

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **EVANGELISTIC LESSONS** **“The Church that Jesus Built”**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

What do you know about the church that Jesus built? And what do you know about the church of which Peter, James, and Paul were members in the first century? Is it essential that we understand what the Bible teaches about the church if we want to be saved? We live in world where people will tell you, “Just choose the church of your choice, and God will be happy.” Is that **really** what God teaches? What does the Bible say about Jesus’ church?

We are not talking about modern denominationalism today, because that is not at all authorized in the Bible. In fact, it is condemned in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. Paul said, “Let there be no divisions among you.” We are asking, “What does the Bible say about the church we find in the Book of Acts?” Let us begin by studying the nature of the church that Jesus built. There is a blockbuster passage found in Matthew 16:18-19, which teaches us clearly about the nature of the church that Jesus built. Notice what Jesus said in the context of Jesus asking His disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” Some said, “Elijah,” or “John the Baptist,” or “Jeremiah.” Then Jesus turned and asked, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to Peter,

“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.

Jesus taught that the church was **His**, that it was built upon **His** deity, and that **He** was the Founder of the one church that **He** promised to build. As we think about the character and the nature of Christ’s church, we need to ask the question, “Who is the Founder of the New Testament church?” In our world today, there are many who have founded various religious groups and denominations—all of them after the time of the first century. But who founded the New Testament church? Let’s notice what Paul said about this in 1 Corinthians 3:11—“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Jesus said that He would build His church. He is the Founder of it (Mt. 16:18-19). And Paul said that there is **no other foundation** other than that which is laid. Laid by who? Laid by God and Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only Foundation (and Founder) of the church today.

In Acts 4:11-12, Peter spoke to the Jews (who were the religious leaders of their day) who had questioned a miracle that had been performed in Acts 3 when a lame man had been made to walk. They asked Peter, “By what power have you done these things?” Peter responded by saying,

“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Here, Peter presents Jesus as the interlocking cornerstone that holds the whole building together. Therefore, Jesus is both the **Foundation** and the **Founder** of the church. Here, then, is where this becomes very practical. If anyone other than Jesus Christ is the foundation of the religious movement of which you are a part, then that is not the church about which you read in the New Testament. It is not the church that Jesus will one day deliver to the Father. And it is not the church, the members of which have their names registered in Heaven (1 Cor. 15:24; Heb. 12:23). Remember that we must do all things by the authority of Jesus (Col. 3:17). The Bible says that we are not to go beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6). John said toward the close of the Book of Revelation that we are not to add to or take away from the Word of God (Rev. 22:18-19). All that being true, we must be sure that we do exactly what the Bible says concerning the church.

Then we need to ask a second question concerning the nature of the New Testament church. When was the New Testament church founded? At what time in history, according to the Bible, was the church to be founded? If we look to God's Word, we will find a clear and concise answer on this matter. The prophet Daniel prophesied in Daniel 2:44 concerning exactly when the Lord's church would be established. Daniel said,

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. “

We need to understand certain things about the context of Daniel's prophecy. Daniel had a vision of four different kingdoms. The Babylonia kingdom was the first. Then there was the Medo-Persian kingdom. Following that, history tells us, was the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great. Then there was the fourth kingdom of Rome. No new kingdom was established during the time of the Babylonian kingdom. No new kingdom was set up during the time of the Medo-Persian kingdom. And God's people were still under the Old Testament covenant during the time of Alexander the Great. But during the time of that fourth kingdom—the Roman kingdom—Jesus came and established His church. We know this because Jesus said during the time of the Roman kingdom, “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” (Mk. 9:1). Jesus promised that the kingdom would come during the time of the Roman Empire. Colossians 1:13 said that, at the time of the writing of that book (during the time of the Roman Empire), some had been translated into the kingdom of God's Son. In Acts 28:30-31 (again during the time of the Roman Empire), Paul was preaching the kingdom as a **present reality**. So, when was the Lord's church prophesied to become a reality? Daniel 2:44 said that it would be during the time of one of those four kingdoms. Today, we know that the only new kingdom to be set up during any of those kingdoms was the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is the kingdom. “The church” and “the kingdom” are used as synonyms in Mark 16:18-19. When Jesus said that He would give the “keys to the kingdom” and that He would “build His church,” those two are used synonymously. So, again, we ask the question: “When were most modern religious groups founded?” In what time period were most religious groups today founded? Most were founded at least a thousand years after the life of Christ. A few were founded a few years earlier, and some were founded a few years later. But most were founded hundreds of years after the establishment of the New Testament church. If they were not established during the time of the Roman Empire, then we must kindly say that they are not the church of which we read in the New Testament. Unless a church was established during the time of the Roman Empire, then it is not the church about which you read in the New Testament. Unless the church was founded during the time of which the Bible prophesied, then it is not the church that Jesus promised to build.

Then there is a third question to consider. Where does the Bible say the New Testament church would be founded? We have already noticed Who founded it and when it was founded. But where does the Bible the New Testament church would be founded? At what location on Earth was it to be founded? Isaiah helps us with this in a prophecy found 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. 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.”

Here, Isaiah is predicting that “the Lord’s house” is going to be established. He cannot be talking about the Old Testament house (founded in the time of Israel) because it was already established. Then what is he talking about? He is talking about (1 Tim. 3:15) “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Isaiah said that the word of the Lord would go forth out of Zion, which is a reference to Jerusalem—where the church was prophesied to be established. Micah 4:1-2 teaches the same thing. Jesus’ church was going to be established in Jerusalem during the time of the Roman Empire. Did that happen? Yes, it did. If we open our Bibles to Acts 2, we see Peter standing up with the other eleven apostles as he begins to proclaim the good news about Jesus Christ. He has the benefit of the Holy Spirit, and as a result he can speak in tongues (that is, a language he has never studied). When he brings his sermon to a climax, he notes that Jesus is the Savior—the Messiah Whom the Jews had crucified. People were told that they needed to repent and be baptized in order to obey God’s will. And then Acts 2:47 says, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Was the church about which we read in the New Testament established in Jerusalem? Absolutely! So let us ask again, “When it comes to most religious groups in existence today, where were **they** founded?” Most were founded in either England or in America (or perhaps in Rome or some place like that). None was founded in Jerusalem. They were founded in other places. If the Bible says that the church about which you read in the New Testament was going to be established by the word of the Lord being preached in Jerusalem, then we need to be a part of the church that was established in Jerusalem. If we are not a part of that church, then we are not a part of the church about which we read in the New Testament.

A fourth question we might ask is, “What name does the New Testament church wear?” What name does God authorize His church to wear? Someone might ask, “Is the name really **that** important? We think names are important. How many people, for example, do you know who would name their child “Judas” or “Adolph”? How many people do you know who would name their daughter “Jezebel”? We think that names are important in our own times today. I would not like it if, when I got married, my new wife took some other man’s name. Why not? Because she is **my** wife! I want her to wear my name. Today, we understand the importance of names. Jesus built His church, and there are biblical names by which it must be called. One God-given name is found in Romans 16:16 when Paul said, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.” The name “church of Christ” is a biblical name. Paul first talks about the type of greeting to which they were accustomed (“a holy kiss”). Then he refers to “the churches of Christ” (plural), since numerous congregations existed in Rome. Does that mean that we should give honor to Christ? Of course it does! The Bible also refers to the church as “the church of God.” In 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul wrote, “To the church of God, which is at Corinth....” In 1 Timothy 3:15, there are other terms that describe Christ’s church. For example, Paul said, “I write

so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." In Hebrews 12:23-29, the church is referred to as "the church of the firstborn," "the general assembly," and "God's church." So, these names must give God the glory. Remember that we must do only that which we find within the Bible. If it is the case that we cannot go beyond the words contained in the pages of the Bible, how could anyone be a part of a modern denomination today? If denominations are not found within the Bible, and if the Bible says, "Do not go beyond that which is written" (1 Cor. 4:6) and do not "add to or take away" (Rev. 22:18-29), how could anyone be a part of a religious group whose name is not in the Bible? For example, if you were to take the Bible to people who had never heard of the Reformation or Restoration Movements, and who did not know anything at all about modern-day denominationalism, and you said, "This is God's Word; read it and study it," and they did that, of what religious group would they be a part when they obeyed God's Word? They could not be a part of modern religious groups today because such groups are not mentioned in the Bible, and thus the people would have no history of them. These people, if they obeyed the Bible, would simply be a part of the church that was established in the first century. That is the point. If we are going to follow what the Bible says, then we need to do things in Bible ways and call ourselves by Bible names and descriptions.

Another question we might ask is this: "What is the purpose of the Lord's church today?" There may be many different purposes that men have established for religious groups today. Some seem to think that the church is simply here "to make people feel good." People sometimes have the attitude, "I want to go to church so I can feel good or get a good feeling deep down in my heart that I am a religious person and that God is happy with me." Others think that the purpose of the church is to entertain. So many people are geared toward entertainment. They are "at church" in order to entertain people, to make kids happy, or to be somewhat like a theater or a circus. But that is not the purpose of the Lord's church. Others are preaching a "health and wealth" Gospel that says, "Here is how you can have the best life—and make a lot of money doing so!" Again, that is not the purpose of the church of which we read in the New Testament. So what is the purpose of the Lord's church. Ephesians 3:10-11 tells us what the purpose of Christ's church is—"that 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." The eternal purpose of the church is to proclaim the Gospel to principalities, rulers, and to all those who have not heard it. The work of the church—the purpose of the church—is to spread the Gospel to a lost and dying world. Luke 19:10 says that Jesus came to "seek and save that which is lost." Jesus said in Matthew 28:18, "I have all authority." He then turned to His disciples and said, "You go and teach people." In 1 Peter 2:9, we find that we have been called "out of darkness into His marvelous light" to "proclaim the praises of our Lord." Thus, we learn that we must be a part of a church—the church of which you read in the New Testament—that is glorifying God by accomplishing its eternal purpose.

We might ask this question as well: "How was the church of which we read in the New Testament organized?" How did Christians organize themselves? What does God have to say about the organization and government of the New Testament church? In modern denominations that exist today, there are various ways in which people govern and organize those denominations. For example, there may be one person (like a pope) who rules over the church. There may be a "pastor" or a "reverend" or "apostle" (which not authorized in Scripture). Some might have "board of deacons" without any elders (again, something that you do not see in the Scriptures). Today, we need to ask, "How was the church of which we read in the New Testament organized?" Again, the Bible clearly teach-

es us the principle regarding the church's organization. Notice Philippians 1:1—"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." The word "bishop" is used throughout the Old Testament to represent the office of an elder. Such passages as Titus 1:5; Acts 20:28-32, and 1 Timothy 3:1-8 discuss such things as the qualifications and role of an elders or shepherds, who are to be the leaders of the Lord's church in matters of an expedient or optional nature. They are to take care of the flock, ensure that the flock is led and fed properly, and that the flock is aware of false doctrine. As Paul traveled, he tried to establish elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Paul left Titus in Crete so that he would set in order the things that were lacking and appoint elders in every church. In 1 Peter 5:1-5, we see that elders are not to be lords over the church, but instead are to be overseers and examples. Hebrews 13:17 says that the elders will give an account of the souls over which they watch. So, we have elders who are the spiritual leaders in the congregation. Then we have deacons in the Lord's church as well. Elders are the overseers, while deacons are servants in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We find in 1 Timothy 3:9ff., we find the qualifications of a deacon. Then we also have saints—those who are simply Christians. We have elders as the leaders. We have deacons as servants. And then we have the rest of the Christians. Here is what is important. In the Lord's church there is no "BIG me and little you." There is no clergy/laity system. We all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. While there may be different responsibilities and duties that are to be carried out, no one looks up to anyone else as his or her "lord" in regard to matters of authority. Jesus is the only Head of the church.

Another question we might ask concerning the church about which we read in the New Testament is, "How many churches did Jesus build?" This is a very important point, because in the world in which we live, there are a multitude of religious denominations. Remember that we are "not to go beyond that which is written" (1 Cor. 4:6), and we are authorized to do only that which is found in the Bible. With that in mind, let's ask, "How many churches did Jesus Christ build?" For the answer, we need to find to Ephesians 1:22-23 where Paul wrote, "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Here, notice that the church is the body; the two terms are used synonymously. Now look at Ephesians 4:4, where Paul said, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling." Remember that the church is the body. Paul says that there is only one body. We can logically infer from that, then, that there is only one church. Jesus never intended to establish a multitude of different denominations. Jesus said, "I will build My **church**." He did not say, "I will build My **churches**." The singular body that Christ promised to build is what you read about in the New Testament. If people are not a part of that church, then they are not a part of the church that Jesus is one day coming to receive and deliver to the Father. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we find this same principle—"By one spirit we are all baptized into one body." In Romans 12:4-5, we find that there are "many members, but one body." Ephesians 2:16 teaches us that Jew and Gentile are reconciled together "in one body." Colossians 3:15 teaches that we have been called "in the one body, and be thankful." Paul emphasizes the concept of one body in 1 Corinthians 12:20 when he says, "Yet there is but one body." How many bodies are there? There is only one. What is the body? The body is the church. We therefore can infer that the church is singular, that Jesus established only one, and that if we are not a part of that one church, then we are not a part of the church about which we read in the New Testament.

Another question that we could ask is, "Can a person be saved outside the church?" If we are not a part of the church about which we read in the New Testament, can we be saved?" It is a very simple question. If the Bible makes it clear that we are to do only that which is

authorized, and we are a part of some group that is not authorized in the Bible, how can we be saved by doing something that God has not told me to do? Let's turn to 2 Timothy 2:10 and notice a simple principle. Paul said, "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Where is salvation found? It is "in Christ." Then if we hope to receive that salvation, we must be a part of Christ's body. It is "in Christ." Christ's body is the church. Then, necessarily, we must be "in the church." In Hebrews 12:23 we read, "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven...." Who has their names registered in Heaven, according that verse? It is "the general assembly and church of the firstborn." In 1 Corinthians 15:24, we find that Jesus is going to deliver the kingdom to the Father. If there is only one church, and if He is going to deliver it to the Father, then we must understand that if we are not a part of that body, then we are not going to be delivered to the Father to live with Him for eternity. Revelation 3:4-5 teaches us that the people who were members of the church had their names registered in Heaven.

We could ask another question concerning the nature of the church: "How is one added to the New Testament church?" How did people become a part of the church of which we read in the New Testament? Were they "voted into" the church? Were they brought into it because their family was a part of it? How does a person get into the New Testament church? Again, a very simple passage—Acts 2:47—teaches us how one gets into the New Testament church. There, we are told that the people were praising God daily, and that "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." They were not voted in. They did not have to pay a certain amount of money to get in. It was not because they were a member of the "right family" that they got in. The Lord added them to the church because they had done what we read about in Acts 2:38ff. They heard the Word, they repented of their sins, they confessed Christ as Savior, and they were baptized for the remission of their sins, and then God—because they had obeyed the Gospel—added them to the church. This is a very important point. Once those people had been added to the church, anywhere they went in the world they were a part of the New Testament church. Jesus said that in order to be saved, one must "believe and be baptized" (Mk. 16:16). Paul was told, "Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16). In 1 Corinthians 12:13, we read of people who, "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." How did they get into the body? They obeyed God and the plan of salvation. They heard the Word, they believed in Jesus, repented of their sins, confessed Jesus as God's Son, and were baptized. God then added them to the kingdom.

Then we ask a final question: "Does the New Testament church exist today?" This is the question that we need to ask because, if it does, then we need to be a part of it. First, let's ask, "Can the New Testament church exist today?" Certainly it can, because we have the same "seed" that they had in the first century. Luke 8:11 teaches us that the seed is the Word of God. We have the inspired Word, just as they had in the first century. If we follow it, and do exactly what it says, then we can grow the same church that existed in the first century. However, not every religious group that calls itself by a biblical name, or merely claims to be a "church of Jesus Christ," is a church that is pleasing to God. There is another important point that we need to notice. It is found in 1 Corinthians 4:17. How does a person determine if what he is doing is right, and whether or not he is a part of the New Testament church? Paul said, "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." How can we know if a church that perhaps calls itself by a biblical name is the correct church? That church will "teach everywhere in every church" exactly what the New Testament teaches. If a church does not follow what the New Tes-

tament teaches—even if they have a biblical name such as “church of God” or “church of Jesus Christ”—then that church is not the church of the New Testament.

The lesson today has been designed to teach you about the church of which you read in your Bible. We want you to become a member of the church that Jesus built. Jesus died and established only one body. You can become a part of it today if you have heard the Word, believe that Jesus is God’s Son, are willing to repent of your past sins, will confess Jesus as your Savior, and then be baptized. The Lord then will add you to the church. We are praying that you will make the decision to become a part of the Lord’s church and live faithfully before Him.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE CHURCH THAT JESUS BUILT”

1. How does Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (“Let there be no divisions among you”) impact modern-day denominationalism?
2. According to Christ's own words in Matthew 16:18-19, exactly how many churches did He say He was going to establish?
3. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, Paul discussed the foundation of the church. Who or what was that foundation?
4. According to Peter's statement in Acts 4:11-12, Jesus Christ plays an important part in the construction of the church. What is that part?
5. Colossians 3:17 teaches us that we are to do what we do in the church according to a certain authority. What is that authority?
6. According to Hebrews 12:23, the names of faithful Christians are registered in a certain place. What is that place?
7. What is the important message found in 1 Corinthians 4:6?
8. What is the important message found in Revelation 22:18-19?
9. At what point in history, according to the prophecy contained in Daniel 2:44, was the Lord's kingdom (or church) to be established?
10. In Acts 28:30-31, Paul preached the church/kingdom as a “present reality.” During the reign of what earthly kingdom was he doing his preaching?
11. What important points is contained in Mark 9:1 that proves that Christ's church/kingdom has already been established?
12. According to the prophecy contained in Micah 4:1-2, where would the Lord's church/kingdom be established?
13. According to Ephesians 3:10-11, what is the purpose of the church?
14. According to Romans 16:16, what is one scriptural name for the church?
15. According to Philippians 1:1, what is the scriptural organization of the church?
16. According to Acts 2:47, how does one get into the church?
17. Ephesians 1:22-23 teaches that the church is the body. According to Ephesians 4:4, how many bodies did Christ establish?
18. What steps must a person take to be saved and thereby enter Christ's church?