

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Mt. 16:13-19

***"A Church Built on the Rock" (part 2)***

**BUILDING A CHURCH ON THE ROCK**

Last week we looked at Jesus' words in **Mt. 7:24-28** and **16:13-18**. Jesus said, ***"Whoever hears My words and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock, when the rain fell and the floods came and the wind blew and beat against that house, it still stood, it did not fall."*** (**Mt. 7:24-28**) While those words are for every human being, they are also true for every church. And then in **Mt. 16:13-19** Jesus specifically tells us what needs to be true of a Church if it is to stand strong during tough times.

We found that a Church must have as its solid foundation Jesus Christ as Lord; the members must have a saving faith and there must also be a special fellowship. Today, I want us to look at two more elements that are true of a Church built on the rock.

**THE SURE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH**

Jesus said to Peter, *"You are Peter, and on this rock I'll build my church."* And then He says something that sums it all up, He says, ***"and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."*** What is Jesus doing? He's talking about the *sure future* of the Church.

While the old English translation of the Greek *hades* is "hell" the literal translation is *hades* – the place reserved for the dead and the place controlled by Satan. You see the Church is part of an ongoing war. And it is not a war with flesh and blood, it is a war with the organized and mobilized forces of the devil. (Recall **Eph. 6:10-12**). But thank God we already have the victory.

You see when the Lord Jesus says that the *"gates of Hades"* shall not prevail against the Church, He's not saying primarily that the Church will simply survive hell's attacks. That's not what He's saying. He's saying that nothing will be able to stop His Church – the one that He builds.

We're not going to be on the defensive. It's not the gates of the Church that Jesus is talking about, it's the gates of *Hades* that will not prevail. He's not saying that the Church is a fortress and hell can't get in, He's saying that the Church is an army that hell can't withstand. Do you understand that? And when Jesus speaks of the gates of Hades, He is not just talking about the devil and his demons, he's talking about the world of sin, sorrow, and death.

And it is the Church alone that has the answer to such problems because Jesus has given us those answers. The truth is that hell has no dominion, sin has no power, and death has no hold that Jesus cannot break.

No, the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. The church is not temporary it is eternal and it is invincible. And everybody's trying to find something to belong to – there's

this club and that club, that organization and this organization but there is nothing like belonging to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing like throwing your heart and soul into something that is eternal and invincible.

### **THE SACRED FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH**

But how do we get our heart and soul into the church? This leads us to the final element of a church built on the rock, and it is the *sacred function* of the church. The Lord Jesus said to Simon Peter, ***"I'm going to build my church, and then He says I will give to 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."*** What is the sacred function of the Church? The answer is found in the phrase, ***"the keys of the kingdom."***

What do keys represent? Keys represent two things. They represent authority and responsibility. For example, who has the keys to our church? The clergy and the staff, and some of the lay leaders. We don't give the keys to just anybody. We give keys to those who have some sort of authority and responsibility here.

In the same way, I am sure you don't just give your car keys or house keys to anybody. When we have children and when they get to be 16 or 17, we give them the keys to our car. We give them some authority and responsibility to drive. And then hopefully, there comes a time when you see enough responsibility in your son or daughter that you give him or her their own key, or their own car with its own key.

You see, what does a key mean? A key speaks of authority, it speaks of responsibility. And Jesus says to Simon Peter, now you're in my Church, and I'm going to build my Church. But here's the way I'm going to build my church, I'm going to build it through people just like you and I'm going to give you the power to bind and the power to loose.

But the words used here in the Greek are in the future perfect tense. So what Jesus is really saying is that *whatever you bind on earth, shall have already been bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth, shall have already been loosed in heaven.* We're not doing the binding and the loosing. We just have the keys our Lord has given to us to use because of what He has already bound and what He's already loosed. So all we have to do is use the keys.

You see, here's the exciting thing. What is the key? The key is the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of the living God, that through Him we can be changed, for eternity and we can be keepers of those keys and preach the gospel so that whatever we bind and loose on earth will be bound and loosed in heaven. That is we can bring the chains of sin and death that have bound souls and lay them down at Jesus' feet. Sin's power is broken through Jesus Christ and death now is robbed of its power.

What a joy and blessing it is to know that God has given to us, has entrusted to us, the keys of the Kingdom, which is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Do you realize that you have been given the keys just like Simon Peter was? Authority and responsibility. How do you use that authority and responsibility? By letting others know about Christ and by taking an active role in the Church.

## **RECOGNIZING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

How do you take an active role in the Church? It's not just going to church and giving money. The Lord wants us to find out what our gifts are and use those gifts to His glory. Please turn with me for a moment to **Romans 12:4-8**: ***“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”***

A four page handout is being passed out by the ushers. It is a spiritual gifts questionnaire and it is a way to discern what spiritual gifts you may have been given by the Lord. Please take it home and fill it out after a time of prayer. Next week we will look into detail at the various spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament as well as how we can use those gifts for ministry in and outside the Church.

Until then, may we all ask ourselves the question, What on earth are we doing for heaven's sake? What are we doing to bring people to Jesus Christ? What are we doing to build people up in the faith? The Lord Jesus Christ has given us the keys of the kingdom of heaven. It is our job to use those keys! It is our task to use those keys if our Church is going to be built on the rock! In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!