Empowered Church

**Matthew 16:18**

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

**Book of Acts Church**

- At the height of the Cold War, in 1982,
  - Billy Graham received an invitation
  - to take part in an unusual symposium
  - sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church.
  - Called the World Conference of Religious Workers
    - for Saving the Sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe,
  - it included representatives from Christian denominations
    - and other religions.
- As a participant, Graham was able to preach
  - on a topic of his choosing at the conference.
    - The title of his sermon was
      - “The Christian Faith and Peace in a Nuclear Age,”
      - in which he spoke about the peace offered by God
        - through Jesus Christ.
- Many conservatives in the US criticized him
  - for being too soft
    - and for not taking a more prophetic role.
- One man accused him
  - of setting the church back 50 years.
    - Graham responded,
      - "I am deeply ashamed [then.]
      - [I was] trying very hard
      - to set the church back 2,000 years”.
- Our text contains the first mention
    - Jesus said, “I will build my church.”
- That promise was brought to fulfillment
  - in the upper room,
  - on the day of Pentecost,
  - where 120 believers
    - were assembled together in worship
    - with one mind and one accord,
      - In that atmosphere
        - Jesus began to build his church.
- In a matter of weeks,
  - the church went from the Upper Room
to every living room in Jerusalem.

- It is estimated by scholars
  - that during the first twenty-five years
    - of the Jerusalem church,
  - it grew from 120 people
    - to over 100,000 people.

- The church that emerged from the upper room
  - was a powerful church,
  - it was an anointed church,
    - and it was a revival church.

- That church is exactly the kind of church
  - that God intends for us to be.
    - The Book of Acts establishes the pattern
      - of what the church is supposed to be.
  - One thing I have in common with Billy Graham
    - is the belief that the church
      - needs to be set back 2,000 years.
  - We need to go back to the book of Acts
    - and take a hard look
      - at what it means to be the church!

- The testimonies of the Book of Acts
  - are not intended to represent
    - an unreachable pinnacle,
      - they are to represent the church
        - as it should be.

- The book of Acts represents the doctrine of the church
  - as it should be,
    - a message that has the power
      - to overcome sin and this world.

- The doctrine of the book of Acts
  - is our doctrine.
    - The baptismal formula
      - of the book of Acts
        - is our baptismal formula.
  - The message of that First Century Church
    - is our message.
  - The message of deliverance a
    - nd infilling of the Holy Ghost
      - that we preach today
        - comes straight out of the pages

- The book of Acts represents the church
  - that God imbued with his spirit,
    - a church that was no stranger
      - to the demonstration of the power of God.
• More than anything,
  o we want to be,
  o we need to be,
  o we must be
    ▪ a Book Of Acts church!

William Tyndale
• When William Tyndale made the first
  o English translation of the Bible
    ▪ in the 1520’s
  o he chose not to use the word “church”
    ▪ anywhere in his translation.
• He did so because in his time,
  o as well as ours,
    ▪ the word “church” has become known
      • as a reference to a building.
  o Tyndale understood that the church,
    ▪ as referenced in the New Testament,
      • was not a building at all.
  o It refers not to a physical location
    ▪ but the larger group of believers,
      • the brotherhood of the cross,
        o the congregation of the redeemed.
  o It is not limited to a specific locale.
    ▪ Rather, it spans the broad fellowship
      • of the redeemed.
  o The word church is used 140 times
    ▪ in the New Testament,
      • but never to refer to a building
  o The language used by the Bible
    ▪ could not be applied to a building anyway:
      • *The Lord added to the church.*
      • *Herod vexed the church.*
      • *The church was persecuted.*
      • *Paul saluted the church.*
      • *The churches had rest.*
    ▪ Building’s don’t rest.
      • And Buildings aren’t persecuted.
  o The church of the Book of Acts
    ▪ is a living, breathing,
      • collection of people.
• People didn’t “go to church” in the First Century.
  o They WERE the church!
• Only in the traditions of men

Empowered Church
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His Church! – His Plan! – His Vision!

- When God envisioned the church
  - he envisioned it as a spiritual necessity.
    - We don’t just go to church.
      - We are the church.
  - Church isn’t something
    - that we can just turn on and turn off.
  - It isn’t something that you can
    - just attend every now and then.
  - Either you ARE the church
    - or you are just PLAYING church!

- We live in a culture that highly values
  - a separation between church and state.
    - That concept, however well meant that it was,
      - has developed into a separation
        - between the church and spirituality.
  - Our culture has watered down the concept of church,
    - making it something that it is not
      - and ultimately changing the very fabric
        - of what it means
          - to be a part of the church.
  - We have been wrongly taught
    - that we can separate our spiritual lives
      - from our secular lives.
  - That what we do from day to day
    - has little or nothing to do
      - with what we do on Sunday.
      - Nothing could be further from the truth!

- Church has become an optional activity.
  - And individualism has driven a wedge
    - between the lively stones
      - that God has fitly framed together,
        - through His Spirit,
          - to build his church.
  - Not a building but a spiritual entity.
    - Not an individual pursuit
      - but an interdependent body of believers.
    - That is what church is supposed to be.
      - But it is not what church has become
        - in our culture.

- Statistically, one out of four church attendees
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- are considered "church shoppers,"
  - with no real devotion
  - to any particular local church.
- An estimated 15-20 million Americans
  - Will report that they are Christians,
    - When asked
    - but they will also report that
      - they don’t belong to a church.
- Jesus said, the church is my Body!
  - How can someone be Christian,
    - and not be a part of the Body of Christ?
- The individuality of our culture
  - has caused us to lose our sense
    - of spiritual community.
  - We are no longer
    - that intertwined body of believers
      - that leans one upon another,
        - where each of us stands together,
          - weeps together
          - and triumphs together.
        - IT SHOULDN’T BE THAT WAY!
  - Spirituality has largely become a private matter.
    - This generation doesn't want anybody
      - to hold them accountable to spirituality.
- The reason why they don’t embrace
  - the cultural community of the church
    - is because they don’t want anyone
      - to have the authority
      - to ask them the difficult questions.
  - They want to do their own thing
    - Without any sense of spiritual accountability.
  - They don’t want a man of God in their lives
    - Asking them the hard questions
      - Have you been reading your Bible?
      - Have you prayed today?
      - Did you fast this week?
      - How long has it been
        - since you were refilled with the Holy Ghost.
      - When did you last speak in tongues?
- You need the church!
  - You need a man of God in your life.
    - Without it you will drift on the seas of life
      - Carried about with every wind that blows
        - With no real spiritual substance to your life.
In a foolish effort to safeguard spiritual shallowness
  ▪ This generation has largely neglected
    ▪ the very source of spiritual strength.

- We need the church!
  ▪ Spirituality takes place in community.
    ▪ It is birthed in the coming together
      ▪ of a body of believers.
    ▪ It is something that we all hold in common,
      ▪ We draw from one another
        ▪ We are strengthened by one another
    ▪ It is the power of God that works in his church,
      ▪ in the body of Christ!

The Body
- A body is a unified whole.
  ▪ But we have become convinced
    ▪ that we can exist as individuals
      ▪ apart from the body.
- We segregate ourselves from one another.
  ▪ We separate ourselves from the church.
    ▪ We don’t want to get too close
      ▪ because it’s too dangerous.
    ▪ It makes us vulnerable.
- That attitude about church is as preposterous
  ▪ as your foot separating itself
    ▪ from the rest of your body
      ▪ and endeavoring to exist on its own.
- Paul said, in his letter to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 12:15-18
15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?
17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?
18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

- God has built his church.
  ▪ He has brought a particular group of people
    ▪ together in this assembly
      ▪ for the purpose of building his church.
  ▪ You didn’t get here by your own hand.
    ▪ You may think you had a choice in it.

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- You may think you are here
  - because of certain circumstances in your life.
  - But God orders our footsteps.
    - He determines our going out and our coming in.
    - And God has set the members in the body!

- Bear with me for a minute.
  - Let's say for the sake of illustration
    - that when God saved you,
      - He made you a hand in His body.
  - You have the gift of service
    - You were gifted to minister
      - to the rest of the body
    - You are the oil in the machinery
      - that keeps things running smoothly.
  - So what happens when you say,
    - "I love you Jesus,
      - but I really don't want to be
        - too involved in your church"?

- That's like saying,
  - "Jesus, I love you,
    - I just don't want to be a part of Your body.
  - I mean I really love the Lord
    - I just don’t care anything for his Bride.
- Paul said that would be like
  - removing one of your hands
    - from your body.
- I don't know about you,
  - but I need both of my hands.
    - Sometimes I could use another one.
  - But it would absolutely hinder me,
    - in everything I do,
      - if one of my hands decided
        - to separate itself from my body
          - and go off and do its own thing.

- Jesus is building His church.
  - He has brought US together,
    - all of us, for his purpose.
      - You aren’t here by chance.
  - You play an important part in the body,
    - and when you aren’t here,
      - when you segregate yourself from the body
        - for weeks on end,
      - not only are you weakened spiritually,
but the body itself is hindered.
  o There is a role that only you can fulfill.
    ▪ God knew exactly what he needed
    ▪ in this assembly of believers
      o and he added you to this church for a reason!
  o But when you're missing in action,
    ▪ When you are half-hearted,
    ▪ When you are casually committed,
      • the rest of the body
        o is crippled and weakened.

Membership
• The word “membership” is of Christian origin,
  o but the world has emptied it of its original meaning.
• Today, membership is often reduced
  o to simply adding your name to a roll,
    ▪ with no requirements or expectations.
• But to the Apostle Paul,
  o being a “member” of the church
    ▪ meant being a vital organ
      • of a living body,
    ▪ an indispensable,
      • interconnected part of the Body of Christ!
  o If an organ is somehow severed from its body,
    ▪ it will shrivel up and die.
  o It cannot exist on its own,
    ▪ and neither can you.
  oDisconnected and cut off
    ▪ from the lifeblood of a local body,
      • your spiritual life will wither
        o and eventually cease to exist.
• This is why the first symptom of spiritual decline
  o is usually inconsistent attendance
    ▪ at worship services.

• Brian Habig and Les Newsom,
  o authors of a book entitled,
    ▪ The Enduring Community,
      • said this,
  o "The church is a body,
    ▪ and I am either a productive member
      • of that organism,
    ▪ or I am actively contributing
      • to its dismemberment."
  o The point they were making

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• is that when you are not
  • where you are supposed to be spiritually,
    o when you are absent from the body,
      • the body is dismembered!

The Called Out Church
• Our theme this week, in our season of sacrifice
  o is an Empowered Church.
• However, before we can ever embrace
  o what that means to be empowered
    • we first must be reminded
      • what it means to be the church!
• The original Greek word for church is EKKLESIA,
  o and it is used 114 times in the New Testament.
• In Greek society, EKKLESIA meant
  o “an assembly of free citizens
    • who were called out of their homes
    • to assemble together
    • for matters of public interest”.
• For years we have shortened that idea
  o to simply the “called out”
    • but we have done ourselves a disservice.
• The church is not just “called out,”
  o we are “called out to assemble together.”
• We are the church.
  o And the church is not complete,
    • much less empowered,
  o when its members are fragmented,
    • isolated
    • and separated from one another.
• How can we ever hope to be
  o the kind of church that turns this city
    • upside down for the sake
      • of the gospel of Jesus Christ
  o until we really become
    • what the church was intended to be.
  o We were called out of this world
    • to come together as a body!
• A community of believers,
  o the fellowship of the cross.
    • The free citizens of a heavenly community,
      • summoned by the gospel
        o from our varied places in the world
          • to be assembled together
Notes by Pastor Tony McCall

The Pentecostals of Lake City

Empowered Church

- to hear from God
- and to serve one another!

- We are a diversity of people
  - with a diversity of backgrounds,
    - He has called us out of every
      - kindred, every tribe and every nation,
        - out of darkness
          - into His marvelous light.

- We are the church!
  - And we are most effective
    - when we are pulling together,
      - when the whole body is unified
        - in vision,
        - in purpose
        - and in practice.

- This is why Paul warned us, in Hebrews 10:25
  - not to forsake the assembling
    - of ourselves together.
  - Because when you are missing,
    - or you are not quite where you need to be spiritually,
      - the church is less effective,
      - less powerful
      - and less able to accomplish God’s purpose.

- You might say, well that was all good and well in Paul’s day,
  - but times have changed.
    - The church has changed.
      - It’s not nearly as important today
        - as it was back then.

- Paul thought you might think that
  - so he went on to say
    - that the closer we get to the coming of the Lord,
      - the more important it is
        - that we assemble ourselves together!

- It is more important now,
  - than it ever has been before,
    - that the church come together
      - as the church!

The Fellowship

- Another important Greek word
  - that relates to the church
    - is KOINONIA (coin-no-knee-ah).

- It is difficult to translate into English,
  - but it carries the idea of
• communion,
• fellowship,
• sharing,
• and participation.

• It is used to describe
  o the LIFE that the church is to share in Jesus.

• In other words, EKKLESIA is what we ARE,
  o and KOINONIA (coin-no-knee-ah) is what we DO.

• Koinonia (coin-no-knee-ah) (“fellowship”)
  o is not just a potluck dinner
  o or church meeting
    ▪ with a bunch of familiar faces,
  o or a comfortable relationship
    ▪ with someone that you would have liked
      • in our out of the church!
  o Koinonia (coin-no-knee-ah) is the uniting together
    ▪ of vastly different people
      • into a common fellowship of believers.

• When the church began, koinonia (coin-no-knee-ah)
  o meant that Jews and Gentiles,
    ▪ who had been enemies for centuries,
      • were becoming one
        o in the body of Christ.
  o Breaking through thousands of years of separation,
    ▪ they came together
    ▪ to worship together.
  o Those who before would not even speak to one another
    ▪ now worshipped together in one church.
  o That is Koinonia (coin-no-knee-ah)!

• They were not all alike.
  o There was a plethora of opinion,
    ▪ a wide assortment of gifts,
      • but they found ways
        o to integrate their differences
          ▪ into a unified body.

• The unity of the upper room,
  o the unity that brought a core group of people together
    ▪ to share a common, powerful, experience,
      • was a unity permeated the church.
  o They shared Koinonia (coin-no-knee-ah)
    ▪ the fellowship of the body of Christ!

• Koinonia (coin-no-knee-ah) is a oneness,
  o A unity, a sense of belonging,
    ▪ that is only possible
      • through God’s supernatural work!

Empowered Church
• One author said that the neighborhood bar
  o is possibly the best counterfeit there is
    ▪ to the fellowship Jesus wants
    ▪ to give His church.
  o Let me clear: It is an imitation,
    ▪ It dispensing liquor instead of grace,
    ▪ escape rather than reality,
  o but it is a permissive,
    ▪ accepting,
    ▪ and inclusive fellowship.
• It is unshockable.
  o You can be yourself.
  o You can be honest about your shortcomings.
  o You can pour out your heart
    ▪ and bare your deepest darkest secrets
    ▪ and no one there is going to judge you.
  o The bar flourishes
    ▪ not because most people are alcoholics,
      ▪ but because God has put into the human heart
        o the desire to know and be known,
          ▪ to love and be loved,
          ▪ to have fellowship,
          ▪ to be accepted into a group,
          ▪ a community of like-minded people.
• With all my heart I believe
  o that is what Jesus wants His church to be.
    ▪ A fellowship where people can come in and say,
      ▪ "I'm sunk!"
      ▪ "I'm beat!"
      ▪ "I've had it!"
        ▪ and not be judged.
• This is what Jesus had in mind when he said
  o I will build my church.
    ▪ What a wonderful statement.
      ▪ My church Jesus said.
  o A place where people are accepted at face value.
    ▪ A place where people can belong,
      ▪ where they can fit in,
      ▪ where they can bare their souls
        ▪ and not be judged.
      ▪ Where they can lean on someone else's strength
        ▪ for a little while.
      ▪ Where you can let your guard down
Empowered Church

- And belong to something that is bigger than you.
  - That is Koinonia (coin-no-knee-ah)
    - And that is what Jesus had in mind
      - when he said, “I will build my church!”
    - An empowered church
      - is a church that is healing the hurting
      - binds up the broken
      - That gives liberty to those who are bound...
      - A church that loves.
      - A church that accepts.
      - A church that is unshockable...

- Listen, the church matters!
  - The church is so significant
    - that Jesus died on the cross for it!
      - You need the church.
      - I need the church.
      - We all need the church.

- And the world,
  - desperately needs the church
    - to be the church!

- The church is not a sheltered sanctuary for saints.
  - Rather, it is a survival station for sinners.
    - It is a place where we, all, can come together
      - and minister to one another.
    - Where we help bind each others wounds.
      - Where we help lift each other up.
    - Where the weary can find rest.
      - Where the troubled can find peace.
    - Where the unlovable are loved
      - Where the broken are mended.
    - That’s what the church is.
      - It is the only hope of a dying world.

- Our text declared that the very gates of hell
  - cannot hinder the church.
    - Satan and all of his evil minions
      - Are powerless in the face of the church!
    - There is nothing they can do to stop it.
  - But you can.
    - That’s how important you are to the church.
  - There is a task here that only you can do
    - When you neglect that,
      - Not only does it harm you spiritually,
It weakens the church
  ▪ And it may, very well, hinder a lost soul
    • from finding their way to the cross,
      o simply because you weren’t here
        ▪ to play your part!

CLOSE

• Years ago a tornado destroyed
  o a little church on the coast of England.
    ▪ The congregation was too poor to replace it.
  o One day a representative of the British Admiralty
    ▪ called on the local minister.
  o The official inquired if his people planned to rebuild.
    ▪ The pastor explained their situation.
  o The Admiral replied, “If you do not rebuild the church, we will.
    ▪ The steeple of that church
      • is on all of our charts and maps.
    ▪ It is the landmark by which
      • the ships of the seven seas
        o steer their courses.”

• I believe, that something incredible is happening right now.
  o God has opened a window of opportunity for his church
    ▪ in this present hour.
  o We have been granted a space of time
    ▪ to make the greatest effort
      • we have ever made
        o to impact our world
        o for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

• The political and spiritual climate of this nation is shifting,
  o and everyone’s eyes are on the church!
    ▪ The world is looking to the church
      • to see if the church will be the church!

• This is not the time to let up,
  o this is not the time to let down
    ▪ and this is certainly not the time
      • to distance yourself from the church.

• It is time to set the church back 2,000 years.
  o It is time to become a Book of Acts church.
    ▪ It is time to embrace the fellowship of the body.
  o It is time to commit and recommit ourselves
    ▪ to the cause of Christ.

• This is what it will take
  o to become an empowered church!
    ▪ We must realize:
      • We need the church

Empowered Church
and the church needs US!