



## **“The Destiny of the Church”**

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The church is one of the greatest themes in the history of mankind. We'll conclude our series on The Church That Jesus Built when He left the earth for glory two thousand years ago. In this series, we've talked about what the church is, when Christ built it, how to identify it in this crowded, confusing modern religious landscape, what significance it has to each of us individually and what responsibility we each bear to it. All of these are very relevant and critical questions, but today, we're going to look ahead. What does the future hold for the church of Christ? Jesus said nothing would prevent Him from building His church (**Matthew 16:18**) but what are its prospects for the future, however long that may be?

There's a wonderful statement made by the Hebrew writer as he urges the disciples to remain faithful to Jesus; not to forsake Christianity to return to the sacrifices of the Jewish temple. Some were tempted to do so because from their vantage point, the future looked bleak for the church of Christ. Persecution and opposition were closing in, and they could very well lose their lives just because they were following Jesus and were numbered among His church.

**Hebrews 12:23-28** “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: (contrasting Moses and the law that came through him, with now the final commandment of God that came through Jesus Christ our Lord) **Whose voice then** (back in the time of Moses) **shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:”**

To put it simply, temporal things—including the temple with its ordinances and sacrifices—would pass away. But spiritual things will remain and last forever. He says, *WE* have received *a kingdom which cannot be moved*. The church may be threatened, but its future is sure. Today, as we conclude our series, let's consider the destiny of the church of Christ.

When Jesus said, *“Upon this rock, I will build My Church,”* perhaps His disciples didn't understand the real impact of what Jesus would build. Maybe that's because they didn't really understand the *rock* that the church would be built upon. That rock was Jesus, the Christ, the Eternal One. Just as death would not hold Him prisoner in Joseph's tomb, but He would burst forth from that cold and musty grave to live forevermore, truly death nor the gates of Hades would not prevail over Him. Even so, death would not keep Him from doing what He said and building His church. Little did that band of bewildered disciples know at that time the impact that Jesus Christ would have on the history and future of the world. Little did they then understand that they would be the foundation of a movement that would literally sweep the earth and transform it.

You recall what the prophet Daniel prophesied to King Nebuchadnezzar about the establishment of the church hundreds of years before:

**Daniel 2:44** *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”*

No other kingdom would overtake it or destroy it, no power on earth or in hell beneath would bring it to ruin. It would stand. And it WILL stand as long as time remains. Jesus was enthroned on the right hand of God when He ascended from earth back to glory, and He presently reigns as King over His kingdom (**I Timothy 1:17**). At the same time and in the same event, He became head over the church that He built on the Day of Pentecost following His resurrection and ascension (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). But that doesn't mean that His kingdom would be unopposed. His church has always been the target of skepticism, ridicule, even violent opposition and persecution, beginning with the apostles of Christ themselves. Nearly all of them died horrific deaths as martyrs for Christ and His church. In fact, there were some ten bloody persecutions waged against the church in its very earliest days, which led to many Christians being fed to lions, burned at the stake, flayed, many stoned to death. Many were thrown into prison and suffered very cruel injustices, either at the hand of the Jewish leaders, or the pagan Roman government.

In **Acts 28:22**, the church is called *the sect which is everywhere spoken against*. When you consider the fierce and vicious assault that was unleashed against this new institution from its very inception, it's remarkable that it survived. In fact, one of the greatest testimonies to the veracity and legitimacy of the Christian message and the church of Christ is its longevity and its durability. What other message, movement or group would survive the spiritual, physical and ideological attempts to stamp it out that Christianity has received for the better part of two millennia?

There is an interesting story recorded in **Acts 5** about the persecution of the apostles. The Jewish leaders were ready to kill them because they were preaching Jesus and turning people to Christ. There was a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel who was a well-known man, a professor of the Jewish school of theology where Paul attended at one time in his life. But in this case, Gamaliel ended up sparing these men of God's lives, even though he was no supporter or sympathizer with Christianity by any means. What he said was really a cowardly copout. Instead of truly considering the evidence supporting

Christianity and fairly putting Christianity on trial, he is merely minimizing or dismissing it. But in so doing, he unwittingly stated a very powerful and telling truth.

He basically told his Jewish colleagues to back off and let the apostles be, because their message likely wouldn't amount to anything more than a flash in the pan. He cited a few insurrectionists and rabble-rousers who had come along in the past and caused a stir among the people, like Theudas and Judas of Galilee, saying that they hadn't amounted to much. When they died, their disciples scattered and their movements fizzled and died. He says that if this 'Jesus movement' is like those, the same will happen; time will take care of it.

**Acts 5:38-39 "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."**

Whether he meant to or not, he expressed at least one tremendous truth in that when he said *you won't destroy the work of God. If the church is of Christ, you won't destroy it. It will stand, no matter what anybody does to it or against it.* Well, it DID live. It DID survive. Many Christians died. Many congregations perhaps were even stamped out of existence or went away with the passage of time. But the church of the Lord Jesus Christ survived, and that is a testament to its divine origin.

For all of its symbolism and mystery, the book of Revelation actually possesses a very simple and practical message. Perhaps in trying to delve into the mystery of the book, we miss the simplicity of it. Revelation was written by John, who received it in a vision while on the isle of Patmos, and it was an apocryphal book sent to the beleaguered and persecuted churches in the days of the late first century Roman empire. The future seemed very, very dark to the disciples in that day. If you can imagine being in their place, they were fearful. Many worshipped in secret. They feared daily for their lives. They were being told to bow to Caesar, to confess Domitian as Lord and God, or else be slain. To them, it seemed like the saints were encircled by the enemy, and it had to have seemed as if all hope was lost.

But Revelation was a message of victory and triumph. Thus, it was a message of exhortation to be faithful to Jesus. Perhaps in our efforts to minutely and carefully discern the symbols of Revelation, which often are so misinterpreted and misapplied, we miss the simple message: *Hold on. God holds the future in His hands. Jesus Christ has conquered Satan and He holds the keys to death and hell.* If the church will just hold on, it wins the war. As the old saying goes, read the back of the book and we win. Skirmishes and battles may look bleak, but the war is won.

Listen to this thrilling, apocryphal and symbolic imagery. (Keep in mind that Revelation is written in symbolic language.)

**Revelation 20:7-10 "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea (speaking of the devil's deception and incessant effort to bring the kingdom of Christ to naught). And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city (spiritual Jerusalem, the church, encircled by the enemies of God): and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."**

That's how the story of human history ends. In the next two chapters, John pictures the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, the glorified church, in a state of lasting eternal triumph, victory and bliss. That, my friends, is the destiny of the church.

We're led to believe today that the church is waning. That it's quickly fading and will soon vanish away, that there's really nothing to the outdated and archaic precepts of New Testament Christianity, except for maybe some diluted form of so-called Christianity that can exist to meet social needs that arise in the world and make people feel good about their existence by giving them a feel-good philosophy to live by. But Christianity as we read about in the Bible, as it was originally authored and adhered to is supposedly in the past and out of date. It may appear that way to us here in America, but I'll assure you that for every church in America that folds, one begins somewhere across the world. The battle is not over. There are those who still have not bowed the knee to Baal. There are still multitudes of people who are hungry for the word of God. They are tired of and unsatisfied with the false religions. They are yearning for the simplicity that is in Christ, for the church that He built. It still exists. His kingdom will never be destroyed. The word of God is that seed that continually reproduces that kingdom (**Luke 8:11**), and heaven and earth will pass away before the word of our God, the seed of the kingdom, perishes (**Matthew 24:35**). Jesus told His disciples as much.

**John 16:33** "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

In that conversation that Jesus had with His disciples in **John 14,15 and 16**, He tells them that times are going to be difficult. He warns them that they will be persecuted for following Him. They will be thrown out of the synagogues and into prison. Some of them will even be killed for the name of Jesus Christ. It's not a very encouraging picture that Jesus paints for them. But He tells them to *Be of good cheer*, which literally means *Be encouraged. Be empowered*. He tells them that it may look bleak and depressing, but don't despair. Be encouraged, be of good cheer because although you will have tribulation in this world, he says, *I have overcome the world*. In other words, *I've defeated Satan and error. Truth triumphs*. I want to close with this wonderfully reassuring scripture in **Ephesians 3:21**. This is really a great chapter about the church. Paul talks about how the church is the revelation or manifestation of God's eternal purpose, and he concludes that portion of his letter by saying this:

**Ephesians 3:21** "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

When you go back and look at the Greek of that phraseology *throughout all ages, world without end*, what he is literally saying is *God will be glorified in the church through Jesus Christ and what He has done and who He is until the end of time*. That's literally what he is saying.

Friend, THAT the destiny of the church. It will endure throughout all ages of time and it will be here when Christ Jesus returns for His bride. When the smoke of life's conflict is cleared away, the church will be standing. When the earth and all that is therein is burned up with fire, the church will live with Jesus in glory and triumph forevermore. There is a spiritual warfare that continues to rage. It is a war for the hearts and souls of men. It is a war for your soul and your allegiance, and when the battle is over, here is the question: What side will you be on? Will you be numbered among His congregation? His assembly? His ecclesia? His church, the church of Christ? Washed in His blood, redeemed in His love, sanctified and purified by His words, set apart and fit for heavenly association with Him and all of the saints of every age?

**Ephesians 5:23 “...even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”**

Jesus died to save His church and He’s coming back for His church one day. The hard reality is that no one outside of His body will be saved. His church, His bride will live with Him forever. Those who are not in His church belong to the world. That’s the reality. They may be moral, successful in life, well-liked and popular, they may feel very safe and secure. They may even have done many wonderful works in the name of Jesus, but because they DID NOT do His will, Jesus said this will be their fate:

**Matthew 7:21-23 “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”**

You see, you must be part of His body to go to heaven. How do you do that? You don’t join it, you don’t ask some man or group of men to write your name on its roll.

**Acts 2:38, 41 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost... Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”**

To what were they added?

**Acts 2:47 “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”**

**I Corinthians 12:13 “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”**

That is, led by the spirit of God through the gospel that He revealed, brought to faith and taught to do so by Him.

**Colossians 1:18 “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”**

So, Paul says there is *one body*, which means there is *one church*. The one that He built, the one that He is head over, the one that follows His will and His teachings, the one that worships Him *in spirit and in truth*, and *He is the savior of His body*.

Are you a member of it? Have you truly obeyed the gospel of Christ? You must believe His word.

**John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

You must believe that He truly is the Christ. Be willing to put your faith and trust in Him. That’s not all--faith that saves is faith that obeys. You must turn to Him in repentance from your sins.

**Luke 13:3 “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”**

Those are very plain words spoken by the Lord: *Repent or you will be lost*. You must also be willing to publicly identify with Him by confessing His name as the Son of God before others, or else He will deny YOU before God.

**Matthew 10:32-33 “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”**

If those things be the case, then you’re ready to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness/remission of your sins. When you do that, the Lord—because of His grace and mercy—will write your name in the book of life, and you will be added to His glorious church. You can then identify with a local church that follows the New Testament in all matters of faith and practice, and you can faithfully worship and serve Him until the day that He comes for His bride and takes you home to live with Him in glory. If we can help you to seek and find the church that Jesus built, call on us today. We’ll be so happy to assist you, including in helping you to obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in baptism and letting Him add you to His church.

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