

## THE BON AIR PULPIT

*James D. Pardue, Pastor*

October 19, 1997

*Scripture:* Matthew 16:16-19

Luke 12:42

*Sermon:* **I Will Build My Church**

Isn't it great to have the choir all together? Amen! We even imported a musician all the way from Minneapolis today to come and lead us, and I am very grateful that Paul would come back and help us on this very special occasion. He is going to be leaving, going back this afternoon to finish his sabbatical, but he has taken this break to come and be with us today, and we are very grateful indeed to have him. He had planned the music for the program and for this service today. He sent it to me by fax, and the anthem you just heard was "On This Rock I Will Build My Church." Then he contacted me and asked me, "What is your text for today?" I said "On This Rock I Will Build My Church." So it is amazing when you begin to sense God at work.

Dr. Albert Einstein, the great scientist, was on a train trip one day. The conductor came through to pick up tickets. Dr. Einstein, who figured out the law of relativity, most of the time couldn't remember where his suitcase was. So when the conductor came through and asked for his ticket, he began to search, and he said, "I can't find it." The conductor said, "Oh, that's all right, Dr. Einstein. Everybody knows you. We know you paid for your ticket. That's O.K." He picked up everybody else's tickets and walked away. After a while he came back through. Dr. Einstein was still looking. He was down on his hands and knees, going through papers on the floor. The conductor turned to him again and said, "Dr. Einstein, I told you that's all right. We don't need your ticket. We know that you paid for it." Dr. Einstein said, "Sir, that's not the problem. If I don't find my ticket, I don't know where I am going."

You know, it is a terrible thing to belong to a church that doesn't know where it is going. One of the reasons we want to look at this Scripture today is to try to remind ourselves, as a church, where Christ wants us

to be going. So this morning I want to read this famous passage of Scripture to us. It is in the Book of Matthew, Chapter 16. It begins at verse 13:

*When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; other say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, 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. 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."*

This passage of Scripture has been one of the most controversial in all of the Bible. The controversy is over what the term on *this rock* means. Some people think it means that Jesus was *building his church on Peter*, and many people feel that the successors of Peter are the leaders of the church, and therefore everyone should be subject to them. Other people understand that Jesus was doing a *play on words*. The word *rock* is the word *petra*. It means a *huge rock or a strata of rock*. Jesus turned to a man by the name of Simon, and he said, "I am going to give you a new name. I am going to call you *Peter*." That word is *Petros*. That is *little rock*. So many people understand that what Jesus was saying is, "*I am the big rock, but you are the kind of person that I am going to build my church upon. You are the kind of person who understands who I am.*" Then there are others who say that the *rock is the faith that Peter expressed*; therefore, all of us who have faith in Him comprise the rock upon which the church is built. You know, you can spend so much time talking about what the rock means that you misunderstand some of the basic truths that Jesus told us about the church. I thought on this occasion that we ought to nail down some real landmarks that we will remember as a church for as long as we have the opportunity to serve it.

The *first* thing that I wanted to remind you of is that Jesus says "*The church is built by Me. I build my church.*" One of the things in our house we enjoy

getting out around Christmas is what we call a little advent house. We brought it back when we lived in Europe. We put it on our table four weeks before Christmas Day. It looks like a little Swiss chalet house. Around it are all kinds of Christmas scenes. On top of it is what looks like a propeller, and then around it are four candles. As it begins to operate, the Christmas scenes begin to revolve around the little house. Many people have come into our house and seen it and commented on it. They have said, "How does it work? What makes the scenes go around the house?" People have said, "Where's the motor?" I have said, "It doesn't have a motor. When you light the candles, the heat from the candles hits the propeller, and turns it." And everybody looks at me and says, "Ah!" I say, "No, that is really the way it works. Let me show you." I just take my hands and put out all the candles, and everything stops. Then they understand that that is really how it works. It really works from the heat of the candles coming up, turning the propeller, and making everything operate.

If you and I are to understand church, we are going to have to look at a reality beyond the obvious. The obvious of what makes church work is a building, and people, and a preacher. Sometimes even people inside churches think in terms of getting another person, another program. If we can do something else ourselves, then church is going to work well. I wanted to remind you today that really *what makes the church work is the power of Jesus Christ*. He said, "*I build the church.*" What we need to understand again is that the church is *divinely crafted, divinely organized, and divinely empowered*. Christ builds the church. When you look at this church assembled here today, we need to be reminded that what has brought us is not our dedication and not our commitment. What has brought us is the power of Jesus Christ.

The passage of Scripture that I read for you is a theological examination. The theological examination is "*Who do people say I am?*", and they gave all kinds of answers. Then Jesus narrowed it down, and He asked, "*But who do you say I am?*" Simon said, "You are the Christ. You are the Son of the living God." Jesus almost seemed to be saying, "Don't get carried away, Simon, with your brilliance, for you didn't figure it out by flesh and blood, but my Father which is in heaven revealed it unto you, and upon this rock, upon the power of God working in your life, I am going to build my church." You need to understand that it is not our

brilliance, and it is not our talents, and it is not our money, but *all that is done in the name of church is done through the power of Jesus Christ*. Therefore, in a few moments we are going to ask us all to dig deeper in our pockets to help build a church building. But we need to understand that's not church. Church is on our knees in humility, broken before Him, recognizing we cannot do church ourselves. He builds His church. Until we come to understand that unless you and I are totally, completely dependent upon Him, all that we will have is a human organization that is humanly explainable.

You recall when they built the temple it was the most majestic building, some have said, that has ever been built in the history of the world. You could have taken an architectural tour, and your mouth would have been agape, and you would have said, "What a building!" But something else happened after they built the building. The Bible said a cloud came over the building, and the presence of God moved in. All of us understand it was not the craftsmen of Solomon who built the building that made it a temple. It was the cloud of God that inhabited it that made it a temple. We understand that you can build buildings from here to Washington, D. C., but if God doesn't come with a cloud, all we have built is another building. Jesus said, "*I build the church.*"

Now, we need to understand that He builds churches like He created nature. I am always totally amazed at the wide variety of what God has done. Someone has said God is outrageous in his variety. At home I have a little book on birds that I received the other day. I didn't know God made so many birds. I have a book on flowers. I am amazed at all the flowers God has made. I have a little book on insects. There are more bugs in this world than you can imagine. God is outrageous in his variety. God is outrageous in his variety of how He builds churches. All churches are not the same. Sometimes people want to say, "You know what we ought to do. We just ought to cut up Southside Richmond, divide it all up into sections and build a church in each section, and send 500 here and 500 here and 500 here, and we will take care of all the needs." I want to tell you God never built His churches that way. He builds some churches that have 50 people. He builds some churches that have 5,000 people. To try to make God do things like we think he ought to makes as much sense as telling God we think

He made too many kinds of birds. We have been in the process of trying to start a new church from our church. We have been working for five years. Today they will have about 70 people present. Five years after Bon Air started it had 500 people present. I don't know why God sent all of us here, but He did. And for us to miss the fact that God has a unique place for us and a unique opportunity for us, and that He wants us to do something that obviously nobody else can do because He sent more of us to this one place than any other Baptist church in Southside, is to miss God's plan. We need to look up and lift up our eyes and ask the question, "Dear God, in the great variety of the way you build churches, what do you want us to do to be a part of your great kingdom's progress?"

The *second* thing He said is that not only does He build church, but, "*I need to remind you that the church still belongs to Me. I build My church.*" Now it is true that if you were to ask us, as Baptists, what kind of church organization we have, we would say a democratic. We simply believe that everybody ought to have a voice in everything that is said. You are partially right when you say that, but if you are not careful you will be totally wrong, because the church is more than democratic. The church is *theo*-cratic. It is not the voice of the people. *It is the voice of God.* Our task is not to ask what we can do for God. Our task is to ask what He wants to do through us. Years ago when the church first started people used to ask, "Who is the head of the church?" Somebody would reply that nobody is. "No, I mean who is the leader of the church." Nobody. And early in Christian history when the Greeks used to write about the church, they used the word *cephai*, which means *your head*. They would put an "a" in front of that, and they would say the church is *acephai*. It simply meant that it is a group without a head. They didn't understand that the head was not a human. *The head was the Lord Jesus Christ.* What you and I are involved in is what He wants us to be involved in. There are some things you and I don't have an opportunity to change. We don't have an opportunity to change the Great Commission. Somebody may come to a church and say, "I don't believe in missions." Well, I want to tell you that is not your choice. Somebody may say, "I don't believe in evangelism." That is not your choice. Somebody may say, "I don't believe in prayer," or "I don't believe in fellowship." I want to tell you that is not your choice. Somebody may say, "I am not in favor of

letting people in our church unless they are the same color as us and just like us." That is not your choice. You need to understand the church does not belong to me, and it doesn't belong to you. It belongs to Jesus Christ. It is His. You and I don't have the chance or the choice to change anything about it. It is who He is and what He has done and what He is up to. *It still belongs to Him.*

The *third* thing He said to us is, "*I need you to understand the church is like a battering ram. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*" The word *Hades* means the *unseen world*. It means all of the powers that you and I can't see that determine the culture in which we live. He said that just as people have always lived in walled cities with gates, not to keep the people in but to keep the enemies out, you are the offensive force. Just as in old times men used to get battering rams and go charging to a gate to knock it down to capture a city, He said, "*My church is like a battering ram; whatever obstacles are in front of the kingdom, you go running at them, and they cannot stand in your way.*" You and I, therefore, are not on the defensive. You and I are on the offensive. You and I are to recognize that words that never enter into our vocabulary are the words *fearful, conservative, careful*, but the words that should characterize us are the word *aggressive*, the word *forward*, and the word *victory*.

Dr. Carl Bates was pastor for many years at the First Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, and served as president of our convention for several years. He recounted a very personal experience in his life in which he said, "I kept asking God for a new power. I wanted a new power with Him and power in my service to Him. I prayed and I prayed and I prayed. I felt no more power. Then one day in the quietness I turned to God and said, 'God, I have been praying for new power for six months, and I feel no new power. God, why haven't you answered my prayer?' There came a still, small voice back to me which said, 'Carl, with the limitation of your vision, you don't need any more power.'"

If you and I ever could catch a vision of what God has called us to be, a battering ram to knock down the walls that hinder the kingdom, then God would pour out more power on us than you and I could imagine.

So let me take just a moment in that context to talk to you about the building campaign. Bon Air Church for 45 years has been in a building program. It

has either been building or getting ready to build or just getting over building. It has been in one for 45 years. I need to tell you that in all of the building campaigns in which we have tried to raise money the most that the Bon Air family has ever given at one time to a building campaign is \$650,000. Keep that figure in your mind. That was done five years ago when we went into a program for \$1.3 million. We raised \$650,000, and we borrowed the rest of the money. So we are getting ready to go into another building campaign. A 12-member planning committee appointed by the church got together and laid it all out, and they said this is what we need for the next five to seven years. We brought in an architect. He said that what we need will cost you \$4 million. I don't know many things about a lot of things, but I do know church. So let me tell you the option we could have taken. We could have said that last time we entered into a program for \$1.3 million, so now we are talking about \$4 million. That divides very neatly into three campaigns. If we go into an effort for \$1.3 million for three times, that would take care of what we need. So what we could have done is said, "Let's go in for \$1.3 million," and we would have raised \$650,000. Then we would have had to borrow some more money. And about three years from now, we would have said, "O, we should have built that new children's building and we should have built that fellowship hall. That is going to cost another \$1.3 million. So let's go ahead and raise that." This time we raise \$700,000, but we still have to borrow \$600,000. We wait three more years, and we do \$1.3 million again, but since we have waited so long, it is not \$1.3 million, it is probably \$1.8 million by now. And we raise \$750,000, but we still have to borrow \$750,000, and ten years from now everybody will say, "Boy, you know our church is really doing good. You know, we are in a building program. We just keep adding on, and we keep adding on," and then somebody will ask, "When did you first decide to do this?" "Ten years ago." "Ten years ago? How much would it have cost ten years ago?" "Four million." "How much did it cost now?" "Five million". "How much are you in debt?" "Three million." Then somebody would say, "Why did not somebody give us a vision ten years earlier—a vision that if all 1 of us had pulled together we could have had these facilities for seven years, we would have saved \$1 million, and instead of being \$3 million in debt now, ten years later, we would not owe a dime."

Once I understood that I wanted to get the

biggest tree I could find and cut it down, and find as many families as I could and say to them, "Let's pick us this battering ram and let's charge."

Now I know how church works, too. I know that when you enter into a campaign somebody says that all that preacher is interested in is getting our money to build a new building. And it would have been easier just to say, "Well, now, dear Bon Air family, let's just do \$1.3 million and you raise \$650,000, and we will borrow the rest. And God bless you." But you know one day I am going to have to give a report, and not to you. One day He is going to say, "Jim, I really did appreciate what I was able to do at Bon Air Church but I want to ask you a question. There is one thing I don't understand. You know back in 1997 when you all planned that \$4 million campaign, why did you not challenge the people to do \$4 million. Don't you understand I put that group together? Don't you understand I empowered them? Don't you understand I blessed them? Don't you understand I kept sending people there, just the people who were needed to do the job? And if you had challenged them and asked them, they wouldn't have had to spend ten years to do what they could do in three. And they would have been debt free instead of owing \$3 million. Think of all the people who could have been reached for seven years while they are still in the process of trying to do it. Just think, Jim, the next preacher would not have had to come and ask them again for money. They'd have all the money they needed to do the project." I could just bow my head, and I could say, "Well, Lord, I really wanted those folk to think well of me." He is going to say, "I didn't send you there, boy, to let them think well of you. I sent them there to let them think well of Me. I could have done such a miracle in their presence that they would have lifted their hands and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.' They would understand that if you take up the battering ram and charge the gates of hell, it cannot stand in front of you."

The *last* truth. He says, "*I want to give you a bequest. This is the bequest. I give you keys.*" We have already talked about rock and gates.

Now He is talking about keys. I have in my hand a set of keys. There are a lot of cars outside, but

the only car that I have the right to get in is the car this key fits. This is the key to my office. You have given me the right to go into that office. This is the key to my house. Of all of the houses on the Southside, it's the only one I have the right to enter. These keys are my authority. Jesus said, "*I want to give you keys. I want to give you keys to the kingdom.*" Listen to it.

*"Whatever you open on earth is opened in heaven.*

*Whatever you don't open on earth is closed in heaven."*

I understand that to mean He has given us the authority and the right to share the message with everybody we come in contact with. If we don't use those keys, if we don't use the authority and the right that He gave us, there are people who will not enter heaven. If you lived in Bon Air and were not a Christian and you depended on the Christians at Bon Air, how comfortable would you be? All that we do in our ministries and in our new building campaign is to use the keys to speed God's message to everyone.