches if the Church is going to thrive?*

📊 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

This week we are looking at some important passages from the gospel of Matthew and the epistle of 1st Timothy to see how truly necessary the influence of the Church is in our world as we consider that:

1. **GOD WILL BUILD HIS CHURCH**
2. **THE GATES OF HELL WILL NOT OVERCOME THE CHURCH**
3. **WE HAVE A ROLE IN THE CHURCH**

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

GOD WILL BUILD HIS CHURCH

☐ MATTHEW 16:18

🗣️: *How have you heard this verse interpreted?*

When you look at all the teachings of Jesus and the questions asked of Him by the disciples, for example, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?”, it becomes apparent that Jesus is not teaching that He will build the Church on Peter. The other disciples did not acknowledge Peter as being any different from themselves, they all wanted to be the greatest in His kingdom. Peter was not given special treatment in God's Kingdom. Most scholars agree that Peter is from *petros*, a masculine form of the Greek word for small stone, whereas rock is from *petra*, a different form of the same basic word, referring to a rocky mountain or peak. Perhaps the most popular interpretation is that Jesus was comparing Peter, a small stone, to the great mountainous rock on which He would build His church. The antecedent of rock is taken to be Peter's divinely inspired confession of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vv. 16–17).¹ The mountainous rock is none other than Christ Himself. Jesus is going to build His church on the foundation and teaching about Himself. Numerous scriptures validate this truth:

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1 Cor 3:10-11 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

We must never forget that the head of the Church is Jesus. He is the cornerstone of every church's existence. If we are not careful we make the Church about the pastor, the deacons or ourselves. As we experience the decline of the Church in Europe and now North America, we must ask the question, "Have we drifted from the Cornerstone? Have we been led to believe the Church is more about our personal needs and desires than about building on the foundation of Jesus?"

In his book, *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby writes, "God is always at work, it is our duty to discover where God is working and join Him in His work." Many believers mistakenly believe their role is to work for God and God will bless their work. Jesus is clear, He is building the Church. If we want to be a part of building the Church, we must join His work.

John MacArthur says this about a disciple of Jesus, "When he studies and is obedient to the Word, and when he walks in the Spirit and produces the fruit of the Spirit, a believer can be sure he is living where Christ is building His Church. It is not faithful believers who build Christ's church, but Christ who builds His church through faithful believers. Wherever His people are committed to His kingdom and His righteousness the Lord builds His church. If believers in one place become cold or disobedient, Christ does not stop building but simply starts work somewhere else. His true church is always "under construction".²

Q: *Paul gives a warning to the Church of Corinth (1 Cor. 3:10-11) to be careful how they built. What do you speculate his warning to the American church would be?*

THE GATES OF HELL WILL NOT OVERCOME THE CHURCH

■ MATTHEW 16:18B

Q: *What encouragement do you draw from the Lord's promise?*

Q: *Do your everyday actions give evidence that you believe the Lord's promise about the Church?*

The church (ekklesia) literally means “the called-out ones.” No matter how bleak and desperate the situation may appear, the promises of Jesus should be an encouragement to every believer. We are on the winning team. The powers and schemes of the evil one will never overthrow the plans and purposes of God. The church of the living God will not be defeated. Until the Lord’s return there will be called-out ones throughout the world.

Observe what Jesus says, “the gates of hell will not overcome the church.” Gates were never used as weapons of war, gates are used to keep people out or keep people in.

Q: *What do the gates of hell protect?*

The greatest tool of the devil is death, and Satan uses death to create fear and paralyze humanity from becoming who God would have them to be. Hebrews 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Revelation 1:18 I am the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

In the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, death has been defeated. Satan no longer holds the keys to death. Death has no victory over believers. The church will always be a shining light no matter the darkness of our society because death has been defeated. The central message of the Church is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Jesus holds the keys to life and death. Throughout Scripture believers are taught that we have nothing to fear, but death still remains man’s greatest fear. Now that we do not fear death we are able to love, and risk and use our lives to be salt and light to a dark world. We can deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus wholeheartedly. 1 John 3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Q: *What changes about your decisions when you know that you are on the winning team?*

WE HAVE A ROLE IN THE CHURCH

1 TIMOTHY 3:14-15

We often hear the word church and we think of pastors, teachers and anyone except ourselves. When you contemplate the Church, you need to think of yourself. You are the Church, I am the Church, every believer represents the Church. The universal church reflects believers worldwide. If there are situations or things we do not like about the Church, we need to reflect on ourselves. Notice the task of the Church; the Church is to be the pillar and buttress of truth. This is the only time the word buttress is used in the New Testament. It means the mainstay. Do you see yourself as being a defender of God's truth? It is impossible to defend what you do not know. It becomes imperative that we be students of God's truth. The Church is the hope of the world because of our message. If we lose the truth of our message, we will fail to be the pillar God designed us to be.

This past year marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The Reformation was reclaiming the truth of scripture, that man is saved by grace alone through faith alone. The reformation serves to warn us that the Church can easily be distracted and led away from the tenets of the Bible.

Q: *Do you view your life as a pillar and buttress of truth?*

In Mt 28:18-20 we have been given the Great Commission, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Jesus originally gave this message to eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee, and now 2,000 years later that task has been passed down to every individual believer and The Church which is made up of those believers. If we really believe the Church is the hope of the world, the mandate of the Great Commission must be a priority for us all.

Q: *Do you view your life as being a fulfillment of the Great Commission?*

Q: *Would you agree or disagree that the fulfillment of the Great Commission is the hope of the world? Why?*

1 Cor 12:27-31 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way.

Paul is stating in 1 Corinthians 12 that the Church is made up of individual members. Each member has been given a gift and responsibility, so the body can function in a healthy manner. Ultimately, for the Church to be the hope of the world it comes down to you and me exercising our spiritual gifts and taking seriously our responsibility as members of Christ's body. I think most believers want the world to change. We desire for the world to be a better place. A place where our children and grandchildren can live without fear and can lead healthy and productive lives. Yet we fail to realize that our spiritual life and the Church play a huge part in that outcome. In a small way, each of us using our spiritual gifts is what God uses to change the world. If each of us would do our part, consider what the Church could accomplish. The church is the hope of the world and that hope has been given to each believer as Christ lives in us, and we manifest the Glory of God to a lost and needy world.

Q: *Do you see your life in Christ as being the hope of the world?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process what you've learned this week and how it will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

Q: *What gives you the greatest hope in our world?*

Q: *In what ways have you seen the Church thrive in a post Christian world?*

Q: *What part do you play in being the hope of the world?*



PRAY

+ Use this prayer point to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

- God, give me clarity and boldness to live out the message of Jesus Christ.

END NOTES

¹MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew* (Mt 16:18). Chicago: Moody Press.

²MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew* (Mt 16:18). Chicago: Moody Press.

