

What is the Church - just a collection of individuals?

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Guten Morgen!

Ich möchte mit euch von dem 16. Matthew beginnen.

Verset 13-18 Als Jesus in die Flächen von Caesarea Philippi kam, erhielt er seine Disziplinen und fragte sie, Wem sagen die Männer, dass ich, der Sohn des Menschen, bin? Und sie antworteten, Einige sagen, dass du John der Baptisten bist, einige Elias, und andere Jeremias oder einer der Propheten. Er antwortete ihnen, Wem sagst du, dass ich bin?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

[00:01:03] And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will build my church.

I'm not going to show you slides. You'll get a variety of presentations in this conference, I don't doubt. But the topic that I've been asked to present to you, I want to turn you to the Scriptures. So you'll be doing the work. Because I'm going to turn you to the Scriptures, rather than show this subject to you in graphic form, [00:02:05] using slides.

What we have just read together is the first in time specific mention in the Scriptures of the Church. When we have read what the New Testament has to say about the Church, of course we can turn back to the Old Testament, and we can find there types and shadows which we can see illustrate what the Church is, and what it means to Christ. But this is the first time that the Scriptures mention the Church. And just picking on that one phrase, there are two or three things which I think will help us with our subject, what is the Church? I'm not going to answer that question in full [00:03:02] till we get to the end of this section. I'm going to look at this passage first, then I'm going to deal with the subsidiary questions that you've got, like is it just a collection of individuals and so on, and then finally try in some measure, and it will be, I'm afraid, only in some measure, to answer the question, what is

the Church? I will build my Church.

So that brings something before us immediately, doesn't it? It's something that Christ is doing.

Not something that we're doing, and that perhaps goes some way to answering the first question, is it just a collection of individuals. It's something that Christ is doing.

It's something which at the time he spoke was future. Not I have built, or I am building, [00:04:03] but I will build.

That's the second thing. The third thing is my Church.

My Church.

Not a Church or the Church, but my Church.

Now this brings before us the very important matter of Christ and the Church, and the preciousness to Christ of his Church.

Now we're going to hear a lot of things today. We're going to be presented with a lot of facts, with a lot of scriptural exposition, but don't let us lose the fact that the relationship between Christ and his Church is a very close [00:05:02] and a very personal one.

It is a matter of love and a matter of affection as some of the scriptures that we're going to look at will show us. So then, is the Church just a collection of individuals? You know, when you say, if you were to ask a number of people, what is the Church? You would get a variety of answers, wouldn't you? To some it would be a building.

Depending on where they were accustomed to go, if they were accustomed to attend a place of worship, you would get a variety of answers. Well, it's an elaborate looking place and it's got a steeple and it's got eight bells and it's got a nice organ and all the rest of it. Others might say, well, no.

Others might associate the Church with, rather, [00:06:03] the people who gather inside it. No, it's not the building. It's those who meet there. Well, that is getting nearer to the truth. But those who truly belong to the Church of Christ are no longer a collection of individuals.

They are a unity.

Ephesians 4 verse 4.

Now, you've been given handouts. Most of the references I'm going to make are already noted on the handouts that you've been given and that one certainly is. Ephesians 4 verse 4, what does it say? There is one body.

There is one body.

Turn back to Ephesians 1 verses 22 and 23.

[00:07:03] Speaking of Christ.

Well, speaking of what God has wrought in Christ, rather. And hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church which is his body.

The fullness of him that filleth all in all.

And again in the second chapter, verses 14 and 15.

For he is our peace who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us having abolished in us his flesh the enmity even the law of commandments contained in ordinances for to make in himself of twain one new man so making peace.

[00:08:06] So, there is one body.

And that body is intimately attached to Christ the head.

For that see Colossians chapter 2 and verse 19.

A unity.

I wonder if we all have that clear in our minds.

Salvation is an individual matter. But as soon as we are saved, we are added to the church.

We become part of that one body. Now, how does that work?

It means that every truly born again person living in the world today [00:09:02] is part of the church whether they know it or not, whether they actively attend a place of worship or not.

No longer a collection of individuals but something which Christ is building and is still building at the present time until the last believer is added to his assembly. No longer a collection of individuals. Now, when we really get that into our heads and hearts, that, I hope, banishes from our minds the thought of a voluntary association.

Well, I go to this church because I like it. They seem to have the truth. Now, that is not what we are talking about. What we are talking about is being a member of a body which Christ himself is assembling.

[00:10:05] It is not a voluntary action.

Christ is building it.

Now, the second question is, why is it not a voluntary association? Well, how does Scripture look at the assembly or the church? I'm using those two words interchangeably. I hope that's all right. The church, the assembly. The called out ones, the church.

Why not?

Well, how does Scripture speak of it? Scripture speaks of the assembly in three ways.

It speaks of a body and we've had some scriptures that refer to the body already. And that you can, of course, look at the body in two ways. There are all those who are on the earth at the present time. But in some scriptures it refers not to those who are alive and well at the present time. [00:11:04] It refers to every member of the assembly from when it began to the time that the Lord takes it home to himself. And we'll be looking at timing in a minute. A body.

But there is another way that Scripture speaks of the assembly and that is as a spiritual house.

Now, if you still have your Bibles open at Ephesians 2, look at the end of that chapter, where he says, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for inhabitation of God through the Spirit.

[00:12:06] A holy temple.

A place where the worship of God can take place. Now that is looking at the assembly in a very different light from looking at it as a body. There are two more scriptures that refer to this aspect that I want to refer to you. Again, they are all in your notes. 1 Timothy 3.15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

[00:13:03] If we look at the church as a temple or a spiritual house, then there is certain behavior which is appropriate to that house. Now I am not proposing to go into that now, but I think you can readily see that if there is a spiritual house, there will be certain behavior which is appropriate to those who belong to it. And it was the apostles' desire that his son in the faith, Timothy, should be fully instructed about these matters. And the Holy Spirit has seen to it that we have these scriptures recorded so that we too can learn.

If we have a mind, if we have a will to learn, and this is the vital subject and it's part of what we have here today, how to behave ourselves [00:14:01] in the assembly of the living God.

There's one more in Peter. 1 Peter chapter 2.

Verse 5.

We'll read verse 4 as well. To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as lively stones, or living stones, are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

So the assembly is a body.

It's a spiritual house. [00:15:02] And scripture looks at it in a third way, as a bride.

I'm going to refer you just to two scriptures. Ephesians 5 verses 25 to 27.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also, loved the church and gave himself for it, that he

might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

[00:16:03] That is the activity which is going on at the present time. Christ is sanctifying and cleansing the church Christ is sanctifying and cleansing his church with the washing of water by the word. Why? Because he has an object in view. One day he's going to present it to himself as a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Now keep that in mind if you look around and you despair at what's going on. Among those who claim to be the people of God today, don't forget that Christ has this purpose in view and it will be fulfilled.

It will be.

Turn over to the other scripture. Revelation that I had in mind. There are plenty more scriptures to turn to. Revelation 21 and verse 2.

[00:17:08] And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And that is future.

Nevertheless, there are scriptures in the Old Testament that we can turn up which help us to understand this figure of the church as a bride for Christ.

Turn back to Adam in Genesis chapter 2. You remember what it says? God brought everything to Adam and he gave everything in this world, every living thing, he gave a name. But amongst all that creation, and it was perfect then, [00:18:01] there was not found a help a mate for him.

Nothing there with which he could have communion on the same level as himself.

So God took a rib out of Adam and he called it woman.

So it was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

Speaking of that near relationship which is prefiguring that near relationship which is now revealed to us in the New Testament concerning Christ and his church. Or think of the last verse of Genesis chapter 4 when Rebecca is brought home to Isaac and it says, and he loved her.

She became his wife. He was comforted after his mother's death. [00:19:03] That is only the second mention of love in the Bible. The first one is the love of Abraham for Isaac. The second is the love of Isaac for Rebecca. Prefiguring, I think, the love of Christ for his church. Now, I must come back to the subject. Most of what we have today is going to be concerned with the body or the spiritual health.

Now, I think you will see that as the lectures proceed. Some will deal with one. Some will deal with the other. Some may deal with both. I don't think we're going to get as far as the bride of Christ although the last lecture of all which is the hope of the church. That's from our side.

That may go towards it.

But the bride of Christ, I think, is possibly too large for us to encompass in a conference such as this.

[00:20:03] How do you become a member of the church? Well, I think if you followed what we've said so far about Christ is building it. It is not that we become a member but that we are added. We'll put it another way then. How do we come to belong to Christ?

This is the Gospel.

Acts 4, verse 12.

Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

We read too, didn't we? In Peter we read Peter's confession. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

[00:21:02] And the Lord said to Peter upon this rock. What rock was he talking about? It wasn't Peter. Peter wasn't the rock. It was the rock was what Peter had confessed concerning the person of Christ. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Does everybody in this room here today confess that?

That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The matter of forgiveness of sins.

He alone has power to forgive sins. Confession, repentance.

Those well-known verses in Romans 10 but they're worth turning to because they remain true no matter how often we repeat them. If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved.

[00:22:09] That is the way of repentance. That is the way to receive eternal life. And if you have done that and if you know that your sins are forgiven then you are justified by faith and you have peace with God. Now it's people like that that Christ is daily adding to his church. And they are added. Where's the connection? We'll turn back to Acts chapter 2 where it says at the end of the last verse of chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

[00:23:02] Now I'm not going to take that subject further except to say that there is a vast difference between being a member of the assembly and enjoying its privileges.

Now we're going to look in a later session at who can break bread.

Now that is a different subject from the one I'm addressing at the moment. I'm addressing those who are members of the body. It may be that there are certain members of the body and we'll hear more about that later who are not for whatever reason enjoying the privileges which that would entail for them as members of a spiritual house. I'll leave that to session 8, who can break bread.

Why did the church start when it did? Well, I will build my church.

[00:24:07] Let's go back to Acts chapter 1 and verse 5.

For John truly baptized with water. This verse is not in your notes. I think all the others so far have been. Acts 1 verse 5.

For John truly baptized with water that he shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.

We know that in Acts chapter 2 the Holy Spirit came down and the assembly was formed. We read of it as being referred to as the assembly. And that is the first that we read in Acts chapter 2 of an assembly being seen and heard and formed here on the earth. And 1 Corinthians 12 just confirms that. [00:25:04] 1 Corinthians 12 and it's verse 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 all been made to drink into one Spirit.

That word baptized is not water baptism.

I think the word baptized literally means to be whelmed. We usually say overwhelmed, doesn't it? But it means to be whelmed, it's to be overcome. And on that day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came down and everyone there who believed was baptized into one body.

And every believer since that day has been baptized or whelmed into that body. You see the apostle here, he's writing to Corinthians. [00:26:03] They weren't at Pentecost. But he could write to them of the truth that they also had been baptized into that one body and he could write that to every believer who is alive today.

That is why it began, the assembly, when it did.

How long does it go on? Well, that question isn't on the sheet but it goes on for eternity. There isn't an ending. It will go to be with the Lord when he comes for it.

The fact that it began on the day of Pentecost, that is when Christ literally began to build his church, means of course that the church, as we began to say, is unique. Don't run away with the idea that Old Testament saints have been or will be at some point made part of the church. If you've got an authorized version like I have, [00:27:02] you can turn up Old Testament scripture after all Old Testament scripture and at the top some well-meaning person has written things about... See, here we are, Isaiah 44, the church comforted. I'm sorry, but it's not the church there. It's Israel.

So let's be quite clear of this wrong idea which seems to have gained ground on quite a wide scale, that the church means all believers. It doesn't. It doesn't. It means what we have been speaking about hitherto. So to sum up then, what is the church?

It's something suited to Christ.

It's something which is a part of him, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.

Study again those closing verses in Genesis 2 and think what it means. [00:28:01] Bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. We get that idea too in Ephesians 5 where we are read of Christ tending the church and taking care of it.

Something which is part of him, something which is for his glory, something which he will display in a coming day.

He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. No doubt that embraces all the circles of believers which have been reconciled to God through his death upon the cross. But particularly in relation to the church, I think we can think of the joy to the heart of Christ when he will see it assembled around himself there in the Father's house in a coming day.

[00:29:03] He told seven parables in Matthew 13.

Parable number six is of a merchantman seeking goodly pearls.

And when he had found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

This is the extent of Christ's love for the assembly which took him to Calvary.

Christ also, we read, Ephesians 5.25, loved the church and gave himself for it.

If you want to show off a jewel, you put it against a dark background that its brilliance might be emphasized [00:30:01] in the eye of the beholder. Well then, look at the church against that dark background of Christ giving himself for it at Calvary.

There is five minutes for questions if anybody has a question. There will be a plenary session, I think, at the end of the day for questions. But if anyone has anything burning now, any brother, please ask.

Otherwise I'll sit down and make way for, I think it's Gavin Hughes next.

There is a question too. Yes, good.

It's a question that I've heard many times.

Is there any specific scripture which tells us [00:31:03] that the church is comprised of those from Pentecost to the Lord's coming?

Any specific Christian version of scripture?

Rather than a great number of scriptures that you have referred to on which we draw this conclusion in France?

If there is, brother, I cannot think of it. I'd rather doubt it. You know, we tend to have to put precept on precept and line on line, don't we, to draw certain conclusions and I'd rather think this is one of them. But we do always assume that, don't we? Some of our hymns assume it in their wording, but I cannot think of one that says that specifically, what you have just said. Please don't think that my question was heretical or anything like that. [00:32:01] No, it wasn't.

I've heard so many people question this as to why you speak of the church in the Old Testament, it's not there. No. But a lot of people think that it is. They've been misled. They've been misled. I will build my church. Now, when it ends, as I said, it doesn't end, but I think that is indicative and if you take that together with Acts 1-5 and the rest of Acts chapter 2, I think it is fairly conclusive as to when it began.

If we think of it as a bride, the Spirit and the bride say, they come, don't they, right at the end of Revelation, the language of the Spirit and the bride and that's their language now.

Could we add to this list of verses that have in mind the church from the Pentecost to the rapture? Yeah. [00:33:01] Ephesians 1, in the end, where it says that the church is the fullness of him that fills all in all. Yes. Now, if the body is only the church at one point in time, then, well, the believers at one point in time would be the fullness of Christ as opposed to all others. So, that would be one of the verses that, to me, shows that the church is really viewed there as spending a whole time period and going to the rapture. Yes. Very good. Very good. And that is on the sheets.

Ephesians 1.

And would Ephesians 2, 21 give us an indication also where it says all the building, put together, increases to a holy temple in the Lord. That's it.

That's it.

Yes. Yes.

Good. [00:34:03] That sufficient? Okay.