

The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail

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The 2008 Montana District LWML Convention had as its theme “On this Rock...” There were three Bible Studies on this passage. The first, “On this Rock” was led by the LCMS District President Terry Forke. The second was led by District LWML Counselor Aaron Stinnett on “I will build My Church.” I presented this study as the third and final study.

Just recently I was paying bills and came across a credit card receipt from a dress shop in the mall. It showed a purchase of a dress for \$300. I tried to remain calm, but I’m sure my voice gave away my angry mood when I confronted Cheryl with the bill. “How could you do this?” I demanded. Cheryl replied, “I don’t know. I was walking past the store and saw it in the window and before I knew it, I was trying it on. It was like the Devil was whispering to me, ‘Gee, you look great in that dress. You should buy it.’” I told her, “Honey, you know how to deal with the Devil! Just tell him, “Get behind me, Satan!” Cheryl said, “I did! I told him to get behind me. And he said, ‘It looks great from back here, too.’”

We can laugh, but the truth is that we all do battle with Satan everyday. The church is under constant attack. Satan and his forces are always attacking, always on the offensive, always looking to take us down. We’re in a fight. We’re in a battle. Paul reminds us of this in the context of putting on the armor of God: *“our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* Ephesians 6:12

After the introductory paragraphs and the passage from Ephesians 6, Have everyone turn to the theme verse, **Matthew 16:18**. **You will want to compare translations, so several are printed below the following paragraph.**

Read Matthew 16:18 This is the promised victory for God’s people. It tells us that Satan is not the victor – Jesus is. He has won the victory. Luther wrote: “All Christians are Peters on account of the confession which Peter here makes, which is the rock on which Peter and all Peters are built.” So the promise is not just for Peter, but for the people who profess and possess the faith that Peter expressed here. We are all a part of the promise, a promised victory that comes from Jesus Himself, the one who overcame death just as He said He would, proving the reliability of His words. We maintain our faith in our Savior in spite of what is going on in the world around us.

Matthew 16:18

(ESV) 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.

(KJV) And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

(NRSV) And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

(NASB95) “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

(NIV) 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.

Footnote in NIV “not prove stronger than it”

Many of us are used to hearing the translation “**the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,**” Because that is how it appeared in the KJV. But the more literal translation is “Gates of Hades”

Hades is one of several words in Scripture that are rendered “hell” in English. It occurs 10 times in NT. In addition to “Hades” (5x) NIV renders as

- “the depths” (Mt. 11:23; Luke 10:15)

Matthew 11:23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

Luke 10:15 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.

- “Hell” (Luke 16:23)

Luke 16:23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

- “the grave” (Acts 2:27. 31)

Acts 2:27-31 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’ “Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.

In classical Greek, Hades both a “god” and the place of the dead—why we often understand it as the place of the dead.

The Gates of Hell shall not prevail... discuss what you think of when you hear this phrase

Make sure you allow time for discussion here before going on – find out what ideas people have about the “Gates of Hell” or “Gates of Hades.”

I think most often we hear this passage as saying that the church will withstand any and all attacks of Satan. The forces of evil will not overcome, overpower, or prevail against the church

of Jesus Christ. That is true. We think of the portals of Hades as being that place from where the many and varied attacks of the devil and all his forces originate. The gates of a walled city symbolize its strength. Not only could they keep out invading armies, but it would be the place through which a city sent its own army to attack others. We envision the gates of Hell are opened and they spew forth legions of evil intent on doing us eternal harm. Maybe we don't have as vivid an understanding of this as we should, but the demons are intent on destroying the church.

Luther had a firm grasp on this and refers to it in his hymn "A Mighty Fortress" :

**Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall no overpower us.
This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none, he's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.**

[There is more facing you than just a problem here and there.](#)

The enemy is not just that quarrelsome person with whom you can't get along. It is not just improper conduct and conversation. It is more than those inappropriate movies and internet sites. You are not just struggling against bodily ailments and financial woes. Satan is your ultimate enemy. He stands at the head of a vast, powerful, invisible army of evil spirits who are intent upon your eternal destruction. He uses things like those listed above to pull you away from God. And you know that at times, he is successful--he takes your focus away from Christ.

The promise Jesus makes is that evil and death and Satan will not prevail against HIS church. He said He would build HIS church on the confession of Peter, and that will stand. That is the promised victory

In our hymn, "The Church's One Foundation" we remind ourselves that "the church shall never perish" because that is the promise of our Lord.

There is another way to understand this phrase "the Gates of Hades will not prevail", or prove stronger than, the church. **Hades**, the place of death, cannot keep the dead in Christ captive. Jesus and His resurrection and His victory will Prevail. With Christ on the offense, assaulting the place of the dead, the faithful will come out. Death will not be able to hold believers in Christ. The Grave has no choice to give up the saints.

[Revelation 14:13 \(NIV\) Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."](#)

The gates of Hades will "Not prove stronger than" the church because of who is on our side, the Rock on whom our hope is built. The one who made everything is still in control of it all.

[John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."](#)

Death is not the victor, JESUS IS. Death has no power over those who are in Christ.

John 5:24 NIV

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

We have crossed over from death to life because of the cross of Jesus Christ. Our Lord and Savior was willing to take all of our sins on Himself and pay the price through that brutal crucifixion. And in rising from death, He proclaimed this victory that becomes ours through faith in him, the victory over sin and death and Satan and whatever He throws our way. The gates of Hades cannot prevail against those who are in Christ Jesus.

One more promise: Speaking of our spiritual warfare against the spirit of antichrist in this world, John conveyed this promise from our gracious God.

1 John 4:4 (NIV) You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

The one who is in you is the one who won the victory for you on a cross, the one who allows us to CROSS OVER from death to life, the one who promised, “On this rock I will build my church, **and the Gates of Hell will not prevail against it.**”