

# VICTORY OF THE CHURCH

***“... I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)***

In the New Testament, the word “church” is translated from the Greek word *ekklēsia*. This word essentially means “assembly”. A church is a group of people who assemble together regularly (**Acts 14:27, 1 Corinthians 11:18**) to worship, practice the ordinances, preach the word, and exercise church discipline. The 1861 Swedish Baptist Confession of Faith robustly defines a church, *“We believe that a true Christian church is a union of believing and baptized Christians, who have covenanted to strive to keep all that Christ has commanded, to sustain public worship, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to choose among themselves shepherds or overseers, and deacons, to administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper, to practice Christian church-discipline, to promote godliness and brotherly love, and to contribute to the general spread of the gospel; also that every such church is an independent body, free in its relation to other Christian churches and acknowledging Christ only as its head.”*

When Jesus says that He will build His Church, it is the first time in the NT that *ekklēsia* is used, and the word emerges explosively. Peter has just rightly identified Jesus as **“the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16)**. Jesus shows Peter that this accurate understanding came from the Heavenly Father Himself (**Matthew 16:17**). In response to Peter’s correct answer, Jesus makes the hell-shaking statement **“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18)**. The more holistic understanding of what this Church will be, blossoms throughout the NT and reaches beautiful bloom in the Epistles. Here Jesus’ main emphasis regarding the Church is that it is built upon Himself as the Cornerstone, and the Apostolic confession of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, The Son of the Living God. Or as the Apostle Paul later says of the Church, **“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” (Ephesians 2:19-20)**. The Church is likened to a Temple (**Ephesians 2:21**), the Body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:12,13**), the Bride of Christ (**2 Corinthians 11:2**), and other metaphors.

No matter which metaphor is used though, Jesus Christ is the sublime and supreme Head, Bridegroom, and Cornerstone of the Church, He is the Lord of the Church! Jesus builds the Church and the greatest opposition, spiritual, physical, cosmic, or otherwise can never thwart the plans of the all-powerful, Sovereign God (**Job 42:2**)!

The gates of hell or Hades refers to the place of punishment for deceased unbelievers. The mention of “gates” points to the entryway for the dead and damned. It is a phrase that graphically refers to and emphasizes the power of death. But as John MacArthur says, *“Even death, the ultimate weapon of Satan (cf. Heb. 2:14–15), has no power to stop the church. The blood of martyrs, in fact, has sped the growth of the church in size and spiritual power.”* Death itself and the powers of darkness can pose no lasting or ultimate opposition to Jesus’ Church. Jesus is the Fortified Foundation, the All-wise Architect, the Holy Head, and the Benevolent Bridegroom, nothing can stop His great work of building His Church for His glory!

One gigawatt (GW) = 1,000 megawatts = 1 billion watts. A typical LED light utilizes 10 watts, and a typical coal plant is about 600 MW in size. No matter how glowing hot the burning fury in the coal furnaces or how much power a plant generates, it is used for the benefit of those

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it serves, as it brings copious amounts of light to citizens. No matter how hot the flames of Hades blaze, the power of death only serves to benefit and advance Jesus' church, as they shine as a light upon a hill (**Matthew 5:14-16**) or as Tertullian, the second-century Church father from Carthage, put it "*the blood of Christians is seed.*" The very powers of death and the flaming fury of the demonic realm only further the cause of Christ and the victory of the Church. Christ the Great Victor is building His Church and no damper can darken its light because it is an Organism and Institution composed of "**children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom [we] shine as lights in the world**" (**Philippians 2:14**).

*How does the unstoppable growth of the Church encourage you to serve more vigorously in the local church?*

*How does your view of the Church often differ from the victorious view that Jesus teaches?*

*Give one example of how opposition to your Christian efforts has actually brightened your witness for Christ?*

*Kevin Huggins*