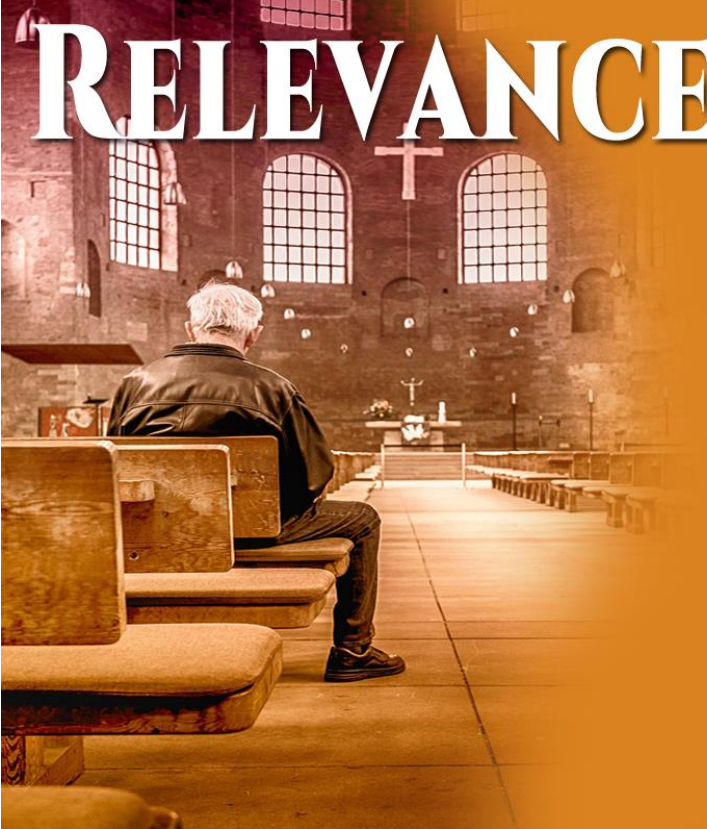


April 21

“The Relevant Church”



# RELEVANCE

*“The Relevant Church”*

Matthew 16:15-18

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“Who do you say I am?”  
Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”  
Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.  
And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Special Music: “Whatever Your Plan Is”

Josie Buchanan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MoLLtZlxdE>

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## **ABOUT THE CHURCH**

**Where is the church  
In a world gone mad?  
Does it sit on a corner  
And pretend that its glad  
When it's Dark. Empty. Silent?  
Except on the Sabbath  
When believers gather  
Because they would rather  
Worship together  
Through chaotic weather  
Tethered together  
Rather than alone in the dark  
Searching for candles  
In their own troubled minds.**

**What is the church, we ask,  
As the passion play fades?  
Where are the people  
And the Christian brigades  
That carried the flag?  
Do we still understand  
The 'what' of the church,  
Of the needs it once met  
As the people gave search  
In a quest for answers  
To answerless questions,**

**Helping the helpless**

**As long as they came through the door.**

**When is the church?**

**Is it still in the now?**

**Has its time come and gone**

**Do the people still bow**

**To the awesome nature**

**Of their precious Creator?**

**Or have we lost our humility**

**As the chaos takes hold**

**Brandishing winds of futility**

**Leaving us out in the cold**

**Waiting for a chance**

**Some future circumstance,**

**That will bring a better tomorrow**

**Without ever a glance**

**In the mirror.**

**Why is the church**

**Fading from view?**

**Have we all forgotten**

**Our faith to renew?**

**That we're to bring to the table**

**The souls of the lost**

**And the hearts of the hungry?**

**Are we so focused on the sundry**

**Of problems we face**

**Forgetting it isn't our place  
To question the plan  
That God has for man,  
But simply to serve  
As the Creator commands.**

**Who is the church?  
Who is responsible  
To bring order from chaos  
And remove all the obstacles?  
Perhaps it's our pride  
That clouds our prospective  
And allows us to blink,  
And lose our respective  
Understanding regarding  
Who is the bride,  
And who is the groom.  
Who is the church?  
Well maybe it's me,  
And maybe it's you.**

Here is a tough question for all of us. What makes the church relevant in today's world? That line drawn in the sand has become fuzzy with age. I hear so many people say that the church has lost its relevance. That it no longer functions to meet the needs that it was created to meet. Many of those people will also say the same thing about Jesus, and even God. That God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and Bible, they are no longer relevant. After all, wasn't the church created to help the widows, feed the hungry, save the lost, help the poor, and make the world a kinder and more loving place? And yet, widows are being ignored, the hungry remain hungry, the number of lost souls seems to be expanding, the poor remain poor, and most people do not see the world as neither a kinder, nor loving place. The work of the church seems almost invisible when compared to the overwhelming needs of the people that inhabit this planet.

War, pestilence, strife, starvation, violence, anger, misinformation, hatred, bigotry, prejudice, and avarice seem more prevalent today than ever before. People are afraid to love people because they believe that those people that they might love are only out to hurt them. We listen to the news and, depending on the resource, we can get totally different information and disinformation, and it always seems to be opinionated. Opinions are spouted as fact with no reference to reality or truth. The word on the street is that the message of the gospel is no longer relevant, because such a message of love, grace and mercy doesn't fit in with the common world view. Everyone, our government, our teachers, our philosophers, our ministers, our leaders, our bosses, our influencers are only out to make their own lives better, not ours. This is the message that we are

bombarded with minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, and year after year. And as we approach the coming election, the mixed messages that we are receiving will only get worse. And we will decide which of those messages we want to embrace and which ones we will ignore, because... because why? Because we feel that we have a right to believe what we want to believe, truth be damned. The world has taught us this.

But as Christians, we aren't called to listen to the messages of the world, but the message of Christ. And once we decide the messages that we receive from the world are more logical, more truthful, more stable, more relevant for us than the message of the gospel, then that is where we plant our flag. But Jesus prays for us in John 17:13-19

**14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.**

**15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.**

**16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.**

**17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.**

**18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.**

**19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.**

And even as Jesus is trying to protect us from the message of the world, we turn a deaf ear to the message of our Creator and believe the very message that our

Savior is doing his best to keep us protected from. The world does not own us. The world is not our friend. The world wants to harm us. The world spouts voracious clouds of lies that for some reason, despite the presence of the Holy Spirit and the words of Jesus, we seem to want to embrace. It's no longer about truth, but about which lies we choose to believe over the message of Jesus Christ.

**15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”**

**16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

**17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.**

**18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**

This passage of scripture has been argued over for millennia. There are those who believe the scripture is saying that Peter is the rock, and that Jesus will use him as the foundation for the creation of his church. But there is also a large segment of theologians and theologists (including myself) that believe the reference for the rock in this passage is the truth that “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Now that is a rock, an unbending truth, that I can relate to.

I will say this as plainly as I can. If the church is built on the premise that the referenced rock is a human, it is doomed to fail. Other than Jesus, there has

never been a human born that could stand as the foundation for the creation and sustaining of God's church, the bride of Christ. Never. We, and I mean every last one of us, are flawed. We are sinful, selfish, wretched souls, and without the cleansing power of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, we could never come before our Creator, much less be the bride of Christ as his church.

I know you have to be thinking, "so, preacher, if the church is built on the foundation of the message that Jesus Christ is the Lord, the Messiah, the Son of the living God, what happened? Why are there so many empty churches all over the world? Why hasn't the church remained respectable, relatable, and relevant in the world today? What has changed?"

I enjoyed watching the television series, Murdoch Mysteries. Detective William Murdoch was always ahead of his time and brilliantly played by Yannick Bisson. In many ways, he reflected the brilliant processes of Sherlock Holmes, but with some of those processes awkwardly renamed giving a certain amount of levity to the show. Whereas Sherlock Holmes refined the process of fingerprints, William Murdoch refined the process of fingermarks. Why do I mention that? Because when I look at the church of today, I expect to see the fingermarks of Christ all over it, molding it. But what I often find instead, is the fingermarks of humanity, trying to reconfigure it and make it more palatable. That's kind of like taking a pair of shears to a wedding gown on a bride's wedding day thinking that somehow, we are going to improve it. The church was never meant to have the fingermarks of humanity all over it. That is taking something so beautiful, put in place by our Savior to bring substance to our relationship with our creator, and



**desecrating it to meet our own needs. What happens when the church no longer reflects the image as bride of Christ because we have chosen to spoil it to its foundation, forgetting that the foundation is built on the message of Christ, a message of love, hope, understanding, mercy, forgiveness, and inclusivity? At what point is the bride still the church Christ intended and how much has been reconfigured by the greed and salaciousness of humankind? When the church ceases to reflect a true image of forgiveness and grace, how can we still call it the bride of Christ when it is more a reflection of what WE want the church to be, rather than what Christ intended for it be?**

**The church is not a club where we pay our dues, elect officers, and determine who is eligible to enter and who is not. The church is not governed by Robert's Rules of Order. The church is not a building that sits on a corner and is empty 6 out of 7 days a week. The church is not about ministers who govern their flocks, nor is it about flocks that govern their ministers. It is a flock and minister who, together, serve one Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. A flock and a minister with no walls that separate them from the work they are charged with. A charge to love their neighbors. A charge to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in a world that appears to only worship money, power, and greed.**

**In the two verses just prior to our scripture today, we read:**

**13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"**

**14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."**

Jesus is saying, “What are people saying about me? I want you to tell me. When they talk about me, I want to know who they think I am?”

Why does it even matter to Jesus? Is he just trying to understand what kind of influence the maddening crowd has on his disciples? Remember, at this time, before the cross, before the resurrection, Jesus has done miracles and healed a great number of people. But so had Elijah, Elishah, Jeremiah, and other prophets. What set Jesus apart? Why didn’t these well-known prophets get their own churches? What is so special about Jesus that makes this conversation so important? What sets him apart from those who came before him?

In our scripture today, Jesus responds with an even more poignant question:

**“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”**

This is a personal question. “Forget what other people are saying about me. Right now, right here, at this moment, at this time, knowing what you know, and having heard my words and watched my example, **Who do you say I am?”**

And Peter is the one who responds,

**“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

Not a prophet, not just a teacher, not just a miracle worker. Not just a nice guy with radical ideas about loving and caring for people. Not just a guy that the very winds and waves obey. Not just a guy who walks on water and raises people from the dead.

**“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

Jesus tells Peter that this understanding of who Jesus is, did not come from the minds of men. This revelation doesn't spring forth from the minds of prophets and wise men. Not from Kings, magicians, astrologers, or philosophers. No, this understanding comes from the Creator himself, from outside the sphere of man's influence, untouched by the flawed thinking of human beings, and revealing truth, validated by the fingermarks of the Living God.

And it is this understanding upon which Jesus will build the church.

**“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”** becomes the foundation upon which the church is built, a divine revelation from our Heavenly Father.

The Church is a living, breathing, bride of Christ, born to carry a message of love, hope, mercy, grace, wonder, joy, and peace to the far corners of the earth. It is this common understanding of who Jesus is that creates the bond for believers around the world. Yes, we may have our differences, but Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27:

**12 There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ.**

**13 We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body. It didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink.**

**14 So the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts.**

**15 Suppose the foot says, "I am not a hand. So, I don't belong to the body." By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body.**

**16 And suppose the ear says, "I am not an eye. So, I don't belong to the body." By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body.**

**17 If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell?**

**18 God has placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be.**

**19 If all the parts were the same, how could there be a body?**

**20 As it is, there are many parts. But there is only one body.**

**21 The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!"**

**22 In fact, it is just the opposite. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the ones we can't do without.**

**23 The parts that we think are less important we treat with special honor. The private parts aren't shown. But they are treated with special care.**

**24 The parts that can be shown don't need special care. But God has put together all the parts of the body. And he has given more honor to the parts that didn't have any.**

**25 In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. All of them will take care of one another.**

**26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part shares in its joy.**

**27 You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.**

And yet, we have such difficulty in accepting this. We think to ourselves, "Everything would be so much better if we all just believed the same way." But folks, that's not how a body works. It is our differences that make us complete, a stronger presence in the world. And we should neither envy nor condemn our fellow believers, our siblings in Christ. For we are one body. One bride for Christ, the Messiah, made specifically to be a body that serves God's children wherever and whomever they are.

Think about that this week as we reach out into our community, not to change the community, but to embrace it and welcome each and every soul to the table of Christ, who welcomes all. Let us embrace our differences. For as long as we seek to embarrass or invalidate one another, we fail the body as a whole. It is our common message and our ability to work through our differences, allowing each other the opportunity to serve as Christ's hands and feet that makes the church relevant in the world today.

**God bless you all.**

**AMEN**

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