

Assembly Required



Bro. Ricky Cunningham

Matthew 16:1-20

For the next five Sundays, we're going to do a short sermon series on the five purposes of the church. We're calling this series – We are Sent. Over the next five Sundays, we're going to talk about these four topics: Gather, Connect, Serve, Give, and Go. I get to kick this series off this morning by talking about gathering. I am so excited.

Now, I have to be honest with you, I'm still in Christmas mode. I love Christmas, I know you love Christmas, but I want to tell you what Christmas did for me this year. Christmas took me back to being a young dad for the first time with my children celebrating Christmas. I'm a grandpa now, a Papaw, and it's just a little different as your kids get older and you are the grandparent. When our kids were at young my work schedule was more flexible because I was a pastor, so we actually gave presents to our children earlier than the other children in the family or community got their presents. Now, we did that for a reason. We wanted them to have more time to play with the presents me and Celisa bought Kiki and Kory because we knew the moment we went to those grandparents' house and got their gifts from the grandparents, they wouldn't play with the gifts we got them. ☺ So this Christmas just reminded me of being a young dad looking at that presents their grandparents got them and having this thought—there is no way that box is big enough to be holding what that picture on the box is

advertising! I mean the picture on the box said this thing is really, really big...but the box wasn't really, really big. I could see Kiki and Kory's eyes when they saw that picture. Now being the dad, I knew how that big thing was in that little box—it doesn't come out of the box all put together, it's in a thousand pieces! I'll never forget that feeling that I had every time my kid would open up a present from the grandparents, and in the bottom right hand corner, it would say this "Assembly Required." Oh, why do we grandparents do that to parents? See, I knew what was going to happen. While they were playing with all the presents that didn't require assembly, they were really wanting to be playing with the present that did require assembly. That meant one person in the family was going to miss out on dinner and fellowship because while everybody else was playing with Christmas presents, guess where dad was? Not Papaw, not Granddaddy, Dad...Dad was outside with the tools that were required to put the thing together. Yes. It's called assembly required, and that's the title of the message this morning.

Do you have that struggle? I have. I know what my life is supposed to be like because I've seen the picture of the person my life is supposed to be like, because I've read the book. But how does God take me, a kid from Dexter, and make me like the picture that I have of who He is? Assembly required. Let's read Matthew chapter 16:13–20.

Scripture

"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' 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. 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.' Then He strictly charged the disciples to tell [we expect Him to say everyone] no one that He was the Christ."

We're going to try to answer four questions this morning: who, where, when, and why. The first question we're going to try to answer this morning in the series and the specific sermon on gathering is who are we? You know there was a time when the DNA of this church caused us to say, "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing." Then we began to say, "It's not about us, it's about Him and it's about them." And then we began to talk about "growing down, growing up, and growing out." But now we say, "We are not dismissed; we are sent." This morning we're going to examine the 'who' — who are we as the church of Jesus Christ?

In Matthew chapter 13, Jesus has the disciples in the region of Caesarea of Philippi. It's the northern part just over the line of what you and I would call Jewish territory. There is a pagan statue to every pagan god known to the people of Caesarea. Against that pagan backdrop, Jesus, knowing that Daniel prophesied about the coming of the Son of Man who would establish the eternal Kingdom of God, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" and they began to reel off these names...some people think it's John the Baptist, some people think it was Jeremiah, some people think...they just name all of these different people. Instead of Jesus commenting about their answer, He now zeroes in on His disciples and says, "But who do *you* say that I am?" You heard Him identify Himself as the Son of Man, but He doesn't want to know what the crowd thinks, He doesn't want to know what the public thinks, He wants to know what they think. Praise the Lord, this one time Peter opened his mouth and didn't put his foot in it, amen! He got it right, he answered, "You are the Christ [that means you are the Messiah], the Son of the living God." I think Jesus looked at Peter with a twinkle in His eye and said, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah!" Can you just see Peter? Wow, he got this one right and he's starting to be puffed up. But then Jesus kind of lets the wind out of his sails a little bit, He humbles him a little bit by saying "For flesh and blood did not reveal this to you..." Whoa, did you hear that? There was nothing in Peter's natural ability, there was nothing in his flesh; there was nothing in

himself that caused him to come to this conclusion. Jesus says, "...but my father, [your father] who is in Heaven" revealed this to you.

Do you realize that? If you're here this morning and you believe Jesus is the Son of the living God, if you believe He is the Messiah, do you know who gets 100% credit for you knowing that truth? It's God. He opened your eyes and revealed that truth to you so that He could draw you to His Son. Listen to what His Son now says to Peter, "...you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." Now if I could, I would like to give you my interpretation of this verse. Notice He calls him Simon Bar-Jonah... *Simon Bar-Jonah, flesh and blood didn't reveal this to you. You are blessed* (Why is he blessed) *because our Father revealed this to you. And you're Peter, you're a stone, you're a pebble, and upon this rock...* Now, in the Greek Peter is *Petros*, which means 'a little stone, a pebble.' But there is a word change when He says rock—He says on this *petra*, which means 'a large massive stone.' In other words, there's something bigger here in this passage than Peter, and of course, we know that bigger person is Jesus. Based on something being bigger than Peter in this passage, Jesus has the confidence to tell Peter, "I will build MY church."

Now, I want to tell you what I believe here, this is my opinion—you can disagree—this passage is not teaching that Jesus is telling Peter He's going to build the church on Peter. I know there are churches that believe that but trust me, the church is not built on Peter. What is the church built on? What is the saving belief of the church? It's that Jesus is the Messiah, He's the Son of the living God. So what Jesus is revealing here is the saving belief of the church, the saving belief of who we are, and who we are is centered on this truth—who Jesus is. And for everyone who confesses Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, guess what? You become part of Jesus' church. Jesus is building His church on those who know who He is. Do you know who He is? Do you know Him as the Christ? Do you know Him as the living Son of God? If so, then you're part of Jesus' church.

Now, those of us in the West use the English word, "church," and we know that church refers to a building, and I struggle with this. I struggle with that because I do not believe the church is a building; I believe the church is people. I have taught us church is not a building, church is people, but

now I want you to follow me here. The Greek word here that Jesus uses is "ekklesia," so in my opinion the word "church" just doesn't cut it, because ekklesia means 'called out assembly.' Now at this time, the Jewish people were meeting in synagogues, and the word, "synagogue," is a Greek derivative that literally means 'to meet together.' So you have all of the Jewish people, which include His disciples, and they've been meeting in synagogues. And now, Jesus says I'm going to build my own *ekklesia*, not synagogue. He uses the word that referred to a group of citizens who gathered together to carry out the purpose of politics and public issues. But when they met together, they met to make decisions for the public. So, what's Jesus saying here? He's identifying who we are as the church. We are a group of people who have been called out of the world, and we meet, we assemble, we gather. Some Greek scholars actually believe that this word, ekklesia, needs to be translated as gathering instead of assembly. We gather.

Now, why do we gather? We gather to carry out the agenda of God's Kingdom. Now, where do I get that? Look what Jesus says, "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Who is "you?" Not Peter... *Yes, I'm giving you, Peter, the keys because you're the first person who is confessing this; you're part of the church I'm building so I'm giving the keys to you and the church.* Now when I think of keys, the first key I think of is the key to my truck. Have you ever seen the expression on a young kid's face when they get their first automobile and mom and dad gives them the keys? Wow...there's something behind that key, right? That key turns on an engine that powers a vehicle that changes your life! Well, they didn't have that in the biblical world. So when they had a key, it referred to a key as something that locked or unlocked something. It bound something or it unbound something. So here's what Jesus says—I'm giving you, the church, the key to what...the Kingdom of God. Woo glory! How many of you believe in the Kingdom of God? How many of you believe it's awesome? How many of you believe the Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in the hearts and lives of His people and His Kingdom changes everything? Guess who has the key to the Kingdom...we do, the church! We have the authority of God's Kingdom backing us. So when we gather

together, we gather together as an assembly, the body of Christ, and the reason we gather is to carry out the purpose of God's Kingdom.

Now watch this. Whatever we bind down here gets bound up there, and whatever we loose down here gets loosed up there. I have to be honest with you, I get frustrated sometimes being a pastor, and I get frustrated being a farmer. I've had a rough fall. Do you realize every time I preach and it's over, do you know what I have to start doing again? I have to start preaching all over again. I just can't ever do it one time and it be enough. That's so frustrating. I'm looking at some of you and I know I'm going to have to keep doing this until Jesus comes! ☺ I mean, have you guys ever been involved in doing something, and when you got done you were frustrated because you knew it wasn't going to last, it's going to have to be done again and again and again! Not the church. What we do right now lasts forever. It's eternal. Wow! That's who we are. We are an assembly. We are a group of people who's been called out.

So, I want to tweak what I've been telling you for the last several years. I told you when somebody asks where do you go to church don't tell them Hardin, referring to a building, but talk about who you really are. Tell them the church is not a building, it's a person, it's a people, it's us, the body of Christ. But I've been convicted...because if we're an assembly of Christ, if we're a gathering of Christ, we have to have a place to gather, and that place is holy. It's holy because the place houses the people of God when they gather. Now, that's not this building, that's these grounds on which this building sets. Because do you know where the place is that houses us? Do you know where the place is where we're supposed to gather? It's right where you're at right now. Those of you who are sitting in a chair, you're where you're supposed to be—you're in Hardin, Kentucky. Don't ever tell anybody that Hardin Baptist Church is on the outside of Hardin, we are not; we are in Hardin. For those of you don't know this story...as this church continued to grow, it outgrew our place to gather in downtown, and we moved out here. We would not move until the city of Hardin agreed to annex this land as Hardin, because we did not outgrow Hardin. Hardin is where we meet. Hardin is where we gather. This is where we assemble, and you're here this morning. Thank you, Thank you, thank you.

Did you know the early church had a problem with gathering? There's a letter written to a group of people called the Hebrews who were having some difficult times in their lives, and because of that, some of them weren't gathering as they should. So guess what the writer of Hebrews had to do? He had to encourage them with these words, Hebrews chapter 10 verses 19–25, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God..."

Let's pause right here for a moment because I want you to see these two statements. The book of Hebrews is written to a group of people who are thinking about turning back and going back to the Jewish way of life, and he's telling them not to do that. He's showing how Jesus is a far better sacrifice and how Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant, not the old covenant. The new covenant that doesn't roll sins forward to the next year, but a covenant in which our sins are forgiven once and for all by the blood of Jesus. He wants us to know that we have confidence to enter into the very presence of God. Why? Because a sacrifice was made by Jesus that tore that temple curtain in two, and when He went into the presence of God, He made a onetime sacrifice that dealt with sin once and for all! So we are forgiven of all sin, past, present, and future, praise be to God, so we have confidence to come into the presence of God because we have a great High Priest over the house of God! So we, the church, are literally the house of God. We are the assembly, we are the body of Christ that carries out God's agenda, and we as a church have the assurance that we can come into the presence of God because we have Jesus as a great High Priest.

Now he gives us three application points, verses 22–25. Since then, we have these two things, confidence and a great high priest, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of

some..." I have to ask all of you this question. Are you here this morning because it's your habit to be here? Or is your normal habit not to be here, but you're just here this month because it's the last day of the year? Do you know what this is teaching? This meeting of us together isn't about any one of us individually but it's about all of us. Do you know what God wants us to do? He wants us to draw near! He wants us to hold fast our confession, never waver. And when we come together, He wants us to stir each other up—not negatively, not be an irritant, but positively stir each other up to love and good works. We encourage one another.

Now, how can we do that? There's only way we can do that. We have to gather together. We can't do what some of us are doing, and that's not gathering. Now, I need to talk to you just a second. Some of you faithfully watch us online ever week. We even want you to tell us you're watching by texting your attendance in, and we are so thankful you worshiped with us online. But I have to ask you this question. Why are you worshiping with us online instead of being here in person? I do think there are a few reasons why you should be doing that. If your health does not allow you to be here, we are so thankful you listen online. If you're on vacation this morning and you're out of state and you're tuning in, thank you, thank you, thank you. Or maybe you've just heard about us and you're checking us out. I'm glad you're doing this. But listen to me—you're supposed to be here if at all possible. I know, and you know, some of you aren't here because of Covid. That was three years ago. About 30 to 35% of those who used to attend church habitually don't attend anymore. Now if health and a Covid scare still causes you not to be here, I understand that. But listen to me as your pastor—if Covid allowed you to stay at home this morning and worship in your pajamas, with your coffee and your donuts from wherever you'd like to get donuts, and it's just more convenient from you, you need to get back here. You need to get back here. I wish you would just get dressed right now and be at the 10 40 service. Hear my heart. There are a couple of you I visited this week who don't have the health to be here—don't you feel bad at all. But if you have the health and you've confessed Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you're part of an assembly, and you're part of the assembly of Christ at Hardin, we need you

to be here. We need some of you who are here this morning to make this a *habit* of being here.

Now, what's the motivation? The end of verse 25 tells us; it's because we see the day approaching. What day is approaching? The day that's approaching in the writer of Hebrew's mind is the day when Jesus is going to come back. When Jesus comes back, what's He going to do? He's going to gather all of His people together, glory hallelujah!! Is that going to be awesome? Every child of God on the planet is going to be gathered up, this present world is going to be destroyed, there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth, and we're going to be sat down on a new earth and we're going to gather together! So if we are looking forward to that day, then what should you be doing? You should be gathering, because gathering is not what we do; gathering is who we are. Amen?

So who are we? We're the assembly of Christ. Where do we gather? We gather in Hardin. You have no idea what your car sitting out there on the parking lot says to this community. It says who you are; it says who *we* are. I learned this growing up in the Bogard family. You wouldn't know I was a Bogard because my name's Cunningham, but there were a lot of people who found out I was a Bogard because of the Bogard tradition. Our tradition was after church on Sundays we would all go to Granny and Granddad Bogard's, all of us. There were eight kids, and they averaged about, I don't know, four or five kids a piece. The older ones were already having grandkids when I came along, so I kid you not, every Sunday around 75 to 125 people were at Granny and Granddaddy Bogard's. The parking area was full! We parked in the gravel, or by the smokehouse, or we parked in the yard. We didn't think a thing about it because Granny and Granddaddy Bogard never built a house big enough to have eight kids. Do you know what people would do? People would drive down the road and they'd see that big old gathering and knew it was the Bogard clan, and they would poke fun. My wife's family used to go eat at Dinner Bell on Sunday. Before we got together, her family would drive by the Bogard clan and they would look at that gathering, and they would kid, "You know, instead of going to Dinner Bell, we ought to just stop there and eat with them. They would never know we were there!" I can't tell you how many

times there were people in the community who would say, "I didn't know you were kin to Ralph," or "I didn't know you were kin to Ruddell!" See, they were Bogard's and I was Cunningham, and our family was so big they didn't know I was a Bogard! Do you know what identified me as a Bogard? I showed up. So show up—it's not what we do it's who we are! Now I want you listen to me. You can be sitting here right now in this crowd and be all alone. No! I want you to be us.

So, when do we meet? I think this is simple. Let's turn to Luke chapter 4, the beginning of verse 14 says, "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee..." Now He's been baptized, He's been through the temptation in the wilderness, and He's returning back to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, verses 14–16, "...and a report about Him went out through all the surrounding country. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day..." He went where? To the synagogue. When? On the Sabbath day, that's Saturday. God in His wisdom believed the man that He created and the woman He created needed to work like He did and then rest. There needed to be a rhythm of life. You work six days and then you shut down and you rest. Your animals rest, your servants rest, everybody you're over rests on that Sabbath day. Now that sounds like you work really hard six days a week and then on Saturday you just kick back and do nothing. Yet we know throughout the Old Testament that this day of rest for Israel was a day when, yes, they didn't do their normal week's work—they shut it down, focused on God, and they worshiped Him on this Saturday. As a matter of fact, we see in Leviticus chapter 3:23, they have all of the feasts of Israel when everybody's supposed to gather together, and guess what the first feast is—it's the Feast of the Sabbath. So don't picture everybody just sitting at home; no, they gathered. There's this rhythm that God wants us to have. Some of us who are part of this assembly don't have a rhythm. We just work, work, work, work...or we don't work, work, work, work. God designed us with a rhythm—work, rest. Now in the New Testament, we don't gather on Saturday. Why? Because we're not under the old covenant, we're under the new covenant. Jesus put an end to the old way when He got up that morning from the grave and brought us into a relationship with

God, and now we worship Him on the first day of the week. So when do we gather? We gather on the first day of the week. Where do we gather? We gather here at Hardin...unless health won't allow us or we're on a vacation or we're traveling. I will soon go to Brazil so I won't be here, and I won't be able to watch while I'm there. That's okay, because what's my habit? What's my custom? It's the same as Jesus'. He gathered with God's people. If you're God's, you gather with God's people.

I know some of you are struggling. You say... *You don't know how hard it is for me to be here because you don't know what my last church did me.* I don't know; I get it, but you're in a new place and God has you here for a reason and a purpose, and it's safe here. I promise you. When the first day of the brand new week starts, we gather together. Just like Granny Bogard's, we cannot and will not build a building big enough to hold all of us. So when we gather together, you get to choose—do you want breakfast at 7:50, do you want brunch at 9:15, or do you want lunch at 10:40? We're going to gather on the first day of a brand new week, and then at least once a month we're going to gather back at night to have supper, the Lord's Supper, where we honor Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Do you have this rhythm where you work day two through day seven, and then on day one you want to start your week out right? How do you start your week out right? You express who you are by gathering with the body so that together we can carry out the agenda of God's Kingdom.

Why do we gather? What would you say is the ultimate purpose? Here's what I think most of us agree on—we gather to worship, amen? We gather to worship and we try to do that at 7:50, at 9:15, and at 10:40. Some of you remember this. Several years ago, we decided at Hardin that there are some steps to true worship. The steps go kind of like this. We are never going to worship unless first there's an awareness of God. You don't worship Him if you're not aware of Him in your life. If you don't recognize Him here this morning, you will not worship Him. There have been times we've come here and not worshiped because worship starts with an awareness of Him. Once you're aware of who He is you're then going to make an appraisal. You're going to appraise who He is and what He's

done, or what He is doing or going to do, in your life. You just can't help it. Once you're aware of who He is you begin to think, wow! And then, you can't separate who He is from what He does and what He's already done when He put His Son on that cross for you. So when you make that appraisal, you've now got a choice. Do you appreciate who He is and what He's done, and what He's going to do or what He is doing? Or do you depreciate it?

In our capitalistic culture, if you're selling something you appreciate the value, but if you're buying you depreciate it. How do you view God? Have there been times this week you depreciated Him? But when we are really aware of His presence and we begin to appraise Him, we appreciate Him. And once you add value and you recognize who He is, it leads to affection. Wow! That affection starts welling up inside and then it turns into (now some of you're going to be offended, but I believe I'm right) it turns into attitude. Has anybody ever told you that you have an attitude? Now, we usually use that word negatively but I'm going to use it positively because I looked up the word, attitude, in an English dictionary. Do you know what it says? "A settled way of thinking or believing or feeling towards someone or something that is typically reflected in how you behave." You *see* attitude. Now here's what I believe worship is and what Hardin Baptist Church believes worship is—worship is the releasing of our attitude toward God. Amen! We don't keep it bottled up! On Sunday, we gather together to worship Him, and then we are sent out; we don't quit worshipping Him! We release our worship as we gather, and then we scatter but we praise God when the attitude starts showing in here. Wow!

Now, have you noticed this about Hardin? We have a 70 minute worship service, unless there's a certain pastor who's preaching, I will not mention his name! ☺ Have you noticed how we do worship? Matt gets about 20 to 22 minutes, 25 at the most to use words of man that are put to music to cause us to be aware of who God is and what He's done. Now somebody do the math...25 from 70 is 45, and we allow 5 minutes at the end to just take care of family and things we all need to be aware of, so that's 40 minutes. What do we with those 40 minutes? We preach or we listen to preaching. Hear me...we don't have a 20 and 25 minute worship service

with song and then preach; we worship, we become aware of who He is, His presence in us and with us, and then we appraise it. We then appreciate it. We then have affection that starts moving in here and it develops into an attitude, a settled way we're going to think, believe, and act this rest of the week. We do not base our worship on what man has written in song, we base our worship on what God has clearly written in His Word! If you come to Hardin Baptist and you're part of the gathering at Hardin, we're not going to serve a spiritual drive through. We may be so busy in our lives that we want to grab something quick, but when it comes to the first day of a brand new week where we're going to have a rhythm that's going to reveal who we are, we're going to gather together and we're going to sit down to a meal together.

And listen, we're not serving sandwiches; we're going to serve the filet mignon of God's Word! We're going to ask you to bring your Bible, we're going to ask you to bring a notebook, we're going to ask you to bring an ink pen, and we're going to ask you to dig in. We're going to ask you to chew and we're going to ask you to swallow. If you only had one part of the church that you're going to be a part of, if your week is that busy, it needs to be this morning. Don't you dare put a small group somewhere ahead of what's happening right now! For us to express who we are, we assemble in Hardin on the first day of the week because we want to be like the person in the Book. We've seen his picture and we've looked at ourselves and wondered *how can I be like Him*...here's how you can be like Him—by being a part of the assembly under the preached Word of God! Not Bro. Ricky's preaching, not Bro. Kory's preaching, not Bro. Chris's preaching, under the preaching of God's Word! Together we are unified, and in our unity, you begin to realize, you are a little different. Yes, different meaning you're diverse...meaning you're a knee or you're an elbow, you're a toe or you're a finger—it's okay to be diverse, but not divisive. This all takes place as we sit down at the table of God together.

In our home, we have something called Sunday supper. I can't tell you what a blessing is when the grandkids ask Memish, "Are we having Sunday supper?" Do you know why the grandkids love Sunday supper so much? It's not just because of Papaw and Memish; it's because the cousins are

going to be there. Yeah, the whole family's going to be there. Do you know what I've noticed? I've noticed when Sunday supper comes we adults love the food, and when the food's over, we love to sit back and we love to just talk. We just love the fellowship; we don't rush anywhere.

Why do you rush away? I ain't talking about the online crowd; I'm talking about you. Why as soon as this is over, are you through that foyer and out into your vehicle and gone? I used to get so excited at Granny Bogard's. We couldn't all get around the same table so the men would eat first, then the kids would eat, and then the women would eat last (I know that's not popular to say in this culture). As a kid, I can't tell you how blessed I was to go in there and see those men at that table while waiting my turn, and then seeing the ladies coming to the table after I left. How many of you stop out there in the foyer and just look at all the 10:40 people coming in, seeing all those college kids coming in? You're going, yes, this is who we are—but you see that person that you have no idea if this was their first Sunday or they've been here longer than you, because you'll never go and talk to them... Maybe they're a brother or a sister and they're here for the same reason you're here! Now, if they're not a brother or sister, we want them to know that we, in the church, love that they're here. Someone judged us by you, what would they think about us?