

HIS CHURCH

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“My church,” Jesus said, “I will build My church.” I love this clear, potent statement. After combing through the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, after reading all of the words recorded of Jesus in these four gospels, there are only two occurrences of the word “church.”

The church would be spoken of on numerous occasions after the day of Pentecost. But the gospels only contain two passages using the word “church.” Both are in Matthew (Matthew 16:18, Matthew 18:17).

Matthew 16:17-19 records these powerful words of the Son of God when for the first time the word “church” is used in the New Testament. The words of Jesus are powerful and to the point. Each word is loaded with meaning.

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’

Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to 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 also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My

church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:13-19, NKJV).

Let’s be clear, Jesus did not say that the church would be built upon Peter, or his successors. Jesus used a play on words, that is lost in our English translation. Jesus called Peter a Greek word “*Petros*” which means “a piece of rock, a stone, a single stone that is movable, insecure, shifting, or rolling.” Jesus continued referring to Himself using the Greek word “*Petra*” which means “a rock, a cliff, a projecting rock, mother rock, huge mass, solid formation that is fixed, immovable, enduring.”

In other words, using the Greek definition of these words, Jesus said something like this: And I tell you Peter (*Petros*- a small pebble or rock), upon this *Petra* (a huge rock mass, the mother rock, a solid foundation, speaking of Jesus Himself), I (Jesus, not Peter) will build My church.

Restating this scripture again in more of a true literal form, would be similar to this: “And I tell you, small rock, upon Me, the massive, unmovable rock, I will build My church.”

Literally billions have worshiped the man Peter and his successors incorrectly believing that the church was built on the man, Peter. Nothing could be further from the truth. The church would be made of fleshly

stones (people) built upon the *Petra*, or the unmovable, unchanging rock which is Jesus Christ.

Years later Peter himself would remind us that we are all small but living stones built upon the massive unmovable rock which is Christ the Son of God.

1 Peter 2:1-10, NKJV, *“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby; if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,*

‘Behold, I lay in Zion. A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,’ and ‘A stone of stumbling. And a rock of offense.’

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

Returning to these important first scriptures dealing with the first mention of the word “church,” let’s return to Matthew Chapter 16. First, let’s talk about the word “church.” It literally means, according to Wikipedia:

Ecclesia (or Ekklesia) in Christian theology means both: a particular body of faithful people, and the whole body of the faithful. Latin ecclesia, from Greek ekklesia, where the word is a compound of two segments: “ek,” a preposition meaning “out of,” and a verb, “kaleo,” signifying “to call” - together, literally, “to call out.” Although that usage soon passed away and was replaced with assembly, congregation, council, or convocation.

In other words, in its truest form, church, or ecclesia means “the called out of.” The word church is also used as a reference to a group of believers such as “the church in his house,” or “tell it to the church.”

“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house” (Colossians 4:15, NKJV).

“And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17, NKJV).

Jesus called His church out from the “world.” The Greek word is “cosmos.”

“Do not love the world (cosmos) or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15, NKJV).

(From Ryrie Study Bible Notes) - the world (Gk., *cosmos*) is that organized system headed by Satan that leaves God out and is a rival to Him.

(From MacArthurComm) - the world. This is not a reference to the physical, material world but the invisible spiritual system of evil dominated by Satan (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) and all that it offers in opposition to God, His Word, and His people (cf. 5:19; John 12:31; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 4:4; James 4:4; 2 Peter 1:4).

I find it so intriguing that Jesus preached only general statements about this “church” or “called out.” Although the disciples spent about three years with Jesus, hearing His words and His doctrine, yet there was much that was not revealed to them until after Pentecost. It is a mystery why

Jesus did not reveal the fine detail of the church that was to come while he was with his disciples. After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit they were able to receive the revelation of the order of the church.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:12-13, NKJV).

After Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead, but before He ascended to heaven, He spent forty days with the disciples speaking to them of things to come and teaching on things that pertain to the coming kingdom of God. Our feeble minds cannot comprehend what it was like for forty days having the resurrected Christ as the teacher.

Did He preach to them all day? I am sure they could still see the nail prints in His hands and feet. We can only imagine what that 40-day experience was like.

Little is said about these forty magnificent days with the disciples before His ascension into heaven. In fact, there is only one brief reference to this forty-day period in all of the gospels, which is recorded in the Book of Acts.

“To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3, NKJV).

It is not recorded in the pages of the Holy Word what Jesus said during those forty days, but we do know that Peter was well prepared to present the first gospel message to the world on the day of Pentecost. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, this uneducated ordinary fisherman spoke like no man, other than the Lord, had ever spoken before. Peter spoke with the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, is arguably the very beginning of the “church age.” Peter literally preached the very first whole gospel message. He preached Jesus crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

Peter’s first message, in Acts 2, contains in a miniature form, most of the ingredients for this new “called out” or “church.” Many key truths of the gospel of the kingdom are included in Peter’s very first gospel message. We shall examine this a little later.

The truths presented by Jesus and the apostles concerning the structure of the church are not complicated and are revealed in the Book of Acts and the writings of Paul and other apostles as recorded in the New Testament. Down through the years man has brought “every wind of doctrine” to bear on church structure resulting in a hierarchy in the church which Jesus never intended. *“That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14, NKJV).*

Let’s take a look at a few of the truths of the gospel of the kingdom primarily given in Acts chapters 1 and 2. As we compare what we see in these passages of scripture regarding the structure of the church with what is going on in Christendom today, may the Holy Spirit help us to discern what is of God and what has been put in place through the mind of man. We thank the Lord for the multitudes that have been transformed by the messages from genuine servants of God, throughout the world. The Lord has a very large vineyard, and we give thanks for all the spiritual husbandman throughout God’s vineyard who faithfully perform their ministry.

In what we call this “move of the Spirit,” from the beginning the Lord has revealed the need to follow the original pattern of the New Testament church. God has encouraged us to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, and to be true to His word as He reveals it. Next we will briefly examine

some of these basic truths.

Your becoming part of the church begins with a saving relationship with Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. You are “saved by grace.” There is nothing you can ever do to earn the forgiveness of God. It is a free gift that is available for the asking and your acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. No rules or regulations will ever save you. Salvation comes to all who ask, and is given freely with no reservation. It is not based on your works. It is based on the sacrificial gift of Christ. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9, NKJV). *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:2, NKJV). *“‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”* (Acts 16:30-31, NKJV). *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12, KJV). *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life”* (John 5:24, ESV).

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’” (Matthew 6:9-13, ESV). *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me”* (Revelation 3:20, ESV).

Christ is the foundation, and His apostles, in the early hour of the church, and in this hour continue to be identified with that foundation. *“... having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone”* (Ephesians 2:20, NKJV). The Ryrie Study Bible Notes portray the church as a temple, Christ is the chief cornerstone, the apostles and New Testament prophets are the foundation, and each Christian is a stone in the building (1 Peter 2:4-8). Christ has gifted each individual in the church with spiritual gifts.

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men’” (Ephesians 4:7-8, NKJV).

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant” (1 Corinthians 12:1, NKJV). *“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord”* (1 Corinthians 12:4-5, NKJV). *“... for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills”* (1 Corinthians 12:8-11, NKJV).

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are “gifts” given to the individual. The “five fold” ministry gifts contained within the apostolic ministry of the early church, and the church today, are the gifts to the church in general. *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for*

the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16, NKJV).

Let us now return to Acts chapter 1 and 2, and list briefly the kingdom truths revealed in these two important chapters. Kingdom truths include the promise of the infilling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the believer, and the promise of the grand second return of Christ to the earth.

“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father; ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:4-11, NKJV). Much prayer and unity has always been a key truth in preparation for the moving of God’s spirit.

“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:12-14, NKJV). *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place”* (Acts 2:1, NKJV).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, became available to all of humanity, and is important for the empowerment of the church. *“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:2-4, NKJV). *“For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call”* (Acts 2:39, NKJV).

Salvation became available on the day of Pentecost to all people. To the Jew and to the non-Jew (Gentile). The door was opened wide for all mankind to be saved from spiritual death, simply by calling on the Lord. *“And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Acts 2:21, NKJV). *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9, NKJV).

The Gospel of the Kingdom includes prophecy, *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy”* (Acts 2:17-18, NKJV).

“Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe” (1 Corinthians 14:22, NKJV). *“For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”* (1 Corinthians 14:31-32, NKJV).

The gospel of the kingdom includes repentance, and baptism, both in water and in the Holy Spirit. *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and*

brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.' And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.' Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:37-41, NKJV). "And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?'

So they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19:1-6, NKJV). "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5, NKJV).

The New Testament church, immediately after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, continued to walk in the apostles' teaching and doctrine, in breaking of bread, which refers to the communion, and in prayers. These same three truths are still very important in the establishment of His church in the earth. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42, NKJV).

Paul spoke later about the doctrine, that he received as an apostle,

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:6-12, NKJV).

The following scriptures deal briefly with the Lord's supper (communion): "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread (referring to the communion service) from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47, NKJV). "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, NKJV).

"When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you'" (Luke 22:14-20, NKJV). "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, NKJV).

Let us endeavor to follow closely the pattern of His church, as revealed in the New Testament. It is a new day, a new hour! Let us resist the temptation of complacency, and reach out for all that the Lord has said would be included in this glorious kingdom message of His church. †

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