



ORIGIN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

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Good morning and welcome. Today, I want to talk about the church we read about in the New Testament. During His earthly ministry, Jesus told His disciples that He would build His church and the gates of hades would not prevail against it; that is to say, death would never thwart the establishment and existence of the church of Christ. The bible elsewhere tells us that the kingdom of Christ will never be destroyed. So, if Jesus built His church and it has not been destroyed, then it still exists. But what is it? What are its characteristics? What form did the church take when Jesus established it in the days of His apostles? There is much confusion about those things today. For one thing, there are hundreds of organizations across America and around the globe which claim to either be the church or a part of the church. These groups vary in doctrine, practice, name, and structure.

What we wish to do in a new series of lessons, is simply open the bible and let it speak concerning the church as it existed in the days the New Testament scriptures were written. For a beginning point, we turn to the words of Jesus to His disciples in Caesarea Philippi, recorded in Matthew 16, beginning in verse 13 and reading through verse 18. "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." In the coming weeks, we will look at several facets of the church revealed in the New Testament, but today, we want to focus on its origin and beginning. Today's lesson: The Origin of the New Testament Church.

The church of Christ is a prominent theme of scripture and is the primary object of God's plan for the ages. It is not an insignificant detail in God's program, but rather a central fact in God's scheme. We're not saved BY the church – we're saved by Christ -- but the saved are IN the church because God adds all

who are saved to it (Acts 2:47). The word rendered as ‘church’ in our English bibles means “the called out”. It refers to an assembly of people who are distinguished from the rest of the people in the world. The church enjoys a special, covenantal relationship with God that those outside of the church do not possess until they are called out the world by the gospel and upon obedience to that gospel are added by the Lord to the church. That fact alone makes the church a subject worthy of our utmost attention and study. It should make us want to desire to be numbered among the church. But what church are we talking about?

Today, folks see the church in different ways and most think of it as being made up of varying and conflicting religious organizations who claim to belong to Christ. Since the Protestant Reformation, those claiming to be the church have been fragmented into a dizzying number of denominations and this has been the case for so long that many take it for granted that this is normal and acceptable to God. It seems overwhelming to stand and survey the religious landscape today and try to discern the church of the bible. That church was not splintered into hundreds of denominations and conflicting organizations but rather represented one body eventually made up of people from all backgrounds. The apostle Paul succinctly stated in Ephesians 4:4 that there is “one body.” The church existed in the form of many congregations spread across the world, but those congregations did not represent a myriad of denominations and theologies. If the beliefs and practices of a congregation erred from the truth, the apostles quickly set out to correct those errors and bring that church back into line with what was right. That should be our desire today, as well: to see the church be what Christ intended for it be in belief and practice and what the apostles taught it to be. In this series of lessons, we want to simply look at the church as Christ instituted it, long before the doctrines and traditions of men corrupted it and see what the New Testament reveals about it. And surely, if we are concerned about truth, we should all desire to be a part of the church as Christ built it.

Today, we want to consider the ORIGIN of the New Testament church. Where, when, and how did the church originate? Is it the product of the work and thinking of men or did it originate with God? If it came from God, was it His plan all along or is it just some small detail in His program for mankind? Well, according to the scriptures, the church is a focal point of God’s scheme of redemption and His overall plan. It is the result of God’s saving work. The apostle Paul made plain the fact that the church was in God’s mind from before the dawn of time. That should tell us how dear and how important the church is to God. In Ephesians 3, verses 9-11, he describes his mission to the nations like this: “to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Notice a few points that Paul makes.

- 1) the scheme of redemption (which Paul refers to as a mystery – which just means that it was hidden from man until the time of its revelation) the scheme of redemption was in the mind of God “from the beginning of the ages”.
- 2) This “eternal purpose” was accomplished by the work of Jesus Christ -- in His coming, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension and enthronement.
- 3) This eternal plan is made known to all, including the forces of the unseen spirit realm through church – that is -- by the existence of the church, all can see the result of God’s work through the ages.

So, the church did not originate in the minds of men but rather in the infinite and eternal mind of God. It was in God's purpose all along for Christ to build His church. There is, by the way, a school of thought that essentially says that God came up with the church late in His program after the Jewish nation rejected Christ and His kingdom offer to them – but the bible doesn't teach that – it teaches the opposite. The church is not only a divine institution – it was in the mind and plan of God from eternity. It should not surprise us then to hear the Old Testament prophets referring to it in their prophecies. For example, Isaiah said, 700 years before Christ came, in Isaiah 2:2-3 "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. [3] Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." Notice that he says that in the latter days (a phrase in the bible which refers to the time beginning with Christ and his first coming) the Lord's house would be established. Well, where does God presently dwell with the people on earth? He dwells among His people, the church. Paul told the church at Corinth that they were the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). He also told Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15 that the "**HOUSE** of God" is "the **CHURCH** of the living God."

So, Isaiah is looking through his prophetic telescope and seeing the establishment of the church in this world. It would supersede all the kingdoms and institutions of this world in the eyes of God. Now then, notice that he said the Lord's house would be established and that subsequently, the word of the Lord would go forth out of Zion – or out of Jerusalem. This is exactly what occurred beginning on the Day of Pentecost, 49 days following Christ's resurrection. Less than a year before Christ went to the cross, He was travelling with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi and made the important declaration that He would build His church and death would not prevent Him from doing so. He elicited a confession from the lips of Peter that He was God's Son, sent from God to be the Christ – or God's anointed King – and Jesus said that this was the rock upon which His church would be built.

Now, I know there are many who believe that Peter himself was the Rock Jesus was referring to, but the original Greek does not bear that out. Jesus used two different words, one meaning a little stone and another a large rock. His play on words was simply to let Peter (whose name refers to the little stone) that on the great truth he had confessed (that Jesus was the King), the church would be constructed. The church was not built upon Peter, it was built upon the Christhood of Jesus. It was built BY Jesus, by God's commission, and upon the truth of the ages that Jesus is the Christ. When people come obedient and saving faith in that fact, they are added to this great spiritual house, the church. Not only is Peter not the head of the church, neither is any other man. Jesus alone claims that title. It is HIS church, for God sent Him to build it, and it constitutes HIS kingdom in the world that God gave Him to rule over.

So, when we look at the church of the New Testament, we're looking at something that Christ alone had the authority to build and something that only He has the rule over. It is HIS church and not ours or anyone else's, and we should always remember that! Now then, when did Jesus build His church? When, as Isaiah prophesied, was the Lord's House established and when, as Jesus promised, did He build His church. When, where, and how did it begin? Well, notice that Jesus told His disciples that when He built His church, He would grant the keys to KINGDOM. In other words, the promised kingdom would appear when He built His church. Well, what did Jesus say about the coming of His kingdom? In Mark 9:1, he said that His kingdom would come in the lifetime of the apostles. He said, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." So, the Kingdom would be in existence within the lifetimes of some living in the first

century. That means, the church would be established in that same period. Jesus said that it would come with “power”. What power? Well, after the resurrection of Jesus and shortly before His ascension and enthronement in Heaven, Jesus told the apostles that they would receive power when He sent the Holy Spirit to them (Luke 24:49). Now then, remember, that according to Isaiah, when the Lord’s house was established, the word of the Lord would go forth from JERUSALEM. Well, notice was happened before Jesus departed for heaven in Acts 1:4 “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;” and in verse 8: “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.” So, the power would come when the Holy Spirit came upon them in Jerusalem. Turn the page to chapter 2, and that is exactly what happened. The Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles and endued them with power which was shown by their speaking in foreign languages they had never learned. Once that sign was seen by the people in Jerusalem, Peter used the keys of the kingdom by preaching the Lordship and Kingship of Christ and declared the terms of entrance into the kingdom. Thousands responded that day by believing the message, turning from their sins in repentance, changing their allegiance to Christ as King, and being baptized in water for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38) and then see in verse 47: “...And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

So, that’s the grand beginning of the church of Christ, which was planned by God from eternity, prophesied in the Old Testament, brought into existence by Christ, declared by the apostles, and described for us in the New Testament scriptures. That’s the church that Jesus built. And that’s the only church that God ever indicated would be built. It was to ultimately include people from all the nations of the earth, and it was to unite people under the lordship of Jesus Christ who had been reconciled to God through Him. As the apostles launched out from that first day in Jerusalem and eventually fanned out across the empire and the world, they preached the same message, men and women became obedient to the same faith, and they were added to the same church. Those men and women in cities and communities across the world came together into local assemblies of that church each of which constituted the body of Christ in that place.

We read of the church, and we read of people of “like precious faith” making up congregations of the church but never do we read of any such thing as a denomination. Never in the New Testament do we read of men or women establishing distinct religious bodies representing unique doctrines, theologies, and practices. Paul, in fact, on more than one occasion, stated that what he taught one church to do, he taught the other churches to do as well. Denominations and distinct religious organizations came much later and when anything akin to or foreshadowing the idea of denominations and sects began to emerge, it was swiftly and soundly condemned by the apostles. For example, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 “Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” Paul rebuked those who aligned themselves after any person but Christ. My friend, Christ never instituted a single denomination in this world. He never sanctioned nor commissioned anyone to begin a denomination in this world. Denominations represent division (despite the ecumenical claims we sometimes hear among the denominations) – the very existence of such is contrary to the design and plan of Christ and His church. Any religious organization larger than a local congregation established through the preaching and reception of the gospel is not of God – it is of men – and should be rejected.

We should each desire to simply be the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing less and nothing more. And if all people made this their objective, every denomination would fold and fall, and we would begin to move toward the unity Christ desired and prayed for as He prepared to build His church. Lord willing,

as we continue our series, next week, we will look to the New Testament to see the form and organization of the New Testament church and I hope you'll plan to join me for that study.

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