

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CHURCH

Matthew 16:13-20

Intro: No message on the Christian life would really be complete without a message on the church. The church was brought into being by the Lord for His own glory but also for the spiritual blessing of the Lord's people. And it certainly can be said that any Christian who does not have a regular connection with a true NT church, is definitely at a disadvantage where his, or her, spiritual growth is concerned. The multiplication of parachurch organizations has made many professing Christians feel that the church is unnecessary. Parachurch organizations are Christian organizations outside of the church and not under the authority of any church.

Having said that, I must go on to say that one of the greatest tragedies of our generation, and probably it should be said that it is *the greatest tragedy*, is that the majority of churches today have departed from the teaching of the NT as to what a church should be. Churches have followed the world in the present-day craze for entertainment, and there does not seem to be any great interest in getting back to what the NT teaches about the church. As churches have moved away from the Scriptures, these parachurch organizations have multiplied to the point where many feel that the church is no longer necessary. And often no attempt is made to channel into churches those people who have professed faith in Christ. And sometimes when these parachurch organizations do attempt it, they send them into the wrong churches.

However, when we go to the Scriptures we find that in the days immediately following the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the work of the Lord was centered in churches – the church at Jerusalem, at Ephesus, at Colosse, and in many other places.

I. THE FIRST MENTION OF THE CHURCH IN SCRIPTURE.

This is found in the text which I have chosen for tonight: Matt. 16:13-20.

You can see that it was mentioned by our Lord Jesus Christ when He was with His disciples in the area of Caesarea Philippi. The Lord had asked His disciples what people were saying about Him. They gave Him various answers. See verse 14. Then the Lord turned the question to the disciples themselves, and Peter gave that memorable answer which most

people who read the Bible are acquainted with. Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” There could not have been a better answer. Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the one and only living and true God.

How was it that Peter knew this when others thought that the Lord was John the Baptist raised from the dead, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some one of the OT prophets who had come back to earth? The Lord told Peter that he had not learned this from anyone whom he knew on earth, but that it had been revealed to Him by the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ! And that is really the only way that anyone understands who Jesus Christ was, and is! Just when and where this became clear to Peter, we do not know, but it is obvious at this point in our Lord’s ministry that Peter knew who the Lord was.

And this was truly a blessing, what we could call the greatest of all blessings, when any person really understands that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God Who had come to earth as a human being. It is a great mystery, but it was true nevertheless.

Then in verse 18 the Lord mentioned the church.

This verse has been interpreted in various ways. The Catholic church tells us that here the Lord appointed Peter as the first Pope, and connecting it with verse 19 that church claims it has the authority to say who is saved, and who isn’t. But let us look more carefully into the words that our Lord used in verse 18. He was not making Peter the first Pope, but he was speaking about the confession that Peter had just made.

“Peter” in Greek is Πέτρος. The word “rock” is πέτρα. They both mean *a rock*, but the change in words would not suggest that Peter was the rock upon which the church would be built, but the Lord was referring to the confession that he had just made. This was a rock-like truth which formed the foundation of the church. Christ declared that He would build *His* church, not Peter’s, and that all who were a part of that work would believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And that to be a part of that church a person must truly believe in the Deity and Messiah-ship of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this message was to be believed by all who are in the church, and people would be bound or loosed depending upon what they believed about the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems that here the Lord was speaking about being bound by sin, or

loosed from sin, i.e., forgiven.

After Peter had preached the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost which we read about in Acts 2, people were convicted, and they asked Peter and the other apostles what they should do. And perhaps you remember Peter's answer:

38 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.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation (Acts 2:38-40).

The word "untoward" means *warped*, or *crooked*, or *perverse*.

So Peter did not understand that he had the power to forgive people of their sins, but he had the message of Christ, the Gospel, which was the message that would bring salvation to those who believed it.

But let me point out one other thing that our Lord said in this passage. He said, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The word that he used there was not the word which is used of the place of eternal torment, but that which refers to death and the grave. It is true that all of the powers of hell would not, and could not, destroy the church, although they have tried time and time again. But primarily the Lord meant that death, the death of the apostles, the death of the godly people of that first generation, would not put an end to the church. And today we lived approximately two thousand years after the church was first brought into being, *and it still continues today*. It is not a very strong church. It has many problems. But it is still here in spite of how the saints have come and gone. Why? Because the Lord is building it. And He will continue to build it until it is complete.

The Lord did not say, "I am building my church," but "I will build my church." When did it begin?

II. THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH.

The Apostle Paul made a very important statement in his first epistle to the Corinthians about the church. This is what he said:

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 (1 Cor. 12:13).

This “one body” which he spoke of is *the church*. In Eph. 1, in the last part of verse 22 and the first part of verse 23, we have the statement, “the church, which is His body.”

We take this truth and look for the first time there was a baptism by the Spirit, and that was on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Every mention of the baptism of the Spirit up to that point is future. So we conclude that on that Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 the church was brought into being. And all three thousand people who were saved on that day, became a part of the body of Christ, the church. And this included, of course, those apostles and other believers who were alive at that time.

So we can really say that the church in Jerusalem was the body of Christ.

However, we learn from the book of Acts that, in obedience to the command of the Lord before He left this earth, through the apostles and other believers, the Gospel began to spread to other cities in other parts of the Empire. The Lord’s command was that this Gospel was to go everywhere! It was to go to the whole world. And a very unusual thing began to take place under the blessing of God. Let me call it:

III. THE APPEARANCE OF LOCAL CHURCHES.

Some of the epistles of the NT give us the names of some of those churches. There was a church at Rome, a church at Corinth, a number of churches in Galatia, a church in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Colosse, and in Thessalonica, just to name a few. People were saved in many different places, and then, as was the case in Jerusalem, they began to meet together. They were taught the apostles’ doctrine. They realized the blessing of fellowship with each other. Prayer became a major part of their meetings, and there was the frequent observance of the Lord’s supper. And then as these churches were established they began to give their money as an offering to the Lord so that the Gospel might be taken to other place where the people had not heard of Christ and the Gospel.

Another significant thing that began to take place was the writing of the Apostles.

IV. THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES.

In these letters individual churches were instructed as to what they were to believe, how they were to live, and how they could serve the Lord. Among the last of these epistles were three written by the Apostle Paul to two of his younger fellowservants in which he gave them instruction not only about the ministry of these local churches, but of the leadership that was necessary, and the spiritual qualifications of those leaders.

Originally the work was in the hands of the apostles. As the work grew, others were appointed to serve with them (in Acts 6), and these were called *deacons*. But by the time Paul wrote the pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus – and some have added Philemon to that list), the ministry of the local churches was very clearly defined. Elders, or bishops, and deacons are the only leaders specified in the NT.

V. THE CHURCH TODAY.

From those days of the early church, many changes have taken place. Many things go on today in churches which have no basis in Scripture. And at the same time we have to say that that which the early churches were instructed to do, many churches are not doing today. Teaching is a rarity in churches, as is the preaching of the Gospel. The level of Christian living is far below the teaching of the NT. There are exceptions of course, but the church stands in great need of an awakening. Many buildings which carry the name “church” have no right to do so because they bear little or no resemblance to what the early church was instructed to do. In many cases humanistic psychology has replaced the teaching of the Word of God, and social issues and political issues are preached from the pulpits instead of the Word of God.

Concl: What are we to do?

Well, Trinity Bible Church is an example of what is taking place in many places. People are withdrawing from those places where the world is followed more than the Word, and they are gathering together for the purpose of getting back to the teaching of the Word of God, and to the instruction that the Lord has given us in His Word for the way His work is to be done.

Every child of God needs to be in a church where he can be instructed in

the Word, where he can be taught to worship, where he can enjoy the fellowship of other Christians, where baptism and the Lord's Supper are regularly observed, and where he can be encouraged to go out into the world, not to be like the world, but to spread the message of the Gospel of God's saving grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. The church needs to have the greatest priority in our lives. Nothing should be allowed to keep us away from the meetings of the church. In the early church they were so eager for the Word that often they met daily. Today many are content to be at the meetings of the church only once in the week.

The basis of Christian living is our own personal relationship with the Lord. This means daily Bible reading and prayer – individually, and in our families. Next in order is getting established in a church that is seeking to follow the teaching of Scripture in its services and in the guidance that is given for daily life and service.

Churches are to be made up of people whom God has called out from the world to Himself, has saved them, and through the church is seeking their edification, their building up in the faith. I doubt very much if a Christian can make much, continued progress in the things of the Lord, if he is not regularly under the ministry of the Word in a church devoted to the glory of God and the teaching of Scripture. All true believers throughout the world make up the body of Christ. As believers in Trinity Bible Church we are only a part of that body. We are far from being perfect as individuals or as a church. But by the grace of God let us persevere in the faith and pray that the Lord will make us individually and as a church a people who love Him, who love His Son, who love the Holy Spirit, who love the Word, and who love each other. If this is true of us, we are certain to see the blessing of the Lord.