

The Church

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Preacher: Andy Farmer

[0 : 0 0] You know, our church is part of a denomination called Sovereign Grace Churches, and we work very closely with some of these churches throughout the country and throughout the world. Andy is from a sister church in Pennsylvania, Glen Mills, called Covenant Fellowship Church.

Covenant Fellowship Church is actually the church that originally the Huckins family was sent out from to join us as we were starting this church plant five or six years ago. So, and Andy serves there as a pastor of care and counseling.

He is a pastor, and he also serves as a biblical counselor. He's actually a highly sought-after biblical counselor. And he's authored several books, including Real Peace, which is kind of related to, we were just talking about passing of the peace, how you can truly find peace in the Lord.

He serves on our denomination's executive committee, which is the committee that represents the council of elders, which is of all the elders from every local congregation, which is the highest governing body in our denomination.

And so he serves us in a number of ways. So you might not know him, but we've actually benefited from his service to our denomination. And I actually seek out his counsel sometimes as I'm counseling others as well.

[1 : 1 4] And so he's been an help to me and an encouragement to me in that. And I'm excited for you to hear from him and get to know him. And Andy is married to Jill, Jill Farmer.

He has four grown children, all of whom love the Lord and are serving the Lord. One son, three daughters, and now he has 12 grandchildren, which is amazing.

He's one of the most interesting people you will ever meet. He's got very interesting hobbies. He's really into history. He's writing a book right now, a biography on Elias Boutinho, whom I had never heard of, but apparently he was the founder of the American Bible Society, a friend of Benjamin Franklin and an abolitionist.

So he's a really, really fascinating man. I hope you get to know him during a short time here today and tomorrow. So Andy, please come up and preach God's word for us. Please welcome him as he comes up.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[2 : 4 5] It's a 50-minute flight. It's like going to the mall. And so I was like, I should get up here more often because it really is easier than driving into Philly sometimes.

But you turn your Bibles to Matthew 16. Yeah, just to let you know, guys, I'm excited to be here. I'm grateful to be here. Sean and I are friends. we've gotten to know each other over the years in various contexts and classes and retreats and serving together in our denomination and I bring a greeting from Covenant Fellowship Church my home church where I've served as a pastor for 28 years you might be looking at me and you might be thinking okay you've got 12 grandkids and you've been serving for 28 years that can't be true you don't look nearly that old I recognize that it is true I'm much older than I look but it's a delight to be here excited to be among you what God's doing here in Boston in Cambridge we need gospel preaching churches everywhere we need faithful churches we need churches that can encourage believers who God moves into areas in fellowship many of you are probably here not because this is where you come from but where you came to and to know that there's a church here that serves you that is a part of a community you can be involved in support you is a wonderful thing one of the things I do with Sovereign Grace is I'm involved in church planning

I'm on a national committee that oversees church planning and just to see how churches get started this church other churches and to be part of envisioning men and women and teams of people to start new works to do the risky work of church planning one of the things we want is to encourage churches that are planning to be thinking about church planning so you might be sitting here and thinking let's just get a good foothold let's just get a building and as a good place to start and that's great and wonderful but I want to instill in you a vision to be church planning people to be people who are thinking where would we plan what would we do if we wanted to extend what God's doing here into another area the thing I'm most concerned about a lot of the churches is they lose sense of mission they go on mission to get started but then they kind of huddle together and get into survival mode and I want to encourage you to not do that to be a people who think we're here because God is

God has invested in us and he's other people have invested in us and now we want to do the same and be thinking about mission as a church so that's that's kind of my burden for you but today we're going to talk about the church this is a message I actually did at my church as we were going through our statement of faith the sovereign great statement of faith we took a series and just walked through it and I I did a message I did a section on the church itself and so that's where this comes from so it's very related to who we are that statement of faith I'm sure Sean has walked you guys through it it is it is who we are as a people this is who we are how we express what God is doing in sovereign grace so that's what we're going to be focusing on so you'll be in Matthew 16 before I jump in there you may be familiar with the word anachronism now an anachronism is something that doesn't belong in the time or place that it's in you ever seen the series of movies the Back to the Future movies that's a whole series built around anachronisms

I just discovered a crazy anachronism recently in 1997 someone convinced the 50's crooner Pat Boone who was known as the Christian Elvis to release an album of classic rock covers it was called In a Metal Mood No More Mr. Nice Guy If you want to experience a serious anachronism just go on Spotify and check out Pat Boone's swinging rendition of Stairway to Heaven but let me warn you you'll never be able to unhear it once you do I bring anachronisms up because the two texts we're going to be looking at today that we're considering reveal an apparent anachronism in the Bible so I want to read these two texts and I want to see if you can notice it so we're going to begin in Matthew 16 and then we're going to be moving over to Matthew 18 just a couple chapters over we're going to begin in Matthew 16 with verse 18 this is Jesus and the context here is well let's start let's start where Jesus says in verse 15 he said to them who do you say that I am and Simon Peter replied you are the Christ the Son of the Living God

[8 : 21] Jesus answered blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in Heaven 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 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 and in verse 18 chapter 18 begin in verse 15 chapter 18 if your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault between you and him alone if he listens to you you have gained your brother but if he does not listen take one or two others along with you so that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses 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 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 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 where two or three are gathered in my name there I am among them let's pray

Heavenly Father we just simply ask you to visit us this evening as you already have through worship as you have through prayer as you have through the declaration of your word and the giving of peace and the confession of sin Lord you have already been with us God we are we are in your presence and you have come to meet with us Lord I simply pray that this message would be used by you speak through it oh Lord God to help us all have faith and vision for what you're doing here in why we gather and I ask this in Jesus name amen amen so did you notice the apparent anachronism there critics of the Bible certainly do they will tell you and they do tell you that these texts

Jesus is talking about the church that's an anachronism because there was no such thing as the church in Jesus day they will tell you that Jesus words about the church were put into his mouth by later writers to validate the institutional church they are if they're right we have some real problems with our Bible so we need to take what they say seriously the word translated here in various places as church speaks of the gathering of a chosen or identified people in other words it's not just a crowd for context the Jews were oppressed people on a search for a Messiah a savior sent by God who would come to gather them together under his power and protection they they lived as if they were and oppressed people and they needed to be gathered by the

Messiah they were regularly crowding around the latest messianic hope Matthew 16 through 18 is Jesus speaking and acting like a Messiah in the middle of that he pulls his disciples aside and he tests them on whether they're tracking with what he's doing Peter boldly confesses you are the Messiah the son of the living God clearly Peter gets the point what you're doing and what you're saying is what the Messiah will do and say and then Jesus fills out the implication as we read in Matthew 16 he basically says I have come to build my church in other words I'm the Messiah who is gathering the people of God together I've come to build my gathering my church so with that in mind let me take a shot at defining the church according to

Jesus and then seek to help us understand how it might be able to help us here today I would say based on the way Jesus is talking about the church what he is saying is this the church is God's people gathered in God's place for God's purpose the church is God's people gathered in God's place for God's purpose you see the Bible critics are wrong because they make the assumption that the church began in Jerusalem in Acts 2 which I know you guys have been studying or even later on in the early forms of the Catholic church in truth the church began much earlier than that the church as Jesus understands it we see the first church actually in Genesis chapter 2 where

[14 : 33] God's chosen people Adam and Eve are gathered in God's place the garden for God's purpose to be fruitful and multiply and cultivate the earth Noah and his family gathered in the ark the Israelites gathered about Sinai God's people in the wilderness camped around the tabernacle the temple in Jerusalem the synagogues that rose up when the Jews were in exile all represent God's people gathered in God's place for God's purposes so what Jesus is doing is he's backfilling Peter's understanding of what it means for him to say he's the Messiah he's saying you know your history Peter you know what it means to be God's people gathered in God's place for God's purpose you know that's the job of the Messiah that's what I'm doing the people who belong to me

Jesus says they are the true church and against that church even the gates of hell shall not prevail to that church I will give the keys of the kingdom verse 16 19 as the Messiah I am gathering and commissioning my church so we get to Matthew 18 he doubles down and he begins to talk about the implications of the church specifically giving it the role to determine and this is significant who belongs among the Messiah's people and who doesn't in verse 17 he says if he refuses if that one who chooses to live like an unbeliever though he says he's a Christian if he refuses to listen even to the church let him to be to you the church as a

Gentile and a tax collector so there is real authority here that Jesus the Messiah has given his church now note that in both Matthew 16 and Matthew 18 Jesus makes the same statement whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven now this is one of the most misunderstood texts in the Bible it's commonly applied to what is called spiritual warfare spiritual warfare is real and the Bible does tell us how to fight it just not here the context of both places where this statement occurs makes abundantly clear that the binding and loosing is not how we cast out demons the binding and loosing

Jesus speaks of is the delegated authority of his church backed up by heaven itself to define who is a follower of Jesus and who isn't now it's not up to us as individuals to decide who's saved and who's not saved in fact even the church doesn't have the right to declare salvation only God saves but the church does have a right and a responsibility to communicate on the basis of your life or your doctrine you may or may not be included among the people of God and that should sober people because that is a significant authority it should hit us at a heavy thought the church has a profound responsibility from God to determine true followership and a profound authority from God to carry out that responsibility that's why for example we baptize people in our gatherings the gathered church is responsible to affirm the authenticity of a person profession of faith that's why we guard the table of communion only offering it to professing followers of

Christ that's why we practice church membership determining who is of this particular body and who is just simply attending its services and functions that's why we practice biblical eldership because God raises up leadership in the church and calls leadership to accountability for the health of the church it's why we practice church discipline the context that is involved here because the most precarious place to be in the world is to be comfortable among God's people but with no evidence that you're a true follower of Jesus brothers and sisters the new testament includes us in the messianic community the church of Jesus Christ called to be God's people gathered in God's place for God's purpose what does it mean to a live streaming mask enduring pandemic fatigued election surviving zoom exhausted news distrusting social media disgusted collection of followers who identify with this organization known as

[20 : 32] Trinity Cambridge Church that's the question we're dealing with today and I have three application points based on my definition followers of Jesus identify with God's people followers of Jesus gather in God's place and followers of Jesus live for God's purpose so our first point followers of Jesus identify with God's people in early April 1891 British pastor Charles Spurgeon was battling numerous ailments and actually had only nine months more to live on this earth knowing he was approaching the end he wanted to leave his people at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London where he pastored for 37 years with what he thought they needed to know after he was gone 130 years ago this past spring he preached a sermon entitled the best donation in the sermon he speaks at length about the church including the following words and these are words that we have shared with our church numerous times in the past

Spurgeon said give yourself to the church you that are members of the church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not if I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect I should never have joined one at all and the moment I did join it if I had found one I should have spoiled it for it would not have been a perfect church after I became a member of it still as imperfect as it is it is the dearest place on earth to us coincidentally for the last 37 years of my life my church covenant fellowship church has been the dearest place on earth to me it was there that

I was baptized all of my children were dedicated to the Lord there and later baptized there it is there more than anywhere else that I've been taught to be a man to be a husband to be a father to be a disciple of Jesus and ultimately to be a minister of the gospel it is there where I developed the deepest and most lasting friendships I will ever know it is there where I've seen dear saints that I knew for decades ushered into glory people who've taught me how to live well and to die in Jesus I agree with Mr. Spurgeon covenant fellowship is not perfect we've had our problems we've had our disappointments our mistakes our regrets our failures and because I'm a pastor I've been in the middle of them all but it's truly the dearest place on earth to me now you here at

Trinity Cambridge are on the beginning side of that and maybe you're sitting here and you're saying I can't imagine being with this group of people for 37 years in our day and age it's a radical idea when I started going to covenant fellowship we met in a rented facility an old school that was contaminated with roaches that would scurry around during the service with no air conditioning and the room we met in had no windows and no air conditioning and that's where we started and it took 15 years to get to a place where we could actually be in our own building so the very fact that you might sit here today and say we are far from established we're far from being a presence don't misunderstand the way

God builds his church he starts with people who want to be part of his church and expresses it through them some of you will be here for 37 years some of you will die here if I have my greatest desire at this point in my life besides the salvation of my grandkids is to sit in the congregation and see our church turned over from our senior pastor Jared mellinger who is about 40 right now to a next generation that will have given me the opportunity to be part of a church plant and see two generations of leadership take the church that's exciting to me that's exciting to me because I want to identify with God's people when I think about the evangelical church more broadly in our country over the past year it hasn't seemed very dear if you know what I mean it hasn't seemed very dear this past week depending on how your news feed is set up the church has been beset by divisions on denominational lines on racial lines on gender lines on generational lines on political lines battered by scandal compromise backbiting heretical ideas

[27 : 01] I don't need to get specific with illustrations you probably know them our reputation these days is kind of like being a Philadelphia sports fan in another town we don't necessarily come with the best reputation I was in Minnesota and we treated the Vikings fans so poorly a few years ago that I felt compelled to apologize on behalf of my city to the people in Minnesota I didn't apologize for the beat down we gave the Vikings but I did apologize for our attitude that's how we can feel I feel like I want to apologize I'm a Christian I'm so sorry we're not all like that that's my that's my my knee jerk sense maybe you felt that way about the church this year you feel like maybe you need to put some distance between you and the church it's it can be uncomfortable identified as a church goer if you were out today out and about and somebody said hey what are you doing tonight and you said well I was going to church maybe you felt a little well do I really want to tell them that is that really going to be good for me to say the church's problems have given the world the opportunity to gloat over us but not just gloat we're beginning if you haven't noticed to be viewed as a problem something that needs to be opposed

Mickey Connolly director of church care for sovereign grace recently wrote an article about how the church is beginning to feel the disfavor of the culture which for people of my generation is disorienting because we've grown up as Christians largely in a favorable place in the culture no more it's a disfavor that may be a precursor to opposition and then even someday to persecution Mickey writes this when considering any persecution sovereign grace churches in America and throughout the world will face in 2021 and following I don't think it's going to be a persecution as we classically think of beatings imprisonment and death though someday that that may come I think the persecution we will face is being shamed and slandered because of historic Christian beliefs and values in words not shamed and slandered because of our behavior which is shameful at times but because of the things that we value at our best we will be shamed and slandered the hostility created in these ways then leads to material harm being silenced marginalized canceled and perhaps even punished in some way that's increasingly happening we need to see that as a reality here in this

Ivy League town you may be experiencing that already I'll be honest I'm not looking forward to it I'm not one of those people that says bring it on I'm one of those people that says can we just avoid all that can we do a better job but I think it's coming church we should be prepared for opposition for oppression and maybe even persecution but we must be united as God's people to weather that storm and my main concern for our churches is at this point there are believers who have started to distance themselves from the church ashamed of what people are saying about it not wanting to be associated with it wanting to recreate their spiritual spaces not tied to the follies and fortunes of the church may that never happen to us may it never happen to you Charles Spurgeon knew the ridicule of proper society against his church and we need to heed the words he spoke from the same sermon I just quoted this is later on and he says this I remember the difficulty I had when I was converted and wished to join the

Christian church in the place where I lived I called upon the minister four successive days before I could see him and each time there was some obstacle in the way of an interview and as I could not see him at all I wrote and told him I was going to go down to the church meeting and propose myself as a member I'd love to see that happen he looked upon me as a strange character but I meant what I said for I felt that I could not be happy without fellowship with the people of God I wanted to be wherever they were and if anybody ridiculed them I wished to be ridiculed with them and if people had an ugly name for them I wanted to be called that ugly name for I felt that unless I suffered with Christ in his humiliation I could not expect to reign with him in his glory that's

Spurgeon as a young man a fairly new believer recognizing that I cannot stand alone as a Christian and distance myself in fact where the church feels the disfavor of the culture I want to be associated with that disfavor that's uncomfortable but it's in the nature of what it means to be the church Jesus said it himself he said people will put you out because of me brothers and sisters we are all strange characters called to an imperfect church and that's a glorious thing we want to be people who identify with God's people number two followers of Jesus gather in God's place in verse 20 of chapter 18 we learn something fundamental about the nature of the church Jesus promises the disciples where two or three are gathered in my name there I am among them when believers gather together in Jesus name in other words in obedience to his lordship they gather together as under his Messiah work in building his church he will show up last

[34 : 04] March I discovered something remarkable early in the pandemic I discovered the amazing convenience of live stream church for many reasons I'm grateful for the gift of live stream churching it allowed connection during the shutdown it's served people who've needed to quarantine and it even introduced new people to our church who found us on the live stream who'd never visited that was all good but I started liking it too much which is a problem if you're a pastor in the church we started talking about maybe we should start meeting in I was like let's give it another month or so I kind of like my coffee roll out of bed get my coffee sit down enjoy the service but I realized something in the process live stream churching is the delivery of church content but it is not church getting church content delivered to me through the device of my own choosing is not the church we have not attended church when we received that live stream content we can benefit from the live stream content we can be grateful for it but we cannot gather we cannot be the church unless we gather

Jesus is not promised to show up through the miracle of you two he promises to show up among people in a place he says when you gather in my name there I am among you there locationally I am among you this has always been massively important to Christians at the very beginning of the church in Acts 2 46 we read that day by day they met in the temple think about this way Christians so wanted to meet with Jesus that they gathered day by day under the gaze of the very people who put their Savior to death on the cross less than three months before they were willing to be seen gathered together in Jesus name the one who had been crucified three months before Christians so wanted to meet with Jesus in the third century under Roman persecution they would gather in catacombs underground burial tunnels it it felt safe because their Roman persecutors were superstitious of dead bodies Christians so wanted to meet with Jesus in the 16th century that the French

Huguenots would gather together as a church even though the law required them to reserve a front pew for government officials who could stop the meeting at any point if they heard anything they didn't like Christians so wanted to meet with Jesus in the 1800s that enslaved people would find hidden areas on the plantations to gather to worship sometimes they hung thick quilts soaked with water to form an outdoor tabernacle to muffle the sound of singing and preaching so slave masters would not know where they were Christians so wanted to meet with Jesus that Chinese Christians today gather even though the church government has installed the Chinese government has installed more than 170 million facial recognition cameras to identify those who attend worship services for future crackdowns Christians so want to meet with Jesus that our sovereign grace sister church in Nepal baptized six young people just recently even though baptism itself is a criminal offense with a five-year prison term in that country brothers and sisters following Jesus eventually gets hard for everybody what a wonderful promise that when we gather together Jesus is there with us if God be for us who can be against us and my third point the followers of Jesus live for God's purpose now why did Jesus take time to instruct his disciples about the church in Matthew 16 and 18 they had no real idea what he was envisioning but see he knew his time was short Jesus wanted his disciples to begin to see themselves not just as disciples following around the teacher but as a body his body his body remaining on this earth to do his will he wanted them to see themselves as a people left on earth for the sole purpose of representing God's saving grace in a world of sin and death that's the reason we're here you and I are here because we've been left here for a purpose in Revelation 2 Jesus the risen king is addressing the church he speaks to the church in Ephesus the thing the first thing he does is commend that church in Ephesus in the culture wars of the day they were standing strong they were not going to compromise but they were so committed to being on the right side of things that Jesus says you've lost your first love in the process of standing strong you've lost your first love they forgot their primary purpose to the beat to be the people on this earth who love the Lord with all their heart soul mind and strength and love their neighbor and love their neighbor as themselves as themselves and Jesus warns them he warns them he warns them if they do not repent and return to their first love he would remove his lampstand the presence and power of the Holy Spirit from among them which would make them simply a group of people

people gathering for religious purposes you see I'm not concerned that the world will somehow defeat the church as small as you might feel in this area as small as we feel at covenant fellowship in our area as small as we feel in a culture that seems to be running away from anything related to God I'm not worried because Jesus said the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church and you can't see us I'm not concerned at the church as we are I'm not concerned at the church I'm not concerned at least a little bit for churches like mine and maybe for churches like yours that we could lose our lampstand we can lose it through compromise trying to do trying to stay in the world's favor trying to keep up with the way the world thinks and talks about issues trying to make their agenda our agenda it happens all the time or we could also become so focused on opposing and bemoaning the culture that we forget why we're here we could make the

Ephesian mistake of being so oppositional to the culture that we stop loving the people who are lost in that culture from the viewpoint of the Bible the world itself is preserved from the wrath of God in order that some might still come to see and know the love of God and the church has been left here to demonstrate and proclaim that love Trinity Cambridge in this crazy world around you you dare not lose your primary purpose you dare not put your lampstand at risk I want to share a little parable as I close as I close it's a personal parable from my life I had a chance one time to visit Cambridge, England there's another Cambridge if you didn't know that it's in England Cambridge is the birthplace of the English Reformation when I was there it was early December and that happened to be the evening of the annual

[43 : 22] Christmas celebration they kick off a Christmas celebration the evening we were there we were there so we went to the market square where the festivities would be taking place we arrived in the square to find a pack of people and decorated for holidays looked around and I saw the 500 year old cobblestone plaza brightly lit shops cafes and pubs welcome revelers in at the other end of the square the British pop band Katrina and the Waves were filling the air with their old hits and some poppy renditions of carols the medieval and the modern met seamlessly at Cambridge Christmas but it went into the square there was a foreboding shadow towering over Market Square a closer look revealed it wasn't a shadow but the darkened facade of a large church the largest structure on the square stood completely dark at Christmas empty and silent a brooding testimony to how irrelevant

Christianity had become in the celebration of Christmas as I listened to Katrina in the waves belt out walking on sunshine under the lights at one end of the square and a church building devoid of life and light at the other I had a thought I'd never forgotten this is what it looks like to lose your lampstand that church had become utterly irrelevant at one time the gospel was declared by some of the greatest preachers of the British Reformation from that pulpit it exists today mostly known as the place where Stephen Hawking is buried ironically but Stephen Hawking's atheistic brilliance casts no light and sadly neither does the church of the light of Jesus the truth of the gospel the truth of the gospel had departed long ago the building is effectively silent the church is effectively dark the lampstand is gone you know what that building is?

it's a tragic anachronism something from another time that no longer makes sense in this present world God forbid Trinity Cambridge that you would ever become an anachronism in this community you might be here saying but we're not even a blip on the cultural radar around here nobody cares that we're here at best we're a curiosity and maybe they want us to turn down our music shut our windows that may be true to the natural eye but where God puts his people he intends to accomplish his purpose and where he accomplishes his purpose is the church will be known maybe right now in June 2021 emerging into a post pandemic world the greater danger is the church might become an anachronism in your lives in your priorities in your families but we have a grand purpose brothers and sisters in God and a grand mission for God we are the evidence that God has left behind of the answer for all the world really needs we are that evidence you are that evidence here why does the church still matter

I want to close in the way this was captured in our statement of faith because I think it sums up very nicely what we need to believe about the church and we need to stand on when we relate to our church statement of faith says this as the body of Christ the church exists to worship God to edify and mature his people and to bear witness to Christ and his kingdom in all the world governed by scripture the church gathers for the teaching of the word prayer and the sacraments congregational singing fellowship and mutual edification to the exercise of spiritual gifts all of which has already happened today as the father sent Jesus into the world so Jesus has sent his people into the world in the power of the spirit the church's mission is to make disciples of all nations teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded we do this by proclaiming the gospel planting churches and adorning the proclamation of the gospel through our love and good works there will always be a gathering of believers on earth because the Lord promises to build guide and preserve his church to the end of the age when Christ returns he will gather and perfect his church from every tribe, tongue and nation as his people for his own possession and he will dwell with them forever forever and that's our purpose that is our end we are on mission to get to that point and other people are meant to join you here at Trinity Cambridge in that adventure, amen amen amen