

“The Church at the Gates”

Stop Playing Defense with a Gospel Built to Advance

Matthew 16:18, Matthew 5:13–16; Jude 22–23; Luke 10:33–34

WHEN DID WE START HIDING?

When did the church become afraid? Afraid of culture. Afraid of conversations. Afraid of being misunderstood. Afraid of being uncomfortable.

Somewhere along the way, the church that once turned the world upside down started locking the doors and whispering prayers like, “Lord, just protect us till You come back.” But protection was never the mission. Jesus didn’t die to create a bunker. He died to unleash a **movement**. However, movements don’t hide. They move.

THE VERSE WE QUOTE — BUT RARELY NOTICE

We love Matthew 16:18. “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” We shout it. We frame it. We put it on T-shirts. But most of us read it backwards.

We picture hell attacking the church. Like we’re huddled up, hoping we survive. But Jesus didn’t describe an attacked church. He described an **advancing church**. Because gates don’t attack.

Gates defend. Which means Jesus sees His church not hiding inside—but storming the gates.

THE PROBLEM WITH A DEFENSIVE FAITH

A defensive faith says, “Let’s just protect our people.” “Let’s stay safe.” “Let’s avoid messy situations.” “Let’s keep church comfortable.” However, nothing about Jesus was comfortable. He touched lepers. He ate with sinners. He walked through Samaria. He stood in storms. He bled in public. And then He said, “As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.” Sent? Where? Into the same mess.

SALT THAT NEVER LEAVES THE SHAKER

Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.” (Matthew 5), But salt only works when it touches something. Light only works when it enters darkness. **If salt stays in the shaker it’s decoration.**

If light stays inside the church, it’s wasted electricity.

And if the church never leaves safe spaces, we’re not preserving anything. We’re just performing.

WHERE ARE THE GATES TODAY?

Let’s make this real. The gates aren’t abstract. The gates have addresses.

They look like:

- the house down the street where addiction owns the night
- the school where kids carry silent anxiety
- the family one paycheck from collapse
- the coworker smiling on the outside and drowning inside
- the friend who says “I’m fine” but hasn’t prayed in years

Those are the gates. And Jesus says, **That’s where My church belongs.** Not just singing about hope.

But carrying it.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN DIDN’T SCHEDULE COMPASSION

Luke 10 says a man is beaten, and left for dead. Religious people walk by. Busy. Important. Late for church, probably. But the Samaritan stops. Gets messy. Gets involved. Spends money. Risks inconvenience. Because love that costs nothing changes nothing. And here’s the uncomfortable truth:

The priest and Levite probably had great theology. They just didn’t have movement. And Jesus says the hero is the one who moved.

THE CHURCH JESUS ENVISIONS

Not a church:

- obsessed with preference
- divided over style
- consumed with comfort

But a church:

- running toward brokenness
- interrupting injustice
- refusing to ignore pain
- showing up where others step back

A church that doesn’t say, “That’s not our problem.” But says, “If it breaks God’s heart, it’s our assignment.”

WHAT IF WE ACTUALLY LIVED THIS WAY?

Imagine if:

- every believer saw themselves as deployed
- every Sunday fueled Monday mission

- every neighborhood felt the church's presence
- every hurting person knew where to find hope

We wouldn't need better marketing. We'd have undeniable witness. The gates wouldn't stand a chance.

THE HARD QUESTION

Here's the soul-piercing question, If your faith never puts you near broken people...Is it really following Jesus? Because Jesus always moved toward the mess. Always.

If our Christianity keeps us clean but not compassionate, safe but not sent, comfortable but not courageous—we may have religion. But we don't yet have mission.

THE CALL: MOVE TOWARD THE GATES

This is where the sermon becomes obedience. Not someday. Not theoretically. Now.

This week, pick one gate. One place. One person. One need. And move toward it.

- Have the conversation
- Make the visit
- Offer the help
- Show up consistently

Not to fix everything. Just to refuse to walk by.

LET THE CHURCH TAKE ITS PLACE

Jesus didn't say, "I will build My church and it will survive." He said, "The gates will not prevail." That's not survival language. That's victory language. Which means the church has nothing to fear—except wasting its calling. So here's the declaration, we will not hide. We will not retreat. We will not play defense. We are salt. We are light. We are sent. And we belong at the gates.

Let the Church say Amen —and then go stand where hope is needed most.

Suggested Response Moment (Powerful + Practical)

Have people:

1. Write down one "gate" God is calling them toward
2. Pray in pairs for courage
3. Close with a commissioning prayer over the congregation

Not dismissal. Commission.