

WHY WE LOVE THE CHURCH

(Matthew 16:18)

The Barna Research Group recently released a survey called the *State of the Church 2020*. The survey reports that about 25 percent of practicing Christian millennials agree that the church is unimportant today. Furthermore, about 1 in 10 Americans considers the church as irrelevant. These so-called practicing Christians have not really grasped the essential value and eternal significance of the church. **The church is the most valuable institution in the world because it is the assembly of God's precious people for whom Jesus died.** Matthew 16:18 is a clear and authoritative declaration of this glorious truth. In this passage, we will learn three vital reasons why we must value and love the church.

1. Our Lord Jesus is the _____ of the church.

As the Builder and Founder of His church, our Lord Jesus established the church upon the foundation of Peter's inspired confession about Jesus' identity as the Messiah and the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16-18). If you take away this confession about the Messianic office and divine nature of Jesus from any church, that church ceases to be the true church of God (1 Corinthians 3:11; 10:4; Acts 4:10-12).

2. Our Lord Jesus is the _____ of the church.

When Jesus said, "*I will build My church,*" He declared the church to be His precious, exclusive and eternal possession (Matthew 16:18). Jesus is the Divine Owner of the church. The church became His own possession because Jesus redeemed the church by His own blood through His death on the Cross (Matthew 16:21-23; Isaiah 53:3-5; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Acts 20:28). We cannot say we love Jesus and then refuse to love the people that belong to His church (1 John 4:20-21). If we really value the self-sacrificial and redeeming love of Christ for us, then we must value our love relationship with our fellow believers (Colossians 3:12-14).

3. Our Lord Jesus is the _____ of the church.

From the beginning to the end of redemptive history, our Lord, as the Shepherd of His people, seeks, rescues, gathers, nurtures and preserves His beloved church (Ezekiel 34:11-15; John 10:14-16). Our Lord Jesus also promises that His church will be eternally secure and invincible. In His own words, Jesus said, "*...the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church*" (Matthew 16:18). Satan and even death itself cannot triumph over the church because our Lord Jesus has already conquered them through His atoning death and victorious resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; John 6:39-40). As pastor and author J.C. Ryle said, "*Not a single sick lamb in Christ's flock shall perish. He will say to His Father in the last day, 'Of those whom You gave Me, I have lost none!'*"
