

“Why Covenant Membership?”
Matthew 16:13-20

Introduction: Pg. ____

Steps series: Our goal is to unpack how we help all people become mature and multiplying followers of Jesus Christ. We have covered Worship, Groups, Teams. Today we are going to talk about what it looks like to be a committed part of Redemption Hill through what we call Covenant Membership.

You may be asking: What is membership? Didn't even know we had membership! (That's our fault...) What is membership all about? If I come on Sunday does that make me a member? How does church membership differ from being a member of Costco or Amazon Prime? Does that mean I get some kind of unlimited access or I have to pay some kind of hidden fee? Do I get a membership card? No, you just get to learn the secret handshake!

If I'm already involved, why become a member?

Church membership is kind of like dieting or exercise for many people: it would be nice but I'll put that off...

We live in a day when so many people are skeptical and apathetic toward the church. Many view the church as outdated and irrelevant, a place that robs a few extra hours of sleep on Sunday morning. (I don't know what responsible humans sleep that late unless you work all night - but...) Why would anyone value you it so much to say - I'm all in with the church, sign me up to be a meaningful member of this church?

Let's turn our attention to what may form the most foundational section in the Bible on the church's existence.

READ Matthew 16:13-20

This moment IS the climactic moment of the first 16 chapters of Matthew's account of the life of Jesus.

Do you know what just happened in verse 18?

- First mention of the church in the NT. The word *ekklesia* - means... assembly, a gathering of people.
- The church is fundamentally not an institution or organization, though there are certainly organizational pieces that help it thrive. The church is not a building or a 75 minute meeting on Sunday morning.
- The church is a “community of disciples.” The church is a simply a collection recognized group of people who know, love and follow Jesus.
- (We don't go to church. We *are* the church!)

So what do we learn about the church? Jesus tells us . . .

The Point: The church of Jesus is a family on a mission.

As we examine the theological base of as it relates to the church, I'm going to present five reasons for your consideration as to why membership is so critical to our journey with Jesus.

Let me toss out a few caveats...

- What if I'm new to Christianity? (Not your first step. Excellent section of the Bible to most importantly, learn who Jesus is, and two to learn what the church is all about!)
- What if I'm new to RHC? Well, membership may or may not be your next step, but today will provide a foundation for you to see its value as you move forward with us. (AND we want you to move forward with us!)
- And then, there are some who have been a part of RHC for a while and have not really considered taking this step or moved forward with membership. Let me put my cards on the table: I HOPE you will be compelled to take this step and go all in with Redemption Hill, but today is not a targeted scheme to arm wrestle you into

becoming a member. And let me give you some evidence. When is the last time we had a sermon that exclusively focused on Church Membership? August 2011. That's a fact. AND... we really don't touch on it in our teaching consistently at all (which needs to change).

- If you are member, you should soak this up and be reminded of how we live this out!

The first thing I want you to see is...

I. The church is the church of Jesus Christ. (13-16, 18)

a. The church is built on a common confession.

- Jesus asks two questions.
 - Who do people say I am? The responses were many (just like today). Prophet, miracle worker, teacher, incredible example... But he follows it up with a question every person must answer:
 - "What do you say that I am?" The "you" here is plural. He is asking the group as a whole, and as usual Peter speaks up: "You are more than a teacher, more than an example to follow, more than a miracle worker, more than a great leader. (Look at verse 16) You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
- Christ: Messiah, God's Promised Deliverer, the one they had been hoping for.
- The Son of the Living God:
- What do you make of Jesus Christ? This is the most important question under the sun.
 - Have you discovered him to be the one who will right every wrong, meet our deepest needs and overturn death with life?
 - Do you understand how his spotless life (never sinned) ended in pure torture as he hung on the cross to pay the penalty for the wrongs we have committed against God and one another? He died to bring us (who were once or currently are separated from God back into a relationship with God.
 - And then he mocked death by rising out of the tomb after being dead for three days and in that moment proved that every word he said was true.
- Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and this confession will forever be the foundation and continuation of the church's existence.
- We see this in verse 18, a widely disputed verse. "On this rock I will build my church." (Word play...) does not call for a succession of popes. Certainly Peter rose up as the early leader of the church and Jesus clearly speaks of his unique role in a direct way, but the key point here is the confession Peter makes. What he says about the God-man is much infinitely more important than the man himself.

T: Jesus calls the church, this new community, this new people of God he is forming: "my church."

b. The church belongs to him

- The church is Jesus' idea. He started it and leads it.
- People like Jesus but not the church. Well, that's problematic. To like Jesus, to really get in with Jesus is to get in with what he's all about, to love what he loves, and Jesus loves his church. Ephesians 5:25 – "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."
- "Saying "I love Jesus but not the church" is as irrational as saying to your best friend, "I like you—I just can't stand being around you." Your attitude toward the church reveals your attitude toward Jesus. - Russ Moore

Go all in with Redemption Hill because . . .

1. Membership displays your commitment to Jesus to the world.

Jesus people always connect with other Jesus people. It is the natural reflex of the soul made new by God.

Universal & Local

- Universal: all believers, all places, at all times.
- Local: smaller expressions of people who say together, “We follow Jesus and are committed to following him together.”

Let me be clear. You will never find a verse in the Bible that says, “Become a member of a local church where you live.” (I’m off the hook!) Do you believe in the Trinity (never find the word in the Bible)? Do you believe Jesus is God? (Never said it directly anywhere in the gospels!) Its understood and implied all throughout.

- The church kept up with who was in and who was out (Acts 2:41, 47)
- The Bible speaks of people joining and not joining the community of disciples (Acts 5:12-13; Acts 9:26-28)
- The vast majority of letters in the NT are written to local churches: groups of people who lived in the same city and formed churches. (Corinth, the churches of Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Rome.)
- There are so many examples of clear, distinct, identifiable people committed to Jesus and one another:
 - “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of *the church at Cenchreae*, . . . Greet Prisca and Aquila . . . to whom not only I give thanks but *all the churches* of the Gentiles as well. **5** Greet also *the church in their house*.” (Romans 15:1-4)
 - In 1 Corinthians 14:23, Paul instructs: "Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, . . ." How could they know the whole church came to together if they did not know who was in and out?
- That’s why all of the metaphors for the universal church imply a group of people that are joined together: body of Christ, Family of God, flock of sheep, temple being built together, bride of Christ.

Nothing matters more than your commitment to Jesus. Committing to RHC is inconsequential compared to committing to Jesus, but a commitment to RHC or another local church is the natural CONSEQUENCE of your commitment to Jesus.

II. The church of Jesus Christ is a family. (16:17, 19)

This principle is implied from Jesus words in *verse 17*.

- God is our Father. Jesus is our brother. Whoever receives Jesus, becomes a “child of God.” (John 1:12) Whoever God saves is adopted into his family (Roman 8).
- When Paul addresses believers in all of his letters, he calls them, what? Brothers and sisters.
- Because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another... (Romans 12:5)
- *Love is a commitment.* Every relationship worth having is based on promises, not demands. The essence of love says: “I will give of myself for your benefit, not make demands of you for my benefit.”
- That’s what makes Jesus so attractive. He served. He should have made demands! (From my perspective - Does that not cause you to love him more?)
- *Promises, not demands!*
- *That’s why we have what we call a church covenant. (Hold it up. State a couple commitments. I’m saying that to Jerry. I’m saying that to Lauren.)*
- Not to be dramatic, but there is a since where prolonged attendance at a church without going all in with membership is something like an engagement that never culminates in saying “I do.” (Jesse & Vanessa!)

Go all in with Redemption Hill because . . .

2. *Membership creates a family where leaders and members care for one another.*

- There are 59 different instructions on how we relate to “one another” in the NT. God tells us to love, serve, encourage, bear one another’s burdens, forgive, pray for, teach, be kind, be patient, out do one another in showing honor, and many, many more.
- Sure, Christians should care for all Christians whenever they have opportunity, but there is a heightened responsibility and accountability for fulfilling those in the context of a local church who have promised to walk together.

- This same idea applies to leadership in the church. *Hebrews 13:17* says, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”
- Who are pastors to give an account for? Listen, we love every person that comes into our midst. We want to encourage everyone in their faith journey, BUT there is a clearly a heightened responsibility for members.
- What does this look like?
 - When our pastors pray together, we pray for everyone, but we take time every week to pray for individual members of our church family.
 - Our elders take specific responsibility to check in with each of our members in a meaningful way multiple times a year. We want to know what’s going on in their lives and we want to know how they are doing spiritually. We want to encourage them, pray for them, and support them every way we can.

T: Loving and caring for one another also means calling out the imperfections we see in one another...

Go all in with Redemption Hill because . . .

3. *Membership helps keep believers in the faith.*

Does anyone have an imperfect family?

Redemption Hill Church is not a perfect church, because we are filled with imperfect people. This is why Jesus establishes church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17.

Let me say a few of things: **1)** Mt. 18:15-17: “The ability to exclude someone from ‘the church’ presupposes that it’s known who belongs to ‘the church’ as a member in the first place.” **2)** discipline in the church starts with formative discipline (1 Tim 4:7) and self-discipline (2 Cor 13:5); **3)** the discipline process is always for the good of the individual, that they might be restored to God and their brothers and sisters. We call it restorative church discipline.

MORE LIKE JESUS. JESUS IS THE GOAL!! Mature and multiplying... (I was having a conversation with one of our members last night...)

Membership creates a family that has one another’s back.

T: Finally...

III. The church of Jesus Christ is on a mission (18-20).

Verse 18 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. “The gates of hell...” Explain...

- The church is on the offensive.
- *The church is the primary vehicle by which God accomplishes his unstoppable mission.*

So...

Go all in with Redemption Hill because . . .

4. *Membership affords [unique] missional opportunities to serve the church & the world.*

- Does the church exist to serve you? Or do you exist to serve the church? Someone needs you: your love, your encouragement, your counsel, your example, your gifts.
- Serving the Church... Leadership Pipeline... Each ministry has participants and Leaders, Coaches, Directors with and Elder Overseeing (helping with big picture direction and encouragement).
 - Team Leaders, Group Leaders, Ministry Leaders... those are going to be our members. (You may think being a member is signing your life away. If you’re already an active part of our church, consistently in a group, serving in a meaningful way, there is really not an additional time

commitment. It is really saying - we are locking arms to live the life Jesus called us to live = Church Covenant. = Normal Christianity.

- Additionally, our members have a stake in the major decisions we make as a church.
 - Financial Ministry Plan
 - Leadership: Elders & Deacons...
 - Decisions that would be a major shift in our vision and direction as a church. (Unfortunately, there will never be a vote on the secret handshake... that's set in stone!)
- If you are here and you belong to Jesus, I hope you will consider belonging to our membership family. We need your wisdom. We need your kingdom potential as we serve together. We need your commitment as we grow together spiritually.

And let me give you one final reason to go...

Go all in with Redemption Hill because . . .

5. Membership provides a vehicle to display the glory of God.

Ephesians 3:10: "so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known in the church."

- We have one life, and our goal should be to spend our lives in such a way that to maximize the glory of God! This happens through the church. It happens in the ordinary and yet extraordinary ways that we've been talking about.
- This is how I see the glory of God displayed.
 - Hanging out having meaningful conversations that motivate one another to press on.
 - Sacrificing for one another (time and resources to help a family adopt//anonymous Christmas presents on the front steps when money is tight).
 - Doing mission together...
 - Celebrating life together on a deeper level (family conversations)!!
- Vision: What happens when move from 90-150 members?
Would you be one of 30 people over the next 10 months? (2x)
- Witness to the community at large.

Conclusion:

If I/we didn't believe this, we would not ask, encourage and seek to persuade.

Review 5 Reasons...

If these are good reasons... then what are you waiting for. Steps... Don't feel pressure from me. I'm going to love you no matter what. But if you are compelled by what God says about his church being a family on mission, then let's go.

I'M INTERESTED IN THE NEXT STEP(S) WITH COVENANT MEMBERSHIP:

- I'm ready to go all in, and will attend Covenant Class...
- o June 12 o August 27
- I have attended Covenant Class and desire to finish the Membership process (**Convo, Covenant**).

[I'm not sure I'm all in...]

- I have more questions and would like to speak with a pastor
- My best next step is to start my journey with God through faith in Jesus.
- My best next step is to Connect with a Group
- My best next step is to Serve with a Team

- For RHC Members:
- _____ I renew my commitment to Covenant Membership.

Prayer: **We trust Christ to build his church (Mt. 16:18). Join the Family. Join the Mission.**