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Lee Magness
jlmagness@milligan.edu

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The Christoform Church

A Reading from Matthew 16

Lee Magness

This reading reflects on the significance of Jesus's statement about the church in Matthew 16, falling as it does between the apostles' confession of faith and Jesus's prediction of his death and resurrection. His words remind us that the church always exists in the context of our profession of faith in Jesus Christ and in the context of our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will build my church,
and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it”** (Matthew 16.18).
2 The Christ rarely called them “the church,”
these come-after-me followers he had called,
these forerunners of the kingdom he came to proclaim.
1 But one day he did,
the day they sputtered it, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,”
the day the Pharisees and Sadducees failed to see the signs,
the day the disciples finally figured out about the bread.
2 He blessed them for their confession,
convincing them there would be consequences.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock . . .”**
2 So the church has a foundation,
1 not rock-in-hand, hold-rock, throw-rock, skipping-stone-rock,
but bedrock, house-built-on-solid-rock rock,
2 not Peter, now rock-solid, now rock-headed,
1 or even Peter's faith,
his “You-are-the-Son-of-the-living-God” agreement
with the “You-are-my-beloved-Son” living God,
2 but the Christ-formed focus of Peter's faith.
1 Jesus said, **“On this rock . . .”**
2 So the church has a foundation,
1,2 and that foundation is Jesus Christ.

- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I . . .”**
 2 So the church has a builder.
 1 The *I* is Jesus, the subject of the sentence.
 2 He is the architect as well as the archetype,
 not only the foundation but the foreman, the finisher,
 1 the doer of the action, the actor in the drama,
 2 the designer, the drafter,
 the journeyman, the master builder.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I . . .”**
 2 So the church has a builder,
 1,2 and that builder is Jesus Christ.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will . . .”**
 2 So the church has a future.
 1 *Will* means living in continuity with God’s past
 and leaning confidently into God’s fulfillment.
 2 *Will* means waiting,
 waiting on what God would do in the passion of the Christ,
 waiting on what God’s Spirit would do in the proclamation of the Christ,
 waiting on what God’s Son would do at his parousia, his coming.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will . . .”**
 2 So the church has a future,
 1,2 and that future is Jesus Christ.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will build . . .”**
 2 So the church has a present.
 1 The church is not ever a building, but it is always a-building,
 2 under construction, in process, in progress,
 1 standing in continuity with God’s past, finding fulfillment in God’s future,
 but living in the presence of the person of God’s Son,
 2 the present of the ever-living God,
 the present from the ever-giving God.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will build . . .”**
 2 So the church has a present,
 1,2 and that present is Jesus Christ.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will build my . . .”**
 2 So the church has an owner.
 1 *My* means that the church not only has a foundation and a founder,
 it also has a haver, an owner.
 And they are one and the same.
 2 The one who planned the church possesses it.
 The one who drew its blueprints also blesses it by dwelling in it,
 his house, his temple.
- 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will build my . . .”**
 2 So the church has an owner,
 1,2 and that owner is Jesus Christ.

1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will build my church . . .”**
 2 So the word *church* has a meaning,
 1 growing up in Greece, germinating in Germany,
 skipping over to Scotland, ending up in England.
 2 At its core it connotes “belonging to the Lord,”but there's more—
 more than belonging, behaving, “Lord-ly,”
 1 Shaped by the Savior, morphed into the Messiah,
 2 like the Lord, Christo-formed.
 1 Jesus said, **“On this rock I will build my church . . .”**
 2 So the church has a meaning,
 1,2 and that meaning is Jesus Christ.

1 Jesus said, **“. . . and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”**
 2 So the church shares a victory.
 1 The church has an enemy, death itself,
 all that opposes God’s life-giving reign,
 but an enemy already defeated, defeated by a death,
 2 an enemy on the defensive,
 whose walls will not withstand the charge of his church,
 the vanguard of his kingdom.
 1 Jesus said, **“. . . and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”**
 2 So the church shares a victory,
 1,2 and that victory is Jesus Christ.

2 The Christ rarely called them “the church,”
 these come-after-me followers he had called.
 1 But one day they would claim that name,
 having stood at the foot of the cross, having eyed the empty tomb,
 having peered at his pierced palms breaking bread, frying fish.
 2 One day they would claim that name,
 remembering that discipling meant denying,
 that being the church meant taking up their cross.
 1 One day they would claim that name,
 proclaiming, “He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
 1,2 And on that rock he will build his church.

LEE MAGNESS IS PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF NEW TESTAMENT AT MILLIGAN COLLEGE IN TENNESSEE AND CONTINUES
 ADJUNCT TEACHING AT MILLIGAN COLLEGE AND EMMANUEL CHRISTIAN SEMINARY (JLMAGNESS@MILLIGAN.EDU).

