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Beyond These Walls: Confrontation *Matthew 16:13-18*

Our family played a lot of Pinochle when I was growing up. One of my dad's favorite sayings when he was about to deliver the coup de grace was, "It's all over but the shouting." Well, as regards to our *Beyond These Walls* initiative, it is *almost* all over but the shouting. A few dozen of our families have already given us an incredible jump start: \$2,640,450. Next weekend the rest of church will lay *our* sacrifices on the altar. Then on Father's Day—Bluegrass Weekend, one service Saturday, one service Sunday at 10:00!—we *will* shout and sing and celebrate the results and top it off with a free pulled-pork BBQ on Sunday after church. (Sign up online!)

During our Town Hall meeting last Thursday, one person asked if talking about money scared off visitors. Maybe—and some members too, I think! But several visitors have been captivated by the vision of BTW. Last week I received this email: "I have been following your BTW sermons online while in Arizona and find them so inspiring and uplifting, my husband and I want to join the church. When is the next class?"

If you *are* visiting today, you have the chance—with no obligation—to listen to the tail end of a family conversation about our future as a church. We love these walls; they have served us and our community well. But we believe it's time to move *beyond these walls* as never before. To pay off our debt and free up hundreds of thousands of dollars per year so we can pour ourselves into our community as never before. In three ways. One, Releasing Leaders: raising up and training pastors and missionaries for a new generation. Two, Loving Gig Harbor: doubling down on our investment in Christ-honoring programs and ministries that serve and bless our community.

And our third goal—Multiplying LifeGroups—was illustrated by Brian and Stephanie in the video (visit www.chapelhillpc.org/beyondthesewalls to view). Some years back, our Session determined that most effective way to make disciples is through LifeGroups. Weekend worship is essential, but by itself, it can't make disciples. Nor will Bible studies, as important as they are. But a small group focused on making disciples, where you grapple with scripture, pray, and hold each other accountable for living out God's word—*that* is the engine of disciple-making at CHPC.

We have about 100 LifeGroups right now with something like 500 people. We want to double that. And, more importantly, we want to quadruple the number of professions of faith in Jesus Christ by training our LifeGroup leaders in evangelism.

And by the way, this focus on LifeGroups, we learned it from Jesus! The Lord taught large crowds but his primary focus was on 12 men into whom he poured his life. This sermon series has been exploring how Jesus took raw recruits and turned them into disciples that made history. First there was the *Call*. No one becomes a disciple of Jesus until they hear and obey his personal invitation to "follow me!" Second, we are *Conspicuous*. The only salt that makes a difference is the salt that touches food; the only light that helps is that which is uncovered. And last week, the *Courage* Peter showed in leaving the boat and

his friends and obeying the command of Jesus to walk to him on the water. If we don't have the guts to step out of the boat, we will never make history.

Today the principle is *Confrontation*. At first, this might seem a harsh word. But Jesus makes it clear in this story that the disciples who make history are the ones who are willing to boldly confront evil. Our text comes from Matthew 16:13 and following.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Caesarea Philippi is 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee at the foot of Mt. Hermon. It is one of my favorite places in Israel. It is cool and lush; a stream of water pours out of the side of the mountain. For millennia, this beautiful area was a site of pagan worship. In Old Testament times, it was one of the central sites for the worship of Baal, a fertility god. In the 3rd century B.C. it became a center for the worship of the god Pan, a half goat/half man deity renowned for his virility. In fact some of the "worship" included activities with goats that I will simply leave to your imagination. And finally, it became a center for emperor worship. A temple to Augustus once stood at the mouth of this huge cave.

The cave itself was key to the popularity of this site. It was believed to be a spiritual gateway that linked this world with the underworld. In other words, this cave was the door through which evil spirits entered and exited our world.

Caesarea Philippi might seem an odd place for Jesus to take a group of teenage disciples. A center of pagan worship that featured very sexualized activity. Frankly, it was a cauldron of spiritual evil. But Jesus led them here. They watched the frenzied worship devoted to Pan. They watched the worship devoted to a dead emperor who had been declared divine. And in that setting, Jesus asked, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" In other words, "We see what the people say about this goat/man, and we see what the people say about this man, Augustus." What do they say about the Son of Man? Who do people say that I am?

"Well," the disciples said, "John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or another prophet." Jesus paused, then came *the* question—the most important question every human being will one day answer: "Who do *you* say that I am?" It's one thing to speculate about what others think. "Some say this, others say that." That's cheap talk, and not very courageous. But it's another thing to say, "This is what I believe about you, Jesus." And Peter, predictably, was the one who spoke up. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." You are the Messiah, Jesus. You *are* the divine one. Not this goat/man. Not this dead emperor. You *are* the Son of the *living* God. That's who you are.

It was one of Peter's finest moments. Remember, only weeks earlier, Jesus called him "Littlefaith!" as he was sinking into the Sea of Galilee. But not now. Now, Jesus blesses him because God has given him a revelation. And then a new name: Peter. Rocky! (That's what Peter means; "rock.") "From now on, I will call you Rocky. And on this rock I will build my Church."

That is one of only two times Jesus uses the word "church." In Greek, it is "ecclesia." Do you know what that means? "The called-out-ones." (Tuck that away! We'll come back to it in a moment.) So, upon this

confession, Jesus will build his Church. And now come the fireworks: "...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Do you remember that cave? The cave believed to be the access point between this world and the underworld? Do you know what they called it? The Gates of Hell! *How cool is that!* How powerful must that have been? To be standing in front of the Gates of Hell as Jesus says, "...upon this rock I will build *my* church and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

But here's the deal. Nearly everyone misinterprets this passage! Here's how you have probably heard it taught in the past. Jesus promises to take Peter's confession of faith and use that as the foundation upon which to build a Church—a Church so strong that nothing the Devil throws at it—will be able to destroy it. In fact, here is how our ESV Study Bible comments: "'Gates' were essential for a city's security and power. (Hell) is the realm of the dead. Death will not overpower the church." Have you heard that before? Death, hell, evil will not prevail against the Church. Right?

Of course, this *is* true. Evil will *not* have the last word. Christus Victor. Except that is *not* what Jesus says here. In fact, it is the *opposite* of what he says. "...*On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" It's not the Church's gates he's talking about. It's the Gates of Hell! We the Church are not on the defensive. We are *attacking* the Gates of Hell. We are on the offensive! And the Gates of Hell, as strong as they appear, will not prevail! In the end, *our* assault against the forces of evil—the battering ram of truth and righteousness that we bring to bear against the strongholds of our enemy—will be too much! The Gates of Hell shall be shattered and God's enemies will be routed. Isn't this exactly what we talked about in our Spiritual Warfare series? "The Gates of Hell shall not prevail..."

Do you see how different this is from the typical understanding of this text? And how important it is for us as we near the end of our Beyond These Walls initiative? For this is *exactly* at the heart of *Beyond These Walls*. We are saying, "We are not going to hunker down behind the walls of this church. We are going on the offensive! We are going to multiply LifeGroups and train them to be courageous and send them into their neighborhoods in the name of Jesus to destroy the strongholds of the enemy. *And* we are going to release leaders to proclaim boldly in all the world that life and hope are found only in the name of Jesus Christ. *And* we are going to love Gig Harbor through strategic partnerships, not because we believe it's good to be good and nice to be nice. But because, when we care for our community in the name of Jesus, it gains a hearing for the one who is the only living God, the only Savior of this broken world.

Do you remember the literal translation of the Greek word for "church"? Ecclesia? "The Called-Out-Ones"! Isn't that interesting? And perfect? The church was never intended to be an organization that builds walls and hides behind them. From the lips of our Master we are told that His Church, built upon the rock of confession in Christ alone, will be those who are called *out*—out of the safety and nurture of our community and into a broken world, and yes, sometimes into a battle that is clearly a battle between good and evil.

Last week, one of our long-time members asked me an important question regarding BTW. "How do we avoid becoming just a social-service agency with robes and hymns?" Great question. And the answer is this: Everything we do we do in the name of, for the sake of, in the power of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. And we see every good thing we do as an assault against the Gates of Hell which we intend to destroy and whose victims we intend to steal from the clutches of the Devil. That's how!

We cannot watch what happened in Manchester last week and not remember what is at stake. But when we see these horrific, Satanic attacks, we might wonder, "What can I do; how can I possibly make a difference against such evil?" Well, it starts with each individual in this room taking the courage we

talked about last week, and having the guts to step up and into daunting situations with the authority and power of Jesus Christ.

I heard a wonderful example of this from our own Karen Rodenbucher, one of our children's ministry leaders. Karen recently travelled to Ireland where she served as a nanny for a family. She was pushing 16-month old Patrick in a pram on the way to the grocery store to get milk. Listen to what happened when she turned the corner:

Right smack in the middle of the alley were six big ruffians. Brawling, drinking beer, smashing bottles, and swearing a blue streak. My first thought was, "They kiss their mothers with those mouths?" My second was my dad's voice in my head: "Show no fear; don't be a victim." So Patrick and I headed straight up the hill into the center of them, and I picked out the one that looked the meanest and said, "Excuse me kind sir but could you point me in the direction of the Tesco? I need to buy milk for the baby."

Baby Patrick took one look at all of them and said "Wow!" All of the men laughed. The transformation of their faces was wonderful. They all looked like angels to me. The one guy said, "Mum, you shouldn't be back here; there are some very unsavory characters around here. It's not safe." I told them that because they were there I was in good hands. So they walked me up the alley to Tesco.

On the way, one of them asked what I did in America. I said I worked for my church. They chuckled and one said, "Of course you do." I told them we were finishing up a year of prayer, and one said, "I don't talk to God anymore. He doesn't listen." I stopped in my tracks and we all jumbled up. I said, "You are clearly mistaken. My image of God is Him sitting on the edge of His seat with His hand cupped to His ear, waiting to hear your voice." It was pretty quiet. Then I told him I would pray that he would find the courage to talk with God, and then they took me to the Tesco.

They waited outside Tesco for me, one man every two feet. No wonder no one else came in the store. Then they walked me down to the corner and, up the alley came my family. I said, "Look, there's my family," and began waving at them. I loved the look on their faces as they saw me surrounded by these nice men. The guys said their farewells and warned me again to stay out of the alley; that it wasn't safe. But then they added that they were there most nights if I needed anything.

I love that story; I love the courage of it. Karen was willing to walk right into the midst of something frightening and, by the grace of God, ended up making six friends and drawing them a little closer to the God who loves them. The Gates of Hell could not prevail, could they?

On this Memorial Day weekend, we are reminded of the ultimate price that so many have paid in order that we might live in courageous freedom. I believe that Beyond These Walls honors that sacrifice because we declare boldly that we will continue that battle for what is good and right! We will not hide behind these walls; but rather, we "the called out ones" will be courageous in confronting darkness and evil with the light and life of Jesus Christ.

Next weekend, we come together and make our sacrifice to that glorious end! For this last week, will you pray about the courageous, sacrificial part Jesus is calling you to play in helping eliminate our debt and free up resources to move beyond these walls as never before. You can find a pledge card at the Connect Center if you need one. But by now, you know the story, you understand the vision, and I hope and pray that 100% of us will join in. And when we do, the Gates of Hell will not prevail against us.