

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 56

by Zac Poonen

Building the church requires seeking God's interest first, denying oneself, and taking up the cross, and trusting God to take care of one's needs.

Duration: 24:34

Scripture: Matthew 16:18-27, Luke 16:13, Acts 2:1-4, Philippians 2:19-21

Topics: "Church Growth", "Spiritual Authority"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of building the church as the body of Christ, not just an organization, by seeking God's interests above our own. It highlights the need for revelation from heaven, spiritual authority, and self-denial to truly build the church. The speaker challenges listeners to prioritize God's kingdom and trust Him to take care of their interests, reminding them of the eternal reward for living a life dedicated to God's work.

Transcript

We turn once again today to a study on all that Jesus taught, from his life and from his words. And we've been going through the Gospels. Today we have come to Matthew 16 and verse 24.

We were just looking at Jesus telling the disciples for the first time about building the church. This is the first time in his life, and the first time in the Bible, the word church comes. They probably didn't even know what it meant.

Jesus did not come to make holy individuals alone. He came to build holy individuals into a fellowship called a church, the family of God, which is called in other places the body of Christ. And the relationship between the members in the church were to be exactly like the members in our body.

Many people haven't understood what Jesus meant when he spoke about the church in Matthew 16, 18. We need to look at that before we look at verse 24 because it's all in the same context. We looked a little bit at that last time and saw that, first of all, to build this church you need revelation from heaven as to who Christ really is, fully God, fully man, one whom we are to worship at the same time, one whom we can follow in our daily life and in our family life.

And we also saw that we need spiritual authority to build this church. You can't build this church with human wisdom. Revelation from heaven, first of all, you can't just build a church because you've studied

the Bible.

The Pharisees studied the Bible. They couldn't build a church. Peter got revelation from heaven.

That's the first thing. On that rock the church is built. Unfortunately, the church, Christians have moved away from revelation to study and understanding.

And that's the reason for the drift in Christianity towards compromise and Babylon. The second thing is we need authority. I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

We cannot build a church without spiritual authority that God has given us to do His work. You can't do it with human authority. It's not just that somebody appoints you a director or a pastor or a bishop and you begin to serve God.

That's a human appointment. You can't build a church with that. You need spiritual authority that Christ Himself gives you from His nail-pierced hands.

If you don't get that, you're not going to build a church. Let me repeat again. What I mean by church is the body of Christ.

Not individual holy people sitting together in a building that's a congregation. Today we think church is a building or church is a denomination like the Methodist Church or the Baptist Church. But the church Jesus spoke about is a body.

It's not an organization. It's an organism like the human body. Different members of the body all functioning together perfectly because of one reason.

They're all connected to the head. The only reason these two hands work together is not because they're always hanging around with each other. It's not because they're good friends.

What a lot of people have among Christians is friendship. Two hands hanging around with each other. But fellowship is where these two hands can work together perfectly like playing a piano because they're both perfectly connected to the head.

If one hand is paralyzed, this connection with the head is gone. It cannot work with the other. It's always because of a break of connection with the head that we cannot work together with someone else.

And so we see here that building the church, the real body of Christ, I'm not talking about building an organization called a church, but the real body of Christ where the people in a local congregation are fitted together like members of a body. Working together can only come if each member is directly connected to the head. It's paralysis that prevents one member from working with the other.

And so to build that type of church, whether it's 10 people or 11 in Jesus' case, or 100, to build them together, to work together, is like building a house. There's a lot of difference between 20,000 bricks lying on the roadside and those 20,000 bricks used to build a house because those bricks are interconnected in the walls and the concrete and the roof. It's little stones put together along with steel rods and then you have a house.

Otherwise it's just stones on the road and anybody can walk off with those bricks on the road. And that's what happens in many churches. People say, hey, you've stolen one of my sheep.

Why did you take this person from my church? Have you ever tried stealing a brick from a solidly built house? How in the world can you steal a brick from a solidly built house? It's impossible. You've got to break and hammer that house to take a brick out of it because it's stuck with cement to a lot of other bricks. But bricks that are lying loose on the roadside, anybody can walk off with.

And so when you say, if anybody says somebody's taken one of my members from my church, well that's because they were not built into a body. They were just loose bricks lying around there. In the same way in our human body, that's the other picture of the church.

The church is a house, the church is a body. Can somebody detach my hand and take it off? Yes, he can if it is an artificial hand. They make artificial hands nowadays which look so similar to human hands.

Exactly the same color and shape and everything. But that needs nuts and bolts to fit it together to my body. It's fitted here with nuts and bolts and there somebody can unscrew it and take out the hand.

But a real hand, which is a part of the body connected to the head, can never be taken out. You've got to cut it off, amputate it, but it can't walk off on its own and you can't take it out. And so when people talk about somebody being taken away from my church, I say that's not the body of Christ.

And that's the tragedy today. When Jesus said I'm going to build my church, he's talking about building his own body, his spiritual body. He had a physical body when he was on earth and he fulfilled God's will on earth.

And he went up to heaven and he sent the Holy Spirit to build a spiritual body, which is the church, the body of Christ, to continue doing the same thing that he did when he was on earth. What did he do when he was on earth? He denied his own will, he did not seek his own interest, but the interest of God and completed the work. And that's why he told Peter here that if your mind is not set, verse 23, on God's interest, you can never, you'll be a stumbling block to me.

You will not be a help to me, you'll be a stumbling block, you'll be an agent of Satan. So the important thing for a person to build a church, we saw first of all he needs Revelation, verse 17. We see that he needs authority, verse 19.

And we need people who are not seeking their own interest. In other words, people, verse 24, who take up the cross. This is the meaning of the cross.

If you want to understand the cross, just read verse 23 and 24 together. A person who got Revelation, Peter, in verse 17, who was given authority, verse 19, one minute later, he's becoming the voice of Satan. How quickly a person who's got Revelation, and been given authority by the Lord, can become the voice of Satan.

How soon? Because he's seeking his own interest, and not the interest of God. This is the tragedy in so much of Christendom today. And that's why Jesus said, if you want to follow me, and certainly if you want to build my church and be a co-worker with me, then you must deny yourself, and take up your cross and follow me.

You cannot follow me without denying yourself. And denying yourself is saying no to my own interests. Now every human being on earth is born and seeks his own interest right from childhood.

You see how children are always grabbing for things. They'll grab toys, and they'll fight, and push people away, and they'll even take other people's toys. That's how children are, and we have this habit of grabbing and seeking our own interests, what's good for me.

And when we have a family, we are married, and we have children, we're always thinking what's good for my family, and I go where it's good for my family. The whole race of Adam is only seeking their own interests. And other things they'll fit in where it is convenient.

Basically their whole life is surrounded in seeking their own interests, and then of course they may have a little interest in doing a few other things, a little social work, giving a little money to missions, or a little money for the poor, or the orphanages, and maybe go Sunday to church service, but basically the center of their life is seeking their own interests. Such people can never build a church. What they'll build is an organization, a dead system, and no such person can be a true servant of God.

A true servant of God is one who is not seeking his own interest in any area. He's given up his own interests. He's seeking God's interests because he's taken up the cross.

He's denied himself, and here is where the failure comes, of so much of church building nowadays. Because we're seeking to save our life. That's what he said in the next verse.

I want to save my life. My life means not just my physical life, could be physical, but the soul life of mine. That means I want to save my reputation, my dignity, I don't want anyone to dishonor me.

Saving my life which has got all these many interests and ambitions and all that, I want to save that. And the Lord says if you're interested in all that, forget about building the church. You're going to lose it one day.

But the one who is willing to lose that self-life, not seeking his own interests, he will find it. He'll find it in a better way as he builds this church which will last forever. I've often thought about Noah's day, and I've said, Lord, if I were living in Noah's day, what would I do? Well, I'd earn my own living.

I would plow the fields and plant vineyards or something to take care of my family. But my main aim in life would be to build the ark, to go to Noah and say, hey, Noah, I'd like to cooperate with you in building the ark. Because I know that's the only thing that's going to remain pretty soon when the flood comes and destroys everything else.

So while I would take care of my family, my main goal in life would be to go and build the ark and to spend as little time as possible for my own interest to provide for my family's needs, but to build the ark, to build the ark, to build the ark. I would dream about building the ark and sleep at night thinking of new ways to help building the ark. That is how a true Christian would live today.

He does the minimum necessary to take care of his family, but his mind will be set on, how can I build a church? How can I build fellowship? Not a church building, but build God's people into a fellowship related to one another like the members of a body, like stones, like bricks taken out from the roadside and built into a building. How can I do it better? How can I do it better? This is the person who is seeking God's interests. Compare it to a person who is seeking business interests.

The reason why I compare is because Jesus said, there are only two masters in the world. We've studied that before, God and money, Luke 16, 13. There are only two masters and the second master is not the

devil.

It is money. Christians are not at all in danger of serving the devil. Christians are in great danger of serving money and earthly things and material things and most of them do.

And how do you know which of these two is your master? Is God your master or money your master? Supposing God calls you here and money calls you there at the same time. Which one do you listen to? That's your master. See, if there is a slave here and there are two people calling him to two different directions, it is very easy to find out who is his master.

The one he listens to is his master. So if money calls you in one direction and God calls you in another direction and you listen to money, you are a slave of money, whether you know it or not. And you need to be honest with yourself and ask yourself, whose call are you responding to day by day? Whose call are you responding to when you look forward to your ambitions on earth? This is why there are so few really faithful servants of God on this earth.

Because most of them are servants of mammon, material things and money. See what Paul said in his day about Timothy. In Philippians in chapter 2, we are talking about the cross, not seeking our own interests, denying ourselves, not trying to save our life but willing to lose it for the sake of the gospel.

In that connection, if you look at Philippians in chapter 2, when Paul is thinking of sending somebody as his representative to Philippi to encourage them and also to learn himself what their condition is so that he himself can be encouraged by hearing about the condition of the Philippians. Philippians 2.19, he says, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy, Philippians 2.19, to you shortly so that I may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. He says, I want to send somebody to you, not just to find out how things are going on there, anybody could go and find out that, but someone who is spiritual enough who could come and build them up and discern what their condition is.

You see, it really requires a spiritual man to discern the condition of a church. The ordinary man cannot understand that. So Paul wants to send somebody to learn of the condition of the Philippian church, their real spiritual state.

He says, I've got to send somebody who's really spiritual. Only a spiritual man can have discernment. Other people will say, well, there were 135 people meeting and there were so many children and this is the program they have for the children and these are the days of their meetings and all these external things which don't really reveal their spiritual condition.

A person with spiritual discernment won't be discovering whether there were 135 people there or 150 people and what programs they had and what times they met on Sunday. These are not the things that he'd be concerned about. He'd be concerned about what is the spiritual state of all these people and of this church.

What's the spiritual condition of the elders? And only a spiritual man can discern that. So he says, I want to send somebody to find out your condition and I can't find a single person among all my co-workers. He's not looking at the unbelievers.

He's looking not even at the believers. He's looking at his co-workers and saying, which of them can I send to find out the condition of the Philippine church? He says, only Timothy. I have no one else of kindred spirit, means one who's got the same spirit as me.

One who's got the same spiritual vision and longing and ambition that I have. There's nobody. Here is somebody who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

Now if he had said just concerned for your welfare, that would have been enough. But some people pretend to be concerned. Here was one who was genuinely concerned and he said, they all seek after their own interests.

Remember what the Lord told Peter? You set your mind on your own interests, not God's. And here we have the same thing in Philippians 2. People seeking their own interests, not God's interest, not those of Christ Jesus. The same contrast between two interests that we saw in Matthew 16, 23.

We find here in Philippians 2 and verse 21. So there we discover what type of person can build the church. One who is not seeking his own interests.

Now the entire race of Adam, everybody seeks their own interests, as I said. They're always thinking what is best for me and my family. I'll go wherever is best for me and my family.

I'll do whatever is best for me and my family, that's fine. But if you want to be a true servant of the Lord, you've got to ask yourself, well, God will take care of the interests of mine and my family. Let me seek what is the best for God's interest on this earth.

There are very few like that. There are very few like that in the first century. There are very few like that in this century.

Whose whole mind is set on what is best for God's interests. How can I be available for God's interest in my life? I want to ask you, dear friend, do you want to be a wholehearted, radical servant of God and spend your earthly days in the best possible way? Then be dedicated completely to God's interest and put to death every interest of your own 100%. Yeah, that's the way.

Be genuinely interested in the things of God and his interests. And then you may say, who's going to take care of my interests? God will take care of your interests. Do you think God can do a better job of taking care of your family than you yourself? I can testify after I quit my job in the Navy 46 years ago.

And I got married 44 years ago. And I have four children and we were very poor when we started. But we decided to honor God, my wife and I, in every single step.

And I can tell you as we have sought to put God's interest first in our life for all these many years. And especially in the last 37 years since God filled me with the Holy Spirit and showed me what it was to build his church, local churches in different places. I've discovered one thing.

That is, the more I set my mind on God's interests and I had to sacrifice a lot of time and money and energy that I could have had for my family, I found God to care of my family. And he did a far better job than I could have ever done. I mean, it's like saying, God, I take care of your interests and you take care of mine.

Isn't that a good exchange? You take care of God's interests and he takes care of your interests. The other is, you take care of your interests. God says, okay, you do that.

So Timothy was interested in the things of God. And God's interest was the way he was always thinking. And where the clash came, if I put that first, that's the meaning of seeking God's kingdom first.

Then I may have to deny myself this and I can't do this and I can't do that for my family. Don't worry. God will do something better.

That's what it means to live by faith. So that is such an essential thing to build a church and there are very few. In Paul's day, imagine, his own co-workers, he could not find people with that type of passion.

There was just one Timothy. And even today, there are very few whom God can find like that. I'd urge you to be one like that because then you won't have any regret in eternity.

You'll have lived a wonderful life on earth and come through to a glorious life at the end of it all. And let's turn back to Matthew 16 where we were. So if we seek to save our life, means seek our own interests.

That's what it means to save my life, my interests, I always want to preserve them. I'll tell you, you lose it. But if you're willing to lose it for the gospel's sake, for Christ's sake, it's a life of faith that means you trust that as you give up something for God, he will never be in debt to you.

Remember Jesus said even a cup of water that somebody gives will get a reward. Imagine if you've given up all your interest to seek God's interest, what your reward will be here on this earth. You'll take care of all your needs.

What will a man be profited? Supposing you said, okay, the Lord says, supposing you set all your mind on your own interests and pursue it, pursue it, pursue it, pursue it, and you ultimately end up gaining not only wealth here and there but the whole world and you've lost your soul. Now we quote that verse to an unbeliever. I want to quote it to believers.

What does it mean to gain the whole world? You spend all your life pursuing earthly things and you get all that and ultimately you've wasted your one earthly life. God gave you one life to live for him on this earth and you've lost your soul. You've wasted the one thing you should live for.

What can you give in exchange for this one earthly life that could be lived for God? What can you give in exchange for your soul? Then he said in verse 27, think of the final day. That's what we must always think of. One day the son of man is going to come in the glory of his father with his angels and he'll reward every man according to his deeds.

Every man will be rewarded according to his deeds. What did he live for? Did he seek his own interest? In the whole context of this, that's the debate. Deeds means what did he live for? What did he seek his own interest? Not did he give a little money in the offering box? Did he go to church every Sunday? That's not the point.

The Pharisees went to the synagogue every Saturday. They gave money. They tithed.

They prayed. They fasted. But they went to hell.

That's not the issue. The issue is, was your mind set on the things above, on God's interest? Did you trust God? Did you live by faith where you believed he would take care of your interest? And then he says, I want to say to you, there are some of you standing here who will not taste of death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. How is that? That's referring to the day of Pentecost, when the kingdom of heaven came to earth, the Holy Spirit.

And he says, some of you standing here will be able to experience that. Jesus called the day of Pentecost the coming of the kingdom of heaven, the son of man, Christ, coming in a body through 120 people on earth. And he says, some of you standing here, not all of you, some of you may die, but some of you standing here will see that.

And dear brothers and sisters, we're living in that age where we can see the power of the Holy Spirit operating. Be open, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and seek with all your heart, not to seek your own interests anymore, but to say, Lord, I want to seek with all my heart the things of the kingdom of heaven, and to build your church, the body of Christ, with the one earthly life I have. You'll never regret in eternity when the son of man comes in the glory of his father and his angels, and sets up his kingdom, and rewards you publicly for what you did and lived for him on this earth.

We'll stop there and continue in our next episode.

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