

LIVE|15 – The Ordinary Revolution

The Context of Ordinary

Matthew 16:13-20

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¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (Matthew 16:13–20)

The vision for our spotlight called LIVE is to help you put into practice some very practical aspects of the Christian life, to encourage you to share what you are learning, and to learn from others in a small group. We designed this month to have an effect on individuals AND on the community of our church.

Our theme for the month of August is **The Ordinary Revolution** – renewing our passion for the ordinary Christian life that creates extraordinary life change. The burden for this series came out of my growing concern of a trend that I see in my life, in our church, and in the landscape of Evangelical Christianity when it comes to always looking for “The Next Big Thing.” While there is nothing wrong with extraordinary moments, the Christian life is more often filled with really good, helpful, ordinary experiences. And I’m pretty sure we have not thought about that enough: *“We’ve forgotten that God showers his extraordinary gifts through ordinary means of grace, loves us through ordinary fellow image-bearers, and sends us out into the world to love and serve others in ordinary callings.”*¹

In case you missed last week, there are three things that we would invite you to do during LIVE|15:

- **Learn** – Through Sunday morning messages, a discussion guide, and a number of resources, my hope is that God will create some new categories in your mind and ignite old passions in your heart.
- **Try** – We are offering 12 unique challenges, and we’d like you to pick one to put into practice during the month of August.
- **Share** – There is something important and helpful about sharing your experience with others. Whether it’s your family, your Bible Study, a Small Group, your ABF class, or a temporary LIVE group, we want you to engage with others as to what God is doing in your life and in their lives.

¹ Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2014), 14.

Last week I introduced you to the beauty of ordinary as we talked about what it means to abide in Christ and to have Him abide in us. We looked at abiding as starting with a connection to Jesus, as a dependent relationship with Him, and also (this is where ordinary fits!) as a continuation of that relationship in every arena of life. I suggested to you that to abide is to bring the life-giving power of Jesus into every aspect of your life such that everything is touched by the influence of His life, His power, His words, and His love. So, how did that go this week? Did you have any struggles? Did you fail? Did you make any progress?

Remember, apart from Jesus you can do nothing (John 15:5). That statement guards us from pride if last week went well, and it protects us from despair if we failed. Keep abiding in Him, and He in you. That's the key.

What is Your Vision of Church?

The Ordinary Revolution starts with understanding the beauty of abiding in Christ, but there is also a context for the ordinary Christian life. And that is the church. But what is the church? What makes for a good Sunday? What is your vision of what the church should be?

Throughout church history, this has been a very important question and one that has been directly affected by the dominant culture. Let me give you four images:²

- **Ladder** – the tendency in the Roman Catholic Church was to see church as cosmic ladder leading from the lowest spiritual level to the highest, represented by the pope. The church is a path for you to move yourself closer to God.
- **Fortress** – the Anabaptists tended to see the church as a community of true saints who had fled the world and the compromised church. The church is a refuge from the world.
- **School** – the Reformation tended to produce a vision of the church as a place of learning and education. The church is a place to increase one's understanding about God and His grace.
- **Market** – I think it's safe to say that the dominant view of church in the 20th and 21st centuries in the United States has been one of multiple choices from which people can pick and choose. The church is a place to help me get what I need.

The challenge with each of these images is that there are elements of truth in all of them. And yet they are not complete. What's more, in some cases they can be misguided and even dangerous. However, the image is not the real problem. The real issue is the vision behind the image. Or, to state it more bluntly: What is your vision for the role of the church in the ordinary Christian life? What is the role of this church in your spiritual life?

You see, the Bible uses other metaphors that are a blend of authority and relationship. Words like kingdom, gathering, family, body, garden, and city are all used to describe what the church is all about. The metaphors change depending on the particular emphasis, so let's see if we can get to the heart of the vision for what the church, what this church, is supposed to be.

² Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2014), 169

Importance of the Church

It might surprise you to know that the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) only record Jesus using the word “church” twice. Both references happen in the book of Matthew, and the way in which the word is used is very important. Matthew 16 and Matthew 18 are the places where the word appears:

¹⁸ *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. Matthew 16:18 (ESV)*

¹⁷ *If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**. And if he refuses to **listen even to the church**, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:17 (ESV)*

From these two uses and the surrounding instructions, we learn a lot about what makes the church important.

Confessional

The first thing that I want you to notice is the importance of what a person “says” about Jesus. In Matthew 16:13-15 Jesus asks the disciples about what other people are saying about the Son of Man. The disciples answer with historical figures like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. He then turns the question directly to his followers: “*But who do you say that I am?*” (Matt. 16:15). Peter speaks for the group of disciples and really every future follower of Jesus. “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matt. 16:16).

Everything that follows in verses 7-19 is predicated upon this confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah and as the Son of God. It is the starting point and the foundation for everything. In other words, the church is first and foremost a people who have confessed Jesus as Lord. Notice that I’m saying that it is not just that they “believe” in Jesus, but a church is built upon a common confession.

We’ll talk more about this in a moment, but I simply want to register this thought: The church is a group of people who have identified with Jesus by confessing Him as Lord.

Providential

In verse 17 we see Jesus affirming Peter’s confession of faith as something that ultimately did not come from Peter. The confession of faith was something being revealed to Peter and attributed from “my Father who is in heaven.” In other words Peter’s confession is connected to something beyond himself – the sovereign power of the Father.³ There is a direct connection between what Peter is confessing on earth and God’s will in heaven.

Personal

Jesus then makes a very personal statement to Peter about his confession. He says, “*You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church . . .*” (Matt. 16:18). What is Jesus saying here? He is identifying that Peter, as a representative of the disciples and all confessors, has articulated the foundation of a new spiritual reality – the

³ The Apostle says something similar in 1 Cor. 12:3 – “. . . no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

church. The word for “church” simply means the gathered ones, the called- out ones, or the congregation. In its basic form, it just means a gathering of people who belong to and identify with Jesus.

This has more sweeping implications than what you might realize. Jesus is identifying a very significant shift in focus and authority. The spiritual center is no longer going to be the physical temple, but the spiritual temple of the people who are gathered together and who confess Jesus’ name. Peter is a foundational part of that new reality. Here is how the Apostle Paul states the same idea:

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19–22)

Therefore, the ordinary church is simply the gathering of ordinary people who have confessed, “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Spiritual life is located with and in a people, not a temple. And that is really amazing. Do you see the gathering of our church that way? The temple with all its grandeur, beauty, and mystery was very impressive and inspiring. Capitol cities and temples are designed to be that way. But there is something even more impressive and inspiring about the church gathered in the name of Jesus. But I wonder if you see the church in the way that Jesus had in mind here. Do you realize how unbelievable the weekly gathering of the confessors of Jesus is?

Powerful

Verses 18b-19 helps us to see even more specifically the nature of the significance of the church. Notice three statements regarding the church’s power:

1) “The gates of hell will not prevail against it” – The church is in the midst of a spiritual battle, and the people of God are not just in a defensive posture. The church is bringing the light to the world, and Jesus is providing assurance that nothing in this world or in the next can overthrow the church.⁴ The church is in a battle, and we will not lose!

2) “I will give you the keys of the kingdom” – To be given the keys means to be given authority. For instance, the book of Revelation says that Jesus has the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:18, 3:7). Jesus is imparting to Peter and to all confessors a level of divine authority. Through Peter’s confession, and in context of the gathering of God’s people, Jesus is imbedding an authoritative connection between heaven and earth.

3) “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven . . .” – Jesus takes this authority even further by specifically identifying that there is connection between what happens on earth and what happens in heaven. Whatever the “key-holders” bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever they loose on earth is loosed in heaven. To bind and loose was a common role for rabbis in Jesus’ day as they declared what was forbidden and what was acceptable. As applied here it means that this new community is given divine authority in

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 425.

regulating itself and in deciding who should be admitted to or excluded from its membership.⁵ In other words, the church has been given authority to be a guardian of the gospel.

Matthew 16 helps us to see what that looks like on the front end. Peter's confession is affirmed by Christ, set in the context of the church and the powerful dynamics that are in play. The church is representing Jesus on earth, acting on His behalf, and has the authority to guard the gospel by deciding who should be in the church and who should be out. The church is important because of the powerful affirmation of personal professions.

Discipline in the Church

Now some of you are thinking, "How judgmental!" But do you want just anyone claiming to be a Christian? Isn't there something wrong about someone who says they believe in Jesus but lives in a contradictory way? You see, in the same way that the priests were called to distinguish what was holy and what was not (Ez. 44:23), so too the church is now called to do the same.

What's more, that is the role for the entire church! Confessors of Jesus Christ are called to know the gospel and guard the gospel because every person is part of that priesthood, with a responsibility to maintain the holiness of the church (see 1 Peter 2:5,9; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

This becomes especially clear when it comes to what is often called church discipline. Matthew 18:15-20 is the main biblical passage on church discipline, and there are amazing parallels to what we find in Matthew 16.

In verses Matthew 18:15-16 we see the process for resolution of conflicts and grievances. First, the person is to be confronted personally (v. 15). If he refuses to listen, then one or two more are to participate so that "every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses" (v. 16). This was a common Old Testament legal precedent coming out of Deuteronomy 19. If that step still results in an unwillingness to listen, then it is to be told to the church (v. 17). Remember, this is the second time that Jesus uses the word church! The first was in regards to affirmation, and now we see it used in regards to discipline.

If the third step does not yield repentance, then the person is to be declared an "outsider" – "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:17). The church has been given declarative authority in order to guard the gospel.

Now look at what follows in Matthew 18:18. Jesus uses the same authoritative language that was formerly connected to the keys of the kingdom for the authority related to church discipline:

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."
Matthew 18:18–20 (ESV)

Once again we see that there is something very powerful that is given to the church. What is happening on earth is affirmed in heaven. What confessors pray about together has a unique power to it. And when the

⁵ Morris, 426.

church gathers in its most fundamental form – “two or three gathered in my name” – Jesus is there. Think about this!

This gathering of people is different than all other gatherings on earth. What happens in the context and the life of this assembly has authority and implications way beyond what we often realize. Every seven days, on the first day of the week, a group of people called College Park Church gather together, and what we do has other-worldly effects.

We are representing Jesus to the world. We are called to affirm those who confess Christ, and we are called to disaffirm those who do not represent Jesus in the world. We are called to know the gospel, confess the gospel, and guard the gospel so that we can share the gospel in the world.

When you thought about coming to church today, is that how you thought about it? Did you have any idea how important this gathering really is? Do you know that Jesus has promised that he will be with us? Do you know that there is heavenly authority operating right now?

How do you see the church? As a ladder, a fortress, a school, a market? My guess is you see those metaphors differently now, and my hope is that you are starting to see that there is far more significance to the ordinary church than what we even realize.

Ordinary Expressions of the Church

What are the ordinary expressions of the church, and how could we see them differently today? If God moves through the ordinary life and the ordinary means of grace, what does that really mean, and how should we see it differently today?

The Lord's Day

Sunday is a part of every week. It is an ordinary part of everyone's calendar. God designed it to be that way with the intention of it being a day for spiritual reorientation – a reminder of what life is really all about. That is why God rested on the seventh day and blessed it (Gen. 2:3). That is why keeping the Sabbath holy was a part of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:8-11). In the Old Testament it was day to be reminded that human activity is not the foundation of everything; God is the center. After the resurrection of Jesus, the church met on the first day of the week to celebrate and remember the essence of what it means to be a Christian (Acts 20:7), to be reminded that Jesus is the center.

This day, Sunday, is a very important day. It is part of every ordinary week, but it is anything but ordinary. What we celebrate, mark, and remember on this day is what a Christian's life is all about. So do you view the Lord's Day through the lens of it being a special day? Or is just another day with different activities? Culturally we are not helped with all of the other things that are beginning to intrude on Sundays. From soccer games, school meetings, band practice, catching up on emails, in-service meetings, and any number of other things, Sunday has become just another day.

Now I'm not suggesting that it is necessarily sinful for any of those to happen on a Sunday. I lived in that cultural fallacy in West Michigan. But what I am saying is that Sunday has to somehow be different because what we celebrate is more important. And I've seen it happen that someone who views Sunday as just

another day of the week and thinks that he can neglect what happens on Sunday eventually finds himself in an unfortunate spiritual condition. You need ordinary Sundays!

Congregational Worship

Sundays are the context for our gathering together in corporate and congregational worship. How do you think about this gathering and what happens in the context of a worship service? Do you come with a mindset that considers the significance of what this gathering is all about? Do you come with a sense of the connection between heaven and earth? Do you consider the importance of what we are doing here?

In gathering, we are assembling an expression of the body of Christ. In other words, you cannot be the body of Christ by yourself. In singing together we are joining our voices in considering and confessing truths that have changed our lives. In giving we are tangibly affirming that everything belongs to God. In praying we are uniting our hearts together in a way that is unique from our private prayer times. In the Word we are learning and rehearsing the truth of God's revealed word to us. And in leaving we are sent back into the world to live another six days on a mission, with a purpose, and with the aim of representing Jesus to the world. Our worship together is very important and special.

Baptism

Believer's baptism is one of two ordinances of the church. It is a picture of a spiritual baptism that happens when a person puts his or her faith in Jesus. By going into and being drawn out of the water, a person is symbolizing that they have been crucified and resurrected with Jesus. They are "in Christ."

In Matthew 28 Jesus charged to the church to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). By being baptized in the name of Jesus, a person is going public with his or her relationship with Jesus. They are announcing that they confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That is why every follower of Jesus needs to be baptized. It is more than just a church ritual; it is your public affirmation that you are confessing Christ as Savior and Lord. That is also why baptism is such a special moment in the life of the church as we witness together people who are publicly identifying with Christ. Baptism is an ordinary part of church life, but it is anything but ordinary!

Membership

Another important but ordinary expression of our church is church membership. What is membership? It is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church's affirmation and oversight of a Christian's discipleship and the Christian's submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.⁶ It means that the church affirms that you are a follower of Jesus. It means that a church is taking responsibility for you and you for the church.⁷

It means that you have a different relationship with people inside the church than with those outside. For instance, if you work with a guy who is a member of College Park Church, and you know that he's involved in an immoral relationship, you have a different obligation to him than you do to another co-worker who is a

⁶ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership – How the World Knows who Represents Jesus*, (Wheaton, Illinois: 2012), 64.

⁷ Leeman, 65.

believer but not a church member. Being a church member means that you have covenanted with a group of people to follow Jesus and to help them follow Jesus.

As I've studied this issue over the last year, it has reinforced the significance of church membership. You need someone else to affirm your profession of faith. You need a people to watch your life and evaluate your fruit for both conviction and encouragement. You need people who will walk with you. You need leaders to whom you submit. You need people whom you are watching over. In other words, a lifetime of discipleship doesn't happen without the church.

For those of you who are members, remember this is what being a part of this body really means. And for those of you who aren't, I would gently ask you to consider what is holding you back. You need to be a part of a people where formal affirmation and covenantal oversight has been established.

Lord's Supper

The final element is something that we are going to put into practice in few moments as we partake of the Lord's Supper together. Receiving the bread and the cup is a memorial and a renewal meal. It is a memorial in that we rehearse the centrality of the gospel. We remember the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and we pledge our lives to Him again. And for those of you who are members, it is also a time to be reminded that you covenanted with a people who are sharing this meal with you. In partaking, you are renewing your relationship with Jesus but also with the people with whom you represent Jesus on earth. This ordinary meal has extraordinary implications.

So how do you view the church now? Do you see the tragedy and the fallacy of seeing the church as a market, a school, a fortress or a ladder? The church is a body, a vineyard, a gathering of ordinary people who have been given extraordinary grace and extraordinary authority to represent Jesus on earth.

Ordinary Christians need the ordinary gathering of God's people because of the extraordinary opportunity to guard and proclaim the gospel.

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