

October 21, 2012

Satan's Favorite Lies

The Church Can't Be Trusted

Matthew 16:13-20

Opening words:

Did you know for the first time in our history, the United States does not have a Protestant majority? The reason is the number of Americans with no religious affiliation is on the raise. The Pew study found that 20% of Americans have no religious affiliation, an increase of five per cent over the past five years. Everyone is wondering why? This is the truth.

Over the past few decades the number of Americans with a negative view of the church has been growing constantly. You know it is true. These are challenging times for the church. Consider these findings from the Schaffer Institute.

*Every year more than 4000 churches close their doors compared to just over 1000 new church starts.

*Every year, 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity.

*From 1990 to 2000, the combined membership of all Protestant denominations in the USA declined by almost 5 million members (9.5 percent), while the US population increased by 24 million (11 percent).

*At the turn of the last century (1900), there was a ratio of 27 churches per 10,000 people, as compared to the close of this century (2000) where we have 11 churches per 10,000 people in America!

*The United States now ranks third (3rd) following China and India in the number of people who are not professing Christians.

*Half of all churches in the US did not add any new members to their ranks in the last two years.

Do you know of anyone who has dropped out of church? Do you know of anyone who believes Satan's lie, the church can't be trusted.

This is message number six in my seven part sermon series, *Satan's Favorite Lies*. To date, we have looked at these lies:

God can't be trusted

Some things can't be forgiven

God grades on a curve

Suffering should be avoided

The Bible can't be trusted

Today, I want to expose the lie *The Church Can't Be Trusted*. Our scripture reading for today is Matthew 16:13-20. May God give you ears to hear.

Matthew 16:13-20

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." 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. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

The first funeral I ever officiated at was for a man by the name of Randolph Scott. I never met him. He was an inactive church member. I was called by the local funeral home to say some parting words. I didn't know the man so I began to question people in my congregation about him. Long-time members told me there was a time when he was a true leader in that small congregation. I asked each one of them two questions. "What happened? Why did he leave?" Every person I asked had a different answer. Some people said Randolph Scott left over a disagreement at a church board meeting. Some people said Randolph Scott left because the preacher didn't visit his hospitalized mother. Some people said Randolph Scott left because he was mad at God. His grandson was born with challenges. Some people didn't know why Randolph Scott left but they were just glad he was gone. He was a jerk! He tried to run the church like his own personal business. Other people missed him. Do you have a Randolph Scott in your life?

Do you know any church drop outs? At one time they valued the church. They never missed worship. They sat on all the committees. They labored in the kitchen and were generous when the plate was passed. For years, every time the church doors were open, they were present. Then, something happened and they suddenly disappeared. The church they once valued suddenly meant nothing. The same energy that once supported the church now is used to criticize it. Do you know of any church drop outs? You must know someone because there are so many.

Peter Brookshaw asked people, "Why didn't you go to church?" These are the ten most popular answers. Can you relate to any of them? People don't go to church because ...

1. Christians are viewed as judgmental and negative
2. Christians are viewed as weird
3. Christians are viewed as homophobic
4. Christians are viewed hypocritical
5. Congregations are exclusive
6. Worship is boring
7. Churches always ask for money
8. Organized religion is seen as insincere
9. Life is better without religion
10. Lack of Time

Many believe the church is struggling because the church has forgotten our primary purpose. I am in that camp. We have no energy left to address our primary purpose, make disciples for Jesus Christ. We spend all of our time and energy raising money to meet the budget. We spend all of our time and energy maintaining the building. People work so hard doing those things that there is no energy left to make a single disciple. We spend all of our doing good things. However, there is nothing left to do the most important thing.

We are like that large steam powered locomotive, which sits in Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan. Beside this complicated piece of machinery is a sign showing boiler pressure, size and number of wheels, horsepower, lengths, weight and more. The bottom line indicates that 96% of the power generated was used to move the locomotive and only 4% was left to pull the load. How much energy do we spend maintaining ourselves? How much energy do we spend making disciples for Jesus Christ? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

Today, I want to remind you of three functions the church must do to remain being the church. If we stop doing these things then we really stop being the church God's intended. Let us look at the scripture lesson together.

Today's story is one of those rare stories that is found in all three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. What you heard was Matthew's version of Peter's confession. It is a pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry. Jesus is walking along with the disciples. As they walk, they talk. Jesus asks them the question, *"Who do people say I am?"* They give some impressive answers. Some say Moses. Some say Elijah. Some say Jesus is one of the other prophets. Jesus doesn't really care what others are saying. Jesus really wants to know what is on their minds. So he asks them the question, *"Who do you say I am?"* Suddenly everyone stops talking. No one wants to be wrong. It is Peter who speaks first. He says, *"You are the Messiah, the son of the living God."* Jesus is pleased with his answer. He looks at Peter and says, *"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."*

The interpretation of that verse has divided the universal church for years. Within the Roman Catholic tradition, the rock to be Peter, himself. This is the verse that makes Peter the first Pope. Within the Protestant tradition, we understand the rock to be Peter's faith. The rock is everyone's faith. Listen to what I am about to say. Through the eyes of God, the church is not denominations, buildings and programs. The church is nothing more than the total collection of the faithful. Men and women who can collectively answer the question correctly, "Who is Jesus?" If you understand Jesus to be the Messiah, the sons of the living God then you are part of the church!

As the church there are three things we must do. First, as the true church, we must remind people of **God's love**. Second, as the true church, we must remind people of **Jesus' mission**. Third and finally, as the true church, we must remind people of their own **eternity**. So if you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"** First, we must tell the world of God's love.

God's Love

On April 4, 1994 the city of Cleveland was alive. It was more than just another opening day for the Indians. It was the day the club took ownership of their new home, Jacob's Field. It was an exciting day in my family because I had tickets to that game. They weren't just any tickets. They were the best tickets I have ever had to a Major League baseball game. I sat about five rows behind the home dugout. It was also an exciting day for my wife, Kathryn. At the time she sang in the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus. They were to sing as part of the opening day ceremonies. She wore a big red bow in her hair so I could spot her. I took a pair of binoculars so I could see her. There was a lot to see. There was a little drama on the field during pre-game. The players were introduced and ran onto the field for both teams, the Indians and the Mariners. The starters, Dennis Martinez and Randy Johnson, warmed up in the bullpen. They revealed a giant American flag that went from the right field line to the left field line. The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus led the sellout crowd in the National Anthem. Then President Bill Clinton threw out the first pitch. There was a great deal to see but I kept my binoculars on one thing, my wife's big red bow. Why? Kathryn was more fascinating to me than anything else. Some things don't change. It is the same as God's love for us. He just can't keep his eyes off of us! First, the church must remind the world of God's love. Just think about it for a moment. The God of the universe, the God who created this whole world out of nothing, can't keep his eyes off of you. Romans 8:37-39 says, *"No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Never forget, God loves you so much he can't take your eyes off of you! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"** First, we must tell the world of God's love. Second, we must tell the world of Jesus' mission.

Jesus' Mission

History tells us Napoleon's army was deeply devoted to him. To the point that one day one of his marshals was mortally wounded in battle. As his end drew near, he sent for Napoleon. The poor man thought his emperor could do anything. So he earnestly pleaded with his leader to save his life. The emperor sadly shook his head and turned away. But as the dying man felt the cold, merciless hand of death drawing him irresistibly behind the curtain of the unseen world, he was still heard to shriek out, "Save me, Napoleon! Save me!" In the hour of death, that soldier discovered that even the powerful Napoleon could not give him physical life. Napoleon was just a man. Second, the church must remind the world of Jesus' mission. Jesus was not just a man. He was the most unique man in the history of the world. He was God incarnate. That means God took a human form and entered into our world. That is why we celebrate Christmas. That separates Jesus from all other religious leaders. Moses, Mohammed, Buddha, and Confucius were all good men but they were not God incarnate. However, none of them were the incarnation of God. None of them lived a perfect life. Each one of them has a grave but not Jesus. The Master came back from the dead and defeated death for all of us. That is why we embrace Easter. The bottom line is Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus came to offer us salvation. John 14:6, "*Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*" If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior say, "**Amen!**" First, we must tell the world of God's love. Second, we must tell the world of Jesus' mission. Third and finally, we must remind the world of their own eternity.

Your Eternity

In sixteen few days you are going to vote for President of the United States. Are you going to vote for Barack Obama? Are you going to vote for Mitt Romney? Both sides want your vote. We have endured a mountain of political advertising. I cannot tell you how to vote but I would encourage you to take your vote seriously. The winner will influence the next four years of our country. Four years is a long time but it is nothing next to eternity! Third, and finally, the church must remind the world of eternity. The church has never been consumed with the here and now. The church has always been consumed with eternity. Those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are going to spend eternity in heaven. Those who have never accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will spend eternity in hell. The most important question you will ever answer, the question that will influence is own eternity is: do you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior say, "**Amen!**"

In 1986, evangelist Jimmy Swaggart began on-screen attacks against fellow televangelists Marvin Gorman and Jim Bakker. He uncovered Gorman's affair with a member of his own congregation, and also helped expose Bakker's infidelity with [Jessica Hahn](#). These exposures received widespread media coverage. Gorman retaliated in kind by hiring a private investigator to uncover Swaggart's own adulterous indiscretions with a prostitute. Swaggart was subsequently forced to step down from his pulpit for a year and made a tearful televised apology in February 1988 to his congregation. In 1991, Swaggart was once again caught with a prostitute. When the California police asked her why she was with Swaggart she replied, "He asked me for sex. I mean, that's why he stopped me. That's what I do. I'm a prostitute."

Satan tells us not to trust the church. It is a lie but the church, itself, in our lifetime has made his case. The true is church is not denominations, buildings or programs. The true church is not fancy logos or memorable phrases. The true church is that collection of true believers. People, just like Peter, who were not afraid to tell the world that Jesus was God's Messiah, the Son of the Living God. As the church may we remind people of **God's love, Jesus' mission** and reality of **eternity**. Joel Osteen said, "*You can be committed to Church but not committed to Christ, but you cannot be committed to Christ and not committed to church.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"