

Do you know why you're here, why you exist?

I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. –Isaiah 43.6-7

Westminster's shorter catechism asks: "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever." That's it. That's why you're here. You were made for God's glory, for eternal joy, "to enjoy Him forever." And I believe we glorify Him most by enjoying Him most.

But the world doesn't know that, at least not by nature. Most don't know why they exist, so they spend their lives in a desperate and vain pursuit of meaning which they cannot find without knowing God. If you have no purpose, and you have no God to define your purpose, then you have no reason for anything. Is it any wonder why we have mass shootings, legalized abortion, and an opioid epidemic that's growing off the charts?

Constantly needing some temp-fix isn't freedom, it's bondage. So long as we don't know why we exist, what our purpose is, nothing in this world will make sense. Consider Colossians 1.16:

For by him all things were created, in heaven & on earth, visible & invisible, whether thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities—all things were created through him & for him.

And that is what God is up to here today and everywhere else around the world: redeeming rebels, recruiting them for His mission of restoring humanity, of putting the old rebellious man death, and rebirthing us back to our true identity. He is calling us back to His glory, our identity.

Matthew wrote to his biological brethren who missed the Christ when He came, who crucified their Lord, instead of submitting to Him. They were looking for a military leader to conquer the foreign nations. But what they saw in Jesus instead was a wonder working, wonder wording, humble Galilean carpenter's son who, the longer He was around, the more He was maligned & marginalized by the religious leaders, by the crowds, and even by Gentiles. "Surely this can't be the Messiah!" No, at least not the one they were looking for. It won't be long until we see in v21 where Jesus "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...". What?! Even His own disciples couldn't believe it. The idea was inconceivable. That's not the Christ they were expecting. And if that wasn't bad enough, Jesus went on in v24 to call His disciples to "deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him." BUT! We're getting ahead of ourselves, aren't we? We're only

in vv18-20 today. Before He drops the command to follow Him in His death, He takes time in our passage today to assure them that, though He is being rejected by the very ones He came to save, His Father's plan—to salvage man from his sinful rebellion, to redeem a people for His own purposes & eternal pleasure; that plan—is absolutely still in tact! Yes, He will be maligned, He will be rejected, He will suffer persecution, and, yes, so will His followers—His Church, but never doubt or despair, He is faithful to fulfill His plans! In Jn16.33, He said,

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

These words of Christ are intended to give great hope to His disciples, and they still contain the power to do so today. Got hope? Let's go!

18 “I will build My Church”. Who is going to build His Church? Peter? Is Peter the head of the Church? Is Peter the great architect, the designer, the builder of God's people, the Church? Is that what the rest of the New Testament teaches us? No! Quite plainly in Ephesians 5, Paul tells us that *Christ is the head of His Church*, He is the Head of His Body here on earth.

The most popular way protestants interpret this passage to keep Peter from taking Jesus' head is to point to Peter's confession: “Surely that's what Jesus was referring to: Peter's confession, on that *petra*, on that great rock, not on *Petros*, the little rock.” As you know *rock* is the meaning of Peter's name, and, as we saw last week, since Peter had just confessed Jesus to be “the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” then surely that's what Jesus was saying He would build His Church upon, not on Peter himself but on his confession. Well, that is a valid interpretation, but the most plain & simplest reading of the passage doesn't lead us to believe that Peter's confession was Jesus' main point.

In Ephesians 2.20, Paul says that the household of God is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” In other words, Jesus is indeed the builder, but He uses the hands, minds, and mouths of His men—men like Peter—to do His building. In fact, in all four Gospels, Peter is the main mouth of the disciples. Sometimes he's right on, but other times, not so much; but he is clearly their leader. When the men are waiting for some direction after Jesus' resurrection, it's Peter who says, “Well, I'm going fishing,” and the others follow their leader. Early in Acts it's Peter who does the preaching, who worked the wonders, who lead the small group. It wasn't Peter who was building the Church, but it was certainly through Peter & the other apostles that Christ was.

I'm not comfortable with an interpretation of today's passage that completely strips Jesus' declaration of Peter as a leader in His Church, but neither do I think Roman Catholic doctrine is right that Jesus was making Peter the first Pope, the vicar of Christ, His earthly substitute. If that were the case, would the disciples even ask later on: "Who is the greatest in kingdom of heaven?" And it wasn't Peter who Jesus put forward, it was a child! Jesus isn't declaring the supremacy of Peter in our passage today, but He's certainly stating that he will play an important role, just not one of worship. In Acts 2.42, the early Church wasn't bowing to Peter or the other apostles, but the Church was "continually devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching." And that's what I think Jesus is saying here. The Church would be built by Christ as the apostles proclaimed His Word. "Faith comes by hearing & hearing by the words of..." Peter? James? John? No! "...the words of Christ." But, "*how will they hear without someone preaching?*" –Romans 10.14.

18 "I will build My Church." Sometimes I get discouraged in ministry. I bet you can relate. No matter how hard I try, how much I pray, how many calls I make or conversation I have, interest in the Lord seems shallow. That can really wear on us. It causes me to question so much of what I'm doing, what *we're* doing, of why we're doing it. Sometimes I even question my call as a pastor. Ministry in one of the wealthiest parts of the world can be tough. But that's exactly what makes these simple words from Jesus so good, helpful, and hopeful! Ultimately, the building up of His Church does not depend on us. That weight is not ours to bear. Jesus Himself takes responsibility for building His Body. He says, "*I will build My Church*." For 2k+ years He has been faithful, and He continues today, right now, as we look at His Word: to be faithful to His promise to build His Church! No matter how much our enemy throws at us, no matter how hard things get without or within, no matter how the world may mock, we belong to a cause that has the absolute support of Almighty God! We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, and He will be faithful to build His people. *If God is for us, who can be against us?*! We need only abide, proclaim & uphold the Truth of His Word, and He will build us into His Holy Church, beloved! The apostles don't build His Church. Jesus builds His Church. Think about it: If the responsibility was solely laid at the feet of those *Jewish* apostles, would the thought of a Gentile Church have even entered their minds? No! God put Peter to sleep. God showed him the vision of the sheet being lowered from its four corners. God took up the cause of convincing His *little* rock that He had bigger plans for His glory than Peter could think or imagine, galactic glory, Jews & Gentiles, the two made One through the blood of His Son!

And the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church! What are gates for? Keeping out, but also keeping in. The gates of hell keep dead sinners in the dark. But they are no match for the resurrected Light of the World. Death has no power to keep His Church imprisoned in bondage & sin. John 14.19: “Because I live,” Jesus said, “you also will live!” Death will not hold you. The gates of hell shall not be victorious over you. You will rise w/Jesus!

19 How are we to understand what Jesus is saying here? Listen to Him in Luke 11.52:

Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.

The religious leaders didn't have the divine revelation of Jesus identity that Peter had. They were excluded from the Kingdom by their wrong knowledge, by insisting on a military Messiah, rather than loving the One, the Son God had sent. And through their false teaching they were hindering many from entering.

But that's not the way the Messiah would have Peter participate in His Kingdom coming. Peter would be given the keys of proclaiming—not false teaching, but—the Truth, the Good News of the Gospel: the King has arrived! Day by day Peter understood better & better, and by proclaiming as much to the world, Peter would open the Kingdom to many [pause] but also shut it against many. In Acts 2 as he preached the identity of Christ the King “the Lord”—not Peter—“added to the Church those who were being saved.” But the same proclaimed-Gospel that added to the Church also excluded from the Church, as many rejected the Truth. And so, we find that Peter, indeed, shuts up the Kingdom from men. It isn't as though Peter has some special direct connection to heaven that you don't, but rather as he—and as we—stick to the Truth of God's Word, as we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus the King & His Kingdom, we accomplish this binding & loosing that Jesus talked about here. Peter may be authoritative in binding & loosing, but only because Heaven has done it first: the Father dispatched His Son, the Light of the World!

Most Jews were looking for some climactic event that would just happen without anyone's agreement or participation. But, Jesus makes clear, we have a role to play, we do participate in His Kingdom coming: the Church is the keeper of the keys through her preaching & teaching the revelation of Jesus Christ the King. In doing so, we urge people to convert, to repent from sin, and to turn to Christ for life; but we also forbid the unrepentant into His eternal kingdom, because without faith it is impossible to please God, and nothing displeasing to the Lord will enter His Heaven. The true Church may represent a small minority upon the earth, but the

people of God are, indeed, the instruments through which Jesus builds His Kingdom. Don't miss this, Church: He wants you to be active in what He is building; we are all assigned the keys to His Kingdom, binding & loosing as we speak the Truth in love!

Shortly after His resurrection in John 20, Jesus told His men, *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."* This is the foundation of church discipline, of how to treat unrepentant sinner within the family of faith: like unbelievers, He says in Matthew 18, because if they refuse to repent of their sin, then that's indeed what they are. It's there in Matthew 18.18 that our Savior says to the whole Church the very same words He told His disciples in John 20, *"Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* In other words, when a humble, well-versed body of believers addresses an unrepentant brother or sister within their church family, they have the full support of Scripture & Christ Himself to refuse fellowship with anyone who is out of sorts with God's Word. The Church has no authority in herself, her authority is only in the Truth of the Scripture. We do not determine what is right or wrong, what is forgiven or unforgiven, but instead, on the basis of God's Word, we simply declare what God has made plain in His Word, what is right or wrong, what is forgiven or not. When we judge on the basis of the Scripture, we can rest assured that our judgement corresponds with God's revealed will & Word.

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence" –2P1.3

This is why it's so important in our efforts in evangelism or apologetics to bring God's Word into the argument. Don't let it be your words versus someone else's, bring God's Word into it. That's the reality others need to wrestle with.

20 Now why would Jesus not want His men to tell others of His identity? Is Jesus talking out of both sides of His mouth: "I'm the Messiah, but I really don't want to be, so let's keep it on the down-low"? Or maybe He wants the Church to be a *secret-society*, you know, like a building with no windows? No! Jesus wasn't trying to conceal the Truth, but rather insist that it was revealed rightly, just as it had been for Peter, the "blessed Simon Bar-Jonah" for whom "flesh & blood didn't reveal" Jesus' identity "but the Father in Heaven did!" In other words, Jesus wants the crowds to come to a right faith in who He is, and that would only come through the Father's revelation as the Son manifested His works & Words before them. Peter saw all the symbolic miracles Jesus did, and he heard all the symbolic sermons Jesus preached. And the Father

used those two ingredients to reveal to Peter, by the power of His Holy Spirit, that Jesus really is the Christ. And, so rather than short-cut that same process by telling others of Jesus' identity, Jesus means for them to be brought—by the Father, through the Son's works & Words—to the same conclusion Peter was brought to. Otherwise, their erroneous fervor for a military Messiah would be the basis of their plans & pursuits, not a coming to Christ through faith. Hope in Christ must be rooted in faith, not military fervor. And, secondly, if the disciples went around proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, they would've short-circuited all of the events that our faith in Him so desperately needed to come about beforehand: like the resurrection of Lazarus that would foreshadow Jesus' own resurrection; like celebrating the Passover, on which night the true Lamb of God would be sacrificed for the sins of the world. And that's the root of our hope, isn't it? That's what everything was made for. His creating, His coming, His preaching, His miracles, His death, His resurrection, His glory... that's why we exist, and this is Truth we are called to live & proclaim.

PRAYER

SONG: *Jesus, There's no One Like You*

COMMUNION

SONG: *Doxology*

BENEDICTION: *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. –Hebrews 13.20-21*