Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

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PART 23: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

DIVINE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

The establishment of the church was a remarkable event in human history, brought about through the direct involvement of two members of the Godhead: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word “ekklesia” describes this divinely established assembly, meaning a gathering or congregation of people. The term is derived from Greek words meaning “to call out,” giving rise to the description “called-out ones.” The English word church, however, has a different origin. It traces back to the Greek word “kyriakon,” meaning “belonging to the Lord,” which came to be associated with the phrase “the Lord’s house.” As the term passed through the Germanic languages into Old English, it gradually developed into the modern English word “church.”

The important distinction is that the name of this divine institution established by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is not associated with any particular nation or ethnicity; rather, it describes a body of believers drawn from all nations who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The teaching of Jesus prior to the cross became the foundation of the belief system that over time would come to be known as “doctrine.” Toward the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus stated that He had many more things to teach, but knowing the disciples could not absorb it, deferred it to the Holy Spirit, who would guide them in the future.

> *“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*
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> *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*
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> *He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” (John 16:12-15)*

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Jesus explained to Nicodemus that physical birth alone does not qualify a person to enter the Kingdom of God. Just as physical life begins through natural birth, spiritual life must come through the Holy Spirit. This spiritual birth is necessary for a person to enter the God’s Kingdom.

> *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3b)*

Jesus commanded the 120 disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. This was not a request or a suggestion, but a direct command. They were to stay in Jerusalem and wait until the Holy Spirit came upon them, just as the Son of God had promised.

> *"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*
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> *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:4-5, 8)*

Pentecost, meaning "fiftieth," was a Jewish holiday celebrated fifty days after Passover. Also known as the Feast of Weeks, it was one of the major annual religious festivals that brought thousands of Jews from Judea and distant lands to Jerusalem to worship God at the temple.

Jesus was crucified the day after the Passover and rose from the dead three days later. Although His crucifixion was witnessed by many, His resurrection appearances were limited to selected witnesses.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was divinely timed to coincide with Pentecost, when thousands of Jews from distant lands had gathered in Jerusalem. This provided an extraordinary opportunity to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ and confront the ungodly Jewish religious leadership with the reality of His divine authority.

The high priest and his cronies could attempt to silence the apostles, but they could not suppress the powerful testimony of the Holy Spirit or prevent the Gospel from spreading.

> *"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*
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> *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*
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> *And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.*

And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (Acts 2:1-11)

PETER'S SERMON AT PENTECOST

As Jerusalem was stirred by the testimonies of the disciples, the Holy Spirit empowered Peter to take the lead. With the other apostles standing alongside, Peter boldly proclaimed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His sermon, delivered under the power of the Holy Spirit, brought conviction to many of the Jews who heard him. They were stricken in their hearts by the realization of what had taken place.

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Peter issued the first-ever public invitation to salvation following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, proclaiming a message that has now been preached for two thousand years. He called upon the people to repent, turn to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and be baptized in His name. Those who responded would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

"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. 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." (Acts 2:38-39)

THE EARLY JERUSALEM CHURCH

On the Day of Pentecost, approximately 3,000 people responded to Peter's preaching and were baptized, increasing the number of believers from about 120 to more than 3,000 in a single day.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41)

These early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Since no dedicated church buildings existed, they gathered in private homes for fellowship and shared meals while continuing to meet at the temple.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers… And they, continuing daily with one accord in

the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." (Acts 2:42, 46)

The Holy Spirit continued to add new believers to the church daily. Take note that the Bible makes no mention of the apostles voting to accept new members. Instead, those who received the Gospel and were baptized were immediately welcomed into the growing body of believers.

"…And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47b)

A person became a member of the New Testament church by repenting of their sins, accepting Jesus as their Savior, and being baptized in water through immersion.

For reasons not fully explained in the Book of Acts, the church in Jerusalem developed a communal system in which believers voluntarily shared their possessions and resources. Some sold their houses and lands, bringing the proceeds to the apostles for distribution among those in need. This arrangement ensured that the material needs of the congregation were met. However, this particular form of communal living was limited to the Jerusalem church and was not required for the other churches.

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." (Acts 2:44-45)

THE TEMPLE AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The temple grounds in Jerusalem played an important role in the daily life of the newly established church. The Jews observed regular times of prayer, particularly around 9:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M., corresponding to the morning and afternoon sacrifices. These were not necessarily organized prayer meetings led by the Jewish priests, but people came to the temple to pray to God while the priests continued performing their sacrificial duties.

The temple complex covered approximately 35 acres, making it one of the largest public gathering places in Jerusalem. The spacious courtyards provided an ideal location for the growing number of believers in Jesus Christ to assemble, pray, and fellowship with one another.

The apostles and other believers continued visiting the temple grounds daily. The ungodly Jewish leadership responsible for the death of Jesus had been laying low up to this point, but that changed when Peter and John went to the temple in the afternoon and encountered a man who had been lame from birth.

After Peter healed him in the name of Jesus Christ, a crowd gathered, providing Peter with another opportunity to preach the Gospel. The Jewish religious authorities responded by arresting Peter and John, marking the first recorded confrontation between the apostles and the corrupt religious leadership since the crucifixion of Jesus.

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God." (Acts 3:1-9)

EXPANDING BEYOND JERUSALEM

Jesus commissioned His church to spread throughout the world, proclaim the Gospel, and make disciples of all nations. The church was never intended to remain confined to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the apostles and the growing number of believers continued to gather in Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and resurrected, and where the temple stood as the center of Jewish religious life. Despite Christ's command to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth, the church remained largely concentrated in Jerusalem during its earliest years.

Jesus expects His followers to obey His commands and disobedience can bring serious consequences. The prophet Jonah learned this the hard way when God commanded him to travel to Nineveh and preach repentance to its inhabitants. Instead of obeying, Jonah ran away in the opposite direction, boarding a ship bound for Tarshish in an attempt to escape his assignment. The Lord sent a violent storm that threatened to destroy the ship. Jonah was eventually thrown overboard, where a great fish, specially prepared by God, swallowed him. After spending three days and three nights inside its belly, Jonah was delivered onto dry land. Jonah finally obeyed when God commanded him a second time to preach in Nineveh. The complete account is recorded in the book of Jonah.

Jesus had commanded His disciples to carry the Gospel beyond Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Yet the apostles and the growing church remained concentrated in Jerusalem. Scripture does not reveal whether the apostles had forgotten His command, were reluctant to leave, or believed they should remain there longer. What is certain is that the Gospel had not yet spread as Jesus had instructed.

God used the violent persecution that erupted following the martyrdom of Stephen to disrupt this established community and scatter its members throughout Judea and Samaria. Forced to leave Jerusalem, these believers carried the Gospel wherever they went, fulfilling the geographical expansion Jesus had commanded. What the enemies of the church intended to accomplish through persecution became the very means by which the Gospel spread beyond Jerusalem.

Jesus kept the apostles in Jerusalem, but it is inferred that the seventy others were used to provide leadership to the new churches. Despite the longstanding hostility between the Jews and Samaritans, the Gospel began to spread into Samaria. Philip traveled to the region and boldly preached Jesus Christ to its inhabitants. Many Samaritans believed his message and were baptized, establishing a growing community of believers and demonstrating that the Gospel was not limited to the Jews.

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." (Acts 8:1-5)

PHILIP AND THE ENUNCH

Later, an angel of the Lord directed Philip to travel south along the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, a route leading toward Egypt. There he encountered an Ethiopian eunuch who served as treasurer to Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. The eunuch had traveled to

Jerusalem to worship God and was returning home while reading the writings of the prophet Isaiah. Ethiopian tradition traces the nation's connection with the Hebrew faith back to the time of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

The Holy Spirit directed Philip to approach the eunuch, providing an opportunity to explain how Isaiah's prophecy pointed to Jesus Christ. The eunuch believed the Gospel and was baptized in water before continuing his journey home, rejoicing in his newfound faith.

The eunuch carried the Gospel back to his homeland, introducing Christianity to the region. Although the Book of Acts does not record his subsequent activities, Christianity eventually became firmly established in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Church developed its own distinctive Christian tradition and was never placed under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church.

“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.

And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:26-39)

SUMMARY

Jesus Christ established His church as a body of believers drawn from every nation, united by their faith in Him as Lord and Savior. He did not leave His followers to develop their own doctrines or determine the direction of the fledgling church. Instead, He promised that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth and empower them to carry the Gospel throughout the world.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in Jerusalem, fulfilling the promise of Jesus. Peter, empowered by the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaimed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His words with the Holy Spirit's conviction brought repentance to 3,000 Jews who received the Gospel and were baptized in water.

The church grew rapidly as believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking of bread. They gathered in private homes and on the temple grounds, voluntarily sharing their possessions to provide for those in need. Membership was not determined by a religious organization or a vote of acceptance. Jesus added believers to His church as they responded to the Gospel.

However, Jesus had not commissioned His followers to remain in Jerusalem. He commanded them to make disciples of all nations. When persecution erupted following the martyrdom of Stephen, believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, carrying the Gospel wherever they went. What the ungodly Jewish leadership intended to accomplish through persecution became an opportunity for the Gospel to spread beyond Jerusalem.

Philip's ministry in Samaria demonstrated that the Gospel was not restricted to the Jews. His encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch further revealed the guidance of the Holy Spirit in bringing the message of salvation to people from distant nations.

The New Testament church was established by Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and commissioned to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. Its foundation was not a building, a religious denomination, or an earthly institution, but a body of believers who had accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The same commission remains in effect today. The church of Jesus Christ is called to remain faithful to His teachings, submit to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and carry the message of salvation to every nation.