

The God of Mission Has a Church in the World

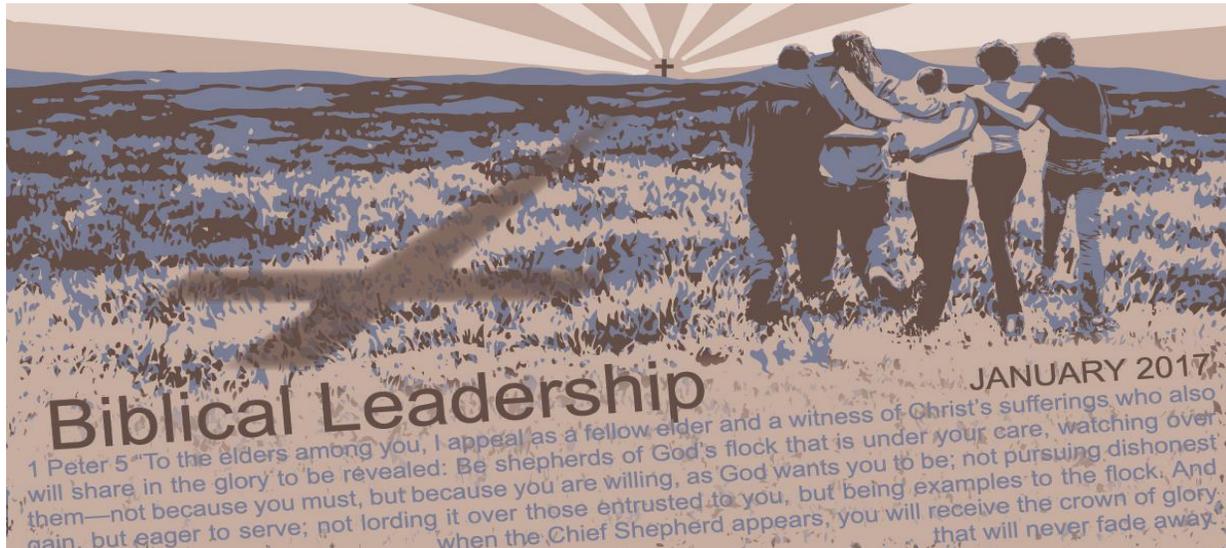
January Sermon Series on Biblical Leadership

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

January 1, 2017

TEXT: Matthew 16:13-19



This morning as we begin this January series on *Biblical Leadership*, we want to turn our attention to a distinctive vision of leadership that is given to us in God's Word. The Christian vision of leadership is in stark contrast with cultural or corporate paradigms around us, firstly, in that biblical leaders are recognized by the godliness of their character; secondly biblical leaders are to serve as a shared leadership team as seen in Scripture. We see throughout the New Testament a particular a vision of how the church is to be organized with shared leaders so that the church that has been entrusted with the gospel can be mobilized for maximum mission. Where we are headed this January is to look at the church and what it is. This is no small thing. The church of Jesus Christ is the one institution that is eternal in this world. Governments will rise and will fall. Great military forces will come and will go, but the church, this seemingly innocent looking place that is easy to drive past, is actually an eternal institution, and we want to talk about that this morning.

The church matters in an incredibly important way, and so over the following weeks in January we are going look at: how the church was led; what type of person is this; how leadership is exercised within the body of Christ; and we are heading for the last week of January to look at the real reason for that—so that the church can maximize its mission in the world. This morning, we are going to begin with a seminal passage in Matthew 16 where Jesus speaks about the church. In Matthew 16, Jesus withdraws with His disciples; He is confessed to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God; and He

gives a description about what the church is. This vision of the church should be the controlling image that carries us through the January series, and if the church is the things that Christ described it to be, then we rightly ask the question: "How is the church led, and why is it lead in that way?" It is lead in that way, as we will head through the month, to see that it is to be positioned to maximize the impact of the church in the world, in our community, and in our neighborhoods.

As you look at Matthew 16 with me this morning, I want to make seven observations about the church from this text. This is a very important text. This text is a moment in Matthew, Mark, and Luke when the gospel narrative turns and takes a decisive shift. Keep your Bibles open and let's look at the church, who it is and what it is called to be in this portion of God's Word. The text begins in Matthew 16:13:

"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'"

The first observation I want to make about the church is that ***the church is a community of people who are committed to following Jesus***. Don't miss that observation, because this group of disciples has been with Jesus. They have been eating with Him. They have been living with Him. They have been journeying with Him. They have watched His miracles. They have listened to His teaching, and they are committed to following Him wherever He goes, so when He withdraws from public view up into the northern area of Caesarea Philippi, they go with Him. It is a building block of discipleship, it is a building block of a flourishing church, to be a community of people who are committed to following Jesus. That means that Jesus will go places that you would not choose to go, but if you are following Him, you will go with Him. I have had the privilege of following Jesus into some places that I never would have chosen to go and have conversations with people that I never would have chosen to begin, and yet Jesus walked in front of me to do that. So, number one, we desire, we strive, to be a community of people who are committed to following Jesus, and in this case it takes the disciples to the Caesarea Philippi. In Matthew 16:14, Jesus turns to His disciples and He listens to their replies to His initial question: Who do people say the Son of Man is? His disciples report to Him:

"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

The second observation I want to make from Matthew 16 is that ***the church is a community that cares to know the opinions of the culture about Jesus***. If Kenwood Baptist Church would be a flourishing church, we must not only be a people who are committed to following Jesus, we must be a community that cares to know what the culture thinks of Jesus. When Jesus asked the question: "What are people saying about Me?" they know, because they are listening. There is a range of opinions and perspectives about Jesus in our surrounding environment. The three answers that the disciples give in the first century are all attested in the sources. People hold these

opinions. From the upper class district, Herod the Tetrarch, (this is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great) had slaughtered John the Baptist because he criticize him for the immorality of his marriage. When you are a person of power and someone criticizes you, one of the responses available is to slaughter that person, and that's the route that Herod takes. He has John the Baptist killed, and yet, he hears the news about Jesus and he panics and he says, "I think this might be John the Baptist raised from the dead, and if that's true, I'm in trouble." Even Josephus says that Herod Antipas lost a major battle engagement because of his treatment of John the Baptist, but that's a subject for another Sunday. That voice is attested. Mark 6:14 reports that many in the crowds thought that Jesus was Elijah, from the characteristic miracles, from the note of repentance. Many held this view. Others had the report that Jesus was like one of the prophets of old. Luke 7 tells us that when Jesus came into a town of Nain, His disciples and a large crowd went with Him. He came up to the town gate and a dead person was being carried out. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd was with her, and we read in Luke 7:13-15:

"When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, 'Don't cry.' Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother."

The response of the crowds was to be filled with awe and praise God and say in Luke 7:16:

"A great prophet has appeared among us."

These answers are attested. People have partial information about Jesus. I can't help but think of this text in Luke 7 when our dear brother Joseph first went to the school in Nigeria and the Lord told him to go early in the morning hours and to speak and to proclaim Christ. Joseph went and stood early in the morning in the spot where the Lord had told him to stand. The sun had not come up, and he began to speak and preach about Christ. He preached from this passage about Jesus' invading your life and bringing healing. As he began to speak and preach in the darkness, students began sliding open their dorm windows. As the sun came up, he could see that the Lord had called him to stand at the open end of a 'U' of buildings so that he was able to speak and preach to thousands of his classmates. The Lord calls us to go. If we are going to be a flourishing community, we have to be committed to following Jesus wherever He goes. Are you willing to do that? Really? Will we be a community that is willing to follow Jesus wherever He goes? Will we be a community that cares to know the opinion of the culture about Jesus? If you don't know what people think about Jesus, you might erroneously conclude that they know Him, and if you think they already know Him, then you don't have to say anything and you can talk about something else. If you don't know what the people think of Jesus, then you have no way, no path, open to bridge that conversation: You're starting here; let me fill out the picture. You think that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead? He's not. You think that Jesus is a prophet? He

is something much greater than a prophet, as we'll see. Jesus turns to His disciples in Matthew 16:15, and in a very terrifying way, He says to them:

“But who do you say that I am?”

I remember my first experience studying in a different culture, in a different language. I don't know what made me think this was a good idea, but I accepted an offer for a scholarship at the University of Québec, in January, in northern Québec in January, and the program was called *Français et Neige: French and snow*. It was the coldest language learning environment conceivable. I took the train and I arrived in northern Québec in a blizzard. It was about 30° below zero, and I thought surely someone from the university would be there waiting to pick me up at the train station, but there was only an eerie silence. So, I got into a cab and realized the cab driver didn't speak any English. I somehow managed to get to the hotel, and the next morning I showed up at the university, ready to start *Français et Neige*. I began to tell my story of arriving late at night, and it was 30° below zero, and I made it here. I'm telling the story, and the people in the office are looking at me, and they are smiling. Then I realize they don't understand what I'm saying, and I thought, *Français et Neige* is really going to be *Français et Neige*. I saw the *Neige*, and now here comes the *Français*. It was this moment of when you are in a different language environment, you can hear the gist of things, but when someone turns and asks you a direct question and they are waiting your response, then you really know where your language skills are. It's not enough to just nod. So here in our text, Jesus turns to the disciples and says: “You report the opinions of the crowd, but who do you say that I am?”

The third observation is that ***a church is a community that is born out of a personal response to Jesus Christ***. This cannot be a flourishing community of friends that are here just because we are friends with one another. To be a flourishing church, this must be a community that is born out of a personal, specific response to Jesus' question, not what other people are saying, but what do you say? Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replies, and this is the turning point of the gospel narratives. He replies in Matthew 16:16:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The fourth observation from this passage is that ***the church is a community that confesses Jesus Christ as the Son of God***. At the foundation, the supporting stone of our existence as a church is in this confession of who Jesus Christ truly is. When we gather together we confess that Jesus is more than a prophet; that He is more than a teacher; that He is more than a good example; that He is the incarnate Son of God, the Messiah sent and enthroned as King of the world. We gather in the presence of Royalty when we gather as a church this morning. Do you believe that? We gather to sing about who Jesus truly is. We gather with a shared confession, and this confession defines the community. We are defined not by our ethnicity, not by our education level, not by our wealth, not by our status. We are defined as a people, as a group that confesses that

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that makes the church a distinctive, recognizable body in the world, proclaiming Jesus as He really is. It is so extraordinary when this happens. For some, this happens over many years, a gradual movement to finally a recognition—I see Jesus.

The week between Christmas and New Year's is supposed to be a week off, but ended up being a week with many moments of ministry. One of the most joyous moments of ministry was to meet brand-new Christians from the Middle East. I was just blown away by brand-new believers, and seeing Jesus at work in the world. When I think of realizing that Jesus is the Son of God, I remember participating in a trip with others from Kenwood and teaching God's Word. Our dear brother Bill Artzt was leading a class discussion of Farsi speakers through the movement of Scripture, describing how God's saving purpose begins in Genesis and comes into fulfillment in the incarnation of Christ, and His willing offering of Himself to pay for your sins and mine, His resurrection from the dead to be enthroned forever as Son of God. In the middle of his class, Sharuz, one of the men who was participating the class all of a sudden shouted: "I see Him! He is the Son of God!" That's what it means to be part of a community that confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. That makes us something different. It makes us something unique in the world. It makes us something everlasting. It makes us something dangerous to the kingdom of darkness when that's happening in and through the ministry of this church. Sharuz said, "I see Him! He is the Son of God!"

This leads us to the fifth observation that ***the church is a community that embraces God's sovereign power to reveal Christ.*** The very next word that Jesus gives is a blessing. Jesus says in Matthew 16:17:

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

Flesh and blood is the biblical idiom for normal human beings. Jesus told Simon he could not know this about Him unless the Father revealed it to him. If this will be a flourishing church, then this must be a church that embraces and relies on and beseeches God and trusts God's sovereign power to reveal Christ. This changes the way we pray; it changes the way we do mission; it changes the way we teach children, students, adults. We rely on God's sovereign power to reveal Christ. When parents tell me of a son or a daughter who was not walking closely with the Lord, I tell them the place to go with your prayers is to the Lord. I will join you in praying that God will position His people on the path of their life. I will pray with you for your son, your daughter, that God will encounter them on the way and that He will reveal Christ in a way that is impossible to resist. The power of ministry is God's, not our own. Jesus reveals this to us in the nature of the church: a community that embraces God's sovereign power to reveal Christ.

Jesus then says to Peter in Matthew 16:18:

“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.”

The sixth observation I want to make is that ***the church is a community that Christ builds, and though heavily opposed will one day fill the earth.*** Do you believe that? I really believe that. I believe that no matter what this looks like with the human eye, this actually is the winning team. It will be heavily opposed, and often the opposition will arise precisely when the church is claiming possible territory. If people are not coming to know Christ through the ministry of Kenwood, then we will face no spiritual opposition. If the Word of God is not being proclaimed at Kenwood, will have no spiritual enemies. But, if the Word is proclaimed, if the church is active in mission, if Christ is proclaimed here and through you throughout the week, then the church will be opposed. But that's okay, because Jesus said that He will build the church, and though heavily opposed, the church will one day fill the earth.

This image of the rock is an Old Testament image, the source of all good ideas. All good ideas come from the Old Testament and come into flowering fruition in the New. This image of the rock filling the earth comes from Daniel 2. In Daniel 2, the Babylonian king is given a vision, and in this vision the king of Babylon sees the splendor and authority and power of the kingdoms of this world in a very awesome, impressive-looking statue. In Daniel 2:31, the king sees a great image:

“This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.”

The king of Babylon is given a vision of all the kingdoms, this succession of earthly kingdoms in their power in their glory, and he is amazed by it. Yet, as he looks at it, suddenly in Daniel 2:34 we read:

“As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Look what happens to the rock. It becomes a great mountain and fills the entire earth. This is the winning side. You will be tempted, I will be tempted at different times in life to think that it is this kingdom or this cause to which I must pin my hopes, and yet the Word of God teaches us that the Kingdom of God will fill the earth. As awesome as a temporary display of earthly power may seem, it is the church, it is the Kingdom of God that endures forever. Notice carefully that the church is not man-made. It is a stone cut without human hand. It is cut by the Lord, and Daniel interprets his vision in Daniel 2:44 so that we can be abundantly clear that this rock is the Kingdom of God:

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.”

The church of Jesus Christ and all of its local expression endures forever. It will never topple. It is built by Christ, and though heavily opposed, it will one day fill the earth.

This year is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Five hundred years ago, the church recovered the gospel—justification by faith, salvation by grace through faith alone. The church recovered the sufficiency of Scripture, the might and power of God. Martin Luther's hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* was penned at this time—great lyrics placed to a barroom tune. Some of the best songs we have are bar songs with new lyrics.

1. A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
2. Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth, his name,
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.
3. And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.
4. That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them, abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours,
thru him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;

the body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever.

The church is everlasting. Jesus then tells Peter in Matthew 16:19:

"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."

This rock built without human hands, it will rise and fill the earth. Jesus tells Peter, "You are part of this."

We see in the seventh observation that ***the church is a community of radical discipleship, holy restraint, and sacred mission***. What do I mean by this? The church as a community of radical discipleship is the place where heaven and earth meet. When we come together, that means that heaven and earth are together in this space. Do you believe that? I really do. When we sing, when I hear you sing and your voices cascade up behind me, it is as though heaven and earth are here with God our Father speaking to us, calling us into His Kingdom, an alternative kingdom, a place where heaven and earth meet together, a radical discipleship, and alternative life. It is a life that is characterized by this *binding* and *loosing*. This is Semitic imagery for the life of a disciple that has restraint to it. *Binding* and *loosing* is technical terminology for that which we are permitted to do and that which we are allowed to do. As I grew up, my parents were hippies and we didn't have any restraint. There were all kinds of things you can do, but no one ever really talks about things that you shouldn't do. Many of us growing up in this moment in history are told constantly that this world is filled with possibilities, that you can become anything, you can do anything you want. All you need is sufficient resources, maybe time, maybe a good backup on your hard drive, and maybe an alibi, and you can do whatever you want. You know where that leads you. It leads you to death. But, this community is a community where heaven and earth meet, of radical discipleship, and we discover together this *binding* and *loosing*. We discover the joy of holy restraint. That is one of the first building blocks of a flourishing community, to say: "In Jesus Christ, I am led by the Spirit and so I am not obligated to gratify every single desire that rises up within me, because some of those are terrible!" Some of us have a desire that rises up within us to take vengeance. Some of us have within us this dark pleasure of holding onto a grudge. The Kingdom of God says *holy restraint*. We are no longer obligated to ourselves. We are no longer obligated to live, walk, and gratify every strange desire that pops into our fallen—yet in process of being redeemed—humanity.

Peter writes later in 1 Peter 2:11:

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."

Abstain—what a great word! I think I didn't even know that word until I had been a Christian for at least five years. Abstain? I'm an American! We don't abstain from anything. Abstain. Abstain from the passions of your flesh which wage war against your soul, and you can abstain and keep your conduct honorable—a holy restraint. A community of radical discipleship, holy restraint, and lastly, but most importantly, of sacred mission. Why are we here? Why is Kenwood here? Why is the church here in the world? We are here for sacred mission. We are here not for ourselves. NT Wright said: "The church exists, in other words, for what we sometimes call 'mission': to announce to the world that Jesus is its Lord." The church is missionary by nature. It bears witness to God's redemptive reign. Robert Weber says: "The church's mission is to show the world what it looks like when a community of people live under the reign of God."

The church is to be a functioning, living body; moving. The mission of God flows through the church to the community, to the city in which we live, and to the world, flowing through each and every one of us. The mission of God flows through every believer. The life of the church is lived out, not just on Sunday morning, but throughout the week, and this is vital for us to be a flourishing community. Richard Halverson writes: "Christ's strategy is to scatter His people throughout the world between Sundays." Christ's strategy is to scatter you and me throughout the world, throughout your workplace, between Sundays, and to "penetrate society's structure from within." These are the true servants, ministers of Christ. Every believer, rightly understood, is in full-time service to Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? I really believe that. Part of what I want you to hear in the testimonies this January is that people come to know Christ. They come to this church largely because of you, and Christ's grand strategy is to spread you out throughout our city, to pray for a coworker, to testify to the grace of God in your life, to be an outpost of the Kingdom wherever you are. Every believer is in full-time service, and the church's impact, Kenwood's impact on this community, will be the aggregate activity of the scattered body throughout the week. That will be our impact, and when we gather, regather, on Sunday, we are fueled for mission, we are reminded of who Christ is, we are given renewed vision for how we are to live as His followers, and then we get spread out again. The English missionary CT Studd said: "Christians are like manure. If you pile them up together, it doesn't smell that good. But, if you spread them out over a huge field, the field flourishes and grows." With all due respect, can we embrace that call? That is what we are called to be.

As we look this January at leadership, I cannot separate the consideration of leadership from the mission. Why do we need leadership? We need leadership to accomplish the mission. Why is the New Testament led by a group of godly elders? It was to accomplish the mission. Why does the Scripture set up a model that we will trace? It so that the church might be mobilized and effective in the earth, in the community. That is what we want to be. We want to be a church that is a:

1. *Community of people who are committed to following Jesus*
2. *Community that cares to know the opinions of the surrounding culture*
3. *Community that is born of personal response to the revelation of God in Christ*
4. *Community that confesses Jesus Christ the Son of God*
5. *Community that embraces God's sovereign power to reveal Christ*
6. *Community that Christ builds and though heavily opposed will one day fill the earth*
7. *Community of radical discipleship, holy restraint, and sacred mission*

We want to be a part of that. Someone told me this morning that someone is here who will take communion for the first time. I don't know who you are, but I'm glad you are here. That means the mountain just got a little bit higher. Amen? We're a community of radical discipleship, holy restraint, and sacred mission. That is why we are here.

Now as we prepare our hearts for this feast, this celebration of communion, I want to remind you with Paul's words he spoke in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 to the Christian community:

"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

As we prepare to partake of communion, we usually think of this individually. We usually think of my personal readiness: have I accepted Christ? Let me assure you, if you have accepted Christ, you are welcome at this table. But this morning, I want us to think of this communion as a body, that when we partake we are issuing a proclamation to our city, to our community, that Christ has died, that Christ is raised, and that Christ will return again, and that we are to be a people following God's mission in the world as His church. Let us pray.

Oh Lord Jesus, we magnify You this morning. We extol You, saving Son of God. We thank You that the church is Your idea, that You build it. We thank You, Lord, for Your calling on our lives, and we pray that You would help us to not just attend church, but to be Your church in the world. Fill us this year, this New Year, with a fresh anointing of Your Holy Spirit. We pray this morning as a group that as we partake together we would proclaim Jesus' death, resurrection, and certain return, and that we would live and love and serve and go into our community as a result. Lord spread us out to be the aroma of Christ this week.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.