Going Deeper bibletime

bes bible educational services

A11 - The Church

Study 1 - "My Church"

BIBLE READING:

Matthew 16: 13-23

KEY VERSE:

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Matthew 16: 18

The earthly life of the Lord Jesus was almost finished. For about three years, He had gone from place to place, preaching, teaching and healing. Now He was commencing His journey from Caesarea Philippi, in the extreme north, to Jerusalem. Note carefully, in ***verse 21***, what He said would happen when He arrived there.

Before making the journey, He questioned His disciples about their understanding of who He really was. He began by asking them a general question - ***"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*** and a variety of answers was given. ***(See verse 14)*** His first question was followed by a much more direct one - ***"But who do YOU say that I am?"*** It was Peter who replied, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".***

It is clear that Jesus accepted what Peter said as a true and accurate answer to His question. He did, however, remind Peter that he had not discovered this by his own ability. ***("flesh and blood" verse 17)*** It had been revealed to him by God in Heaven.

It was immediately after Peter's remarkable statement that Jesus began to speak, for the very first time, about the church. It is important to understand that the teaching about the church is closely connected with the uniqueness of Jesus as ***"the Christ, the Son of the living God"***. Only such a Person can properly speak about building ***"My church"***!

There are four important points to note:

1. THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATION - *"THIS ROCK"*

"This rock" does not refer to Peter. The church is not built on him. The foundation of the church is the Person of Christ, the Son of the living God, as Peter had just confessed Him to be. He is the only safe and lasting foundation. Peter, along with the other apostles, consistently urged people in their preaching to put their trust in the Lord Jesus - not in any mere man, however good he may have been. ***(Read Acts 4: 12 and 1 Corinthians 3: 11)***

Cornerstone of the Church of Saint Paul in Macau, 1602. (Source: Wikipedia)

2. THE CHURCH'S CONSTRUCTION - *"I WILL BUILD"*

Jesus did not say, 'I have built My church'. At the time of His speaking, the church was still future. It would only begin to be built when three events had taken place:

a) The death of the Lord Jesus, by which the sins of those who would make up the church would be taken away. ***"Christ loved the church and GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER." (Ephesians 5: 25)***

b) The resurrection of the Lord Jesus, by which He is empowered to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. ***(Ephesians 1: 19-23)***

c) The coming of the Holy Spirit, following the return of the Lord Jesus to Heaven. The Holy Spirit has an essential work to do in bringing people to believe the Gospel, and so become members of Christ's church. ***(John 16: 7-11)*** The next Study will deal more fully with this.

3. THE CHURCH'S SEPARATION - *"I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH."*

It is always helpful to remember that the word 'church' in the Bible means 'a called-out company of people'. It refers to PEOPLE, not to the BUILDING in which they may meet. So when the Lord Jesus speaks about ***"My church"***, He is referring to all who will believe in Him after the events mentioned above. Each 'living stone' is very precious to Him, for He paid a high price to purchase it. Each one belongs to Him in a special way, having been 'called-out', or separated, from the sinful world. ***(see 1 Peter 2: 4-5)***

4. THE CHURCH'S PROTECTION - *"THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT."*

This means that there is no force, such as Satan or death, which has the power to stop Him completing His church. Because of who He is, He has the authority and the strength to finish what He has planned! Throughout the centuries, Christians have been persecuted and even martyred, but the church of Christ, the Son of the living God, still advances around the world!

This is the first of two units on
The Church.

Going Deeper bibletime

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A11 - The Church

Study 2 - The Church's Birthday

BIBLE READING:

Acts 1: 7-11; 2: 1-5

KEY VERSE:

"For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body…"

1 Corinthians 12: 13

In Study 1, we stressed that when the Lord Jesus first spoke of His church, it was still in the future. He said, ***"I WILL build My church". (Matthew 16: 18)*** It was not until fifty days after His death that His promise began to be fulfilled. After He rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples on several occasions. At first, some of them were very sceptical, but eventually all of them became totally convinced of the reality of His resurrection. He instructed them to ***"go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation". (Mark 16: 15)*** Before embarking on this task, however, they were to remain, at Jerusalem, until the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Forty days after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus returned to Heaven, and, true to His Word, the Holy Spirit came down just ten days later. In the Jewish calendar, with its annual round of religious festivals, or feasts, it was the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. (Each year, Pentecost, which means 'the fiftieth day', occurred fifty days after the Feast of Passover. In this particular year Jesus had been crucified at Passover.) In the history of Christianity, the Day of Pentecost described in ***Acts 2*** is very special, because on that day, the church was formed.

The experience that the followers of Jesus had was remarkable. The whole house was filled by a sound, like that of a great rushing wind. In addition, there were tongues, like fire, which appeared and rested on each person in the house. They found themselves able to speak in languages previously unknown to them! It was a truly miraculous thing to hear ordinary Galileans proclaiming ***"the mighty works of God"*** in languages which they had never studied. ***(Acts 2: 11)*** All of these things happened because the Holy Spirit had come - just as Jesus had promised before He left. This was the beginning, or 'birthday' of the Christian church, a never to be forgotten day. We believe that Paul, years later, had this event in mind when he wrote the words of the Key Verse. He was teaching his readers that the coming of the Holy Spirit had fused all individual Christians into one 'body', thus creating a spiritual unity. Christians all 'belong together', just as all the parts of your body are joined together to form one living person!

The crowds who filled the streets of Jerusalem demanded an explanation! How could these disciples of Jesus suddenly speak unknown languages? What had happened to them? Perhaps they had been drinking too much wine! ***(See verses 12-13)***

Peter seized the opportunity to speak to them. He immediately denied the accusation of drunkenness and went on to explain that what had just happened was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Joel. He then spoke about the Lord Jesus, whom the Jews had crucified (just seven weeks earlier!), but whom God had raised from the dead. Peter's whole argument was that the events which had just occurred were a conclusive proof that Jesus was who He had claimed to be - the Christ, the Son of God.

On hearing this, many of Peter's listeners were deeply troubled. ***"Brothers, what shall we do?"*** they asked. ***"Repent, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"***, Peter replied. ***(Acts 2: 37-38)***

Many did just as Peter said! On that day - the church's 'birthday' - about 3,000 people became believers in the risen, glorified Lord Jesus, received the Holy Spirit, and were incorporated into Christ's church.

The Lord Jesus had begun to build, just as He had said. Each new believer in Him was like another 'stone' in the great spiritual structure which He called ***"My church"***. The work of construction is on-going, right up to the present time!

The Cenacle (The Upper Room) in Jerusalem is claimed to be the location of Pentecost. (Source: Wikipedia)

This is the first of two units on
The Church.

Answer Sheet
A11 - The Church
Study 1 - "My Church"

Leader's Comments:

Name: Return address on back of answer sheet

Address:

1. Write IN YOUR OWN WORDS what Jesus said would happen to Him when He arrived at Jerusalem. _____ /3

_____

2. Answer the following questions:

a) What general question did Jesus ask His disciples at Caesarea Philippi? _____

_____

b) Write four answers which they gave. _____

_____

c) How did Peter reply to his Master's second question? _____ /6

_____

3. Write TRUE of FALSE after each statement:

a) Some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist come to life again. _____

b) Jesus rebuked Peter for his foolish answer. _____

c) Peter's statement about who Jesus is was the result of God revealing it. _____

d) The Lord Jesus said that Peter is the foundation of the church. _____ /5

e) The first mention of the church is found in ***Matthew 16***. _____

4. Explain how the Bible's use of the word 'church' often differs from our everyday use of the word. _____ /2

_____

5. Answer these questions about the Key Verse:

a) When Christ spoke about the church was it past, present or future? _____

b) Why was it necessary for the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus to take place before the formation of the church? _____

_____

c) What is the Holy Spirit's role in the formation of the church? _____

d) When would the Holy Spirit come? ***(John 16: 7)*** _____ /7

e) ***"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*** To what does ***"it"*** refer? _____

f) How can we know for sure that Christ will complete His church? _____

6. Look up these references:

How does ***1 Corinthians 3: 11*** describe Jesus Christ? _____

_____ /2

What does ***Acts 4: 12*** tell us is unique about the name of Jesus? _____

_____

THINK: Are you part of the church which Jesus told Peter He would build? Give thanks for what this means to you.

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet
A11 - The Church
Study 2 - The Church's Birthday

Leader's Comments:

1. Arrange these events in the order in which they happened, by numbering them from 1 to 7.

The Lord Jesus was buried. _____
The Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. _____
The apostles waited in Jerusalem. _____
The church was formed. _____
The crucifixion of Jesus happened at Jerusalem. _____
After 40 days, the ascension took place. _____
Jesus rose again on the third day. _____

/7

2. Read *Acts 2: 1-4*:

a) What did the followers see and hear? _____

_____

b) 'Wind' and 'fire' are both used often in the Bible to stand for, or represent, God the Holy Spirit. Suggest some ways in which wind is a very suitable symbol of the Holy Spirit. _____

_____

c) What unusual thing were they able to do while in the house? _____

_____

/5

3. Peter was given power to preach to the crowd who had gathered.

a) Which Old Testament prophet did Peter quote from who had predicted the coming of the Holy Spirit? ***(Acts 2: 16)***

_____

b) For whom did this prophet say salvation was for? ***(Acts 2: 21)***

_____

/2

4. Peter's explanation of what happened on the Day of Pentecost reached its climax in *Acts 2: 36*. Read this verse carefully, then write two sentences IN YOUR OWN WORDS to say:

a) What the Jews had done to Jesus. _____
b) What God had done to Him. _____

/2

5. *Acts 2: 37* states that Peter's hearers *"were cut to the heart"*.

a) What do you think this means? _____
b) In response to their question, what two things did Peter tell them to do in ***verse 38***? _____

_____

c) What two things would they receive as a result? _____

_____

/6

6. Reflect on the impact of the events which took place on the Day of Pentecost.

a) Who came as the fulfilment of Jesus' promise in ***John 16: 7***? _____
b) What change took place in a large number of people 's lives who heard Peter's message?

_____

c) In what way was the Day of Pentecost the beginning of what Jesus promised in ***Matthew 16:18***?

_____

/3

THINK: Read and think about the Key Verse. What does this mean for you as a member of the church today?

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet
A11 - The Church
Study 3 - Practices and People

Leader's Comments:

1. According to *Acts 2: 41*, what was the first 'step' for a new Christian?

_____ /2

_____

2. The first members of the church *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching".*

a) Explain IN YOUR OWN WORDS, what this means. _____

_____

b) Read ***Acts 4:33*** and explain what the apostles were preaching about. _____

_____

c) In what way could we, today, devote ourselves ***"to the apostles' teaching"***? _____ /6

_____

3. Explain how the first Christians expressed their love and care for each other in the following passages:

a) ***Acts 2: 44-45*** _____

_____

b) ***Acts 4: 34-35*** _____

_____

c) ***Acts 11: 27-30*** _____ /6

_____

4. Suggest ways in which Christians can express practical love for each other today.

_____ /3

_____

5. Why did the first Christians *"break bread"*?

_____ /2

_____

6. Read *Acts 12: 5-12* and answer the following questions:

a) What was the church praying about? _____

_____

b) Where did the church meet to pray? _____

_____

c) How did God answer their prayers? _____ /3

_____

7. Today, there are so many different types of church that it is not easy for a young believer to know which one to join. What advice do you think would be helpful to such a person?

_____ /3

_____

THINK: Am I devoting myself to Bible teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer in the same way as the early church did?

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet
A11 - The Church
Study 4 - Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Leader's Comments:

1. Explain what is meant by "an ordinance".

_____

_____ /2

2. A symbol is a mark, or sign, which stands for something much greater than itself. Of what three events in the experience of the Lord Jesus is baptism a symbol?

_____

_____ /3

3. God views believers in the Lord Jesus as people who have died, been buried, and been raised again with Christ. *(Romans 6)*

a) In what way can Christians show that they have accepted this teaching? _____

_____

b) What do you think is meant by walking ***"in newness of life"***? ***(Romans 6: 4)*** _____

_____ /2

4. Look up these references, and write down the name which is suggested in each for the simple meal by which we remember the Lord:

a) ***Acts 2: 42*** _____

b) ***1 Corinthians 10: 16*** _____

c) ***1 Corinthians 11: 20*** _____ /3

5. When the Lord Jesus introduced the Lord's Supper:-

a) What two things did He use? _____

b) What did He say each of them would represent? _____

c) From this point onwards, what was to be the main reason for Christians 'eating and drinking', in accordance with His instructions? _____ /6

6. Read *1 Corinthians 11: 23-29* again and give short answers to these questions:

The starting point for the Lord's Supper begins with instructions which were received _____ _____ _____ ***(verse 23)***. It is to continue until _____ _____ . ***(verse 26)*** We should not partake in _____ _____ _____ ***(verse 27)*** but should _____ ourselves. ***(verse 28)*** If someone takes part in a careless way, it may result in _____ . ***(verse 29)*** /5

7. Answer TRUE or FALSE to the following statements:

a) The water used in baptism is holy. _____

b) Being baptised makes a person a Christian. _____

c) The bread at the Lord's Supper reminds us of the body of the Lord given for us in His death. _____

d) The Lord's Supper is intended for true believers in the Lord Jesus ONLY. _____ /4

THINK: As God's children, we should obey Him in every possible way! If you have become a Christian, you should be baptised and also meet regularly with believers to partake of The Lord's Supper.

Return your completed answer sheet to:

TOTAL = /25 **UNIT TOTAL = /100**

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A11 - The Church

Study 3 - Practices and People

BIBLE READING:

Acts 2: 41-47; 4: 32-37; 11: 27-30

KEY VERSE:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 2: 42

In this Study, we go back to the earliest days of the Christian church. Our task is to find the answers to such questions as these: What did the 'foundation members' believe? What kind of people were they? Does God intend that the practices of the first Christians should continue until the church is complete?

The Reading from ***Acts 2*** helps us to understand what beliefs and practices were important to the Christians who lived at the time when the church began:-

1. Upon believing in the Lord Jesus, they ***"were baptised". (verse 41)*** Baptism symbolised the end of their former life: they were now taking their stand with the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. ***"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching". (Acts 2: 42)*** The apostles were formerly the disciples of Jesus. During His lifetime they had learned from Him and now they became the teachers of the new Christians. What the apostles taught carried weight with the believers and was accepted as authoritative. This is what ***"devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching"*** means. The apostles' teaching later included the epistles: these were letters which they wrote to the young churches to instruct them in the Christian faith.

3. They met together regularly, finding much happiness and encouragement in their fellowship with each other. ***(Acts 2: 42)*** It is still God's plan that members of Christ's church should meet together on a regular basis, wherever this is possible. ***(Read Hebrews 10: 25)***

4. Of utmost importance to them was ***"the breaking of bread". (Acts 2: 42)*** This refers to the Lord's Supper, at which bread and wine are used as symbols of the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus. They did this because He had requested it. ***(See 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26)***

5. Times of prayer were another practice of first century church-life. Christians pray privately, but in the Acts of the Apostles the COLLECTIVE prayers of the church are emphasised. ***(See Acts 12: 5, 12)***

These practices were not merely for the early church; they are for each succeeding generation of Christians and should continue until the return of the Lord Jesus. For each of us, then, the responsibility is to ensure that we try to associate with fellow-believers who value these practices. A 'church' which does not show these features is not really a church according to the New Testament pattern. If we desire to make progress spiritually, we must try to find such a church, and then give it our full commitment.

The Acts of the Apostles also shows us what kind of people the members of Christ's church were:

1. They were happy and thankful people. ***(Read Acts 2: 46-47 again!)*** Their faith was in no sense dull and boring! Rather, it was genuine and dynamic!

2. They were marked by a great spirit of oneness. Their unity was clear for all to see. Sadly, Satan has succeeded in causing many divisions, as the years have passed.

3. They really cared for each other and were willing to share with others who were in need. ***(Acts 2: 44-45 and 4: 32, 34-35)***

4. They were not afraid to talk about their Lord and Saviour to neighbours and friends. They ***"continued to speak the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4: 31)*** In fact, they found it hard not to share the good news! Even when the Jewish religious leaders, who rejected Jesus' claims to be the Christ, began to persecute them, they showed tremendous courage. ***(Acts 5: 41)***

Again we are challenged! Are the marks of true membership of Christ's church seen in us? Do we genuinely want to obey the Lord Jesus? Are our lives showing love and concern for others? Are we trying to spread the good news of the Lord Jesus? It is important for all of us to be sure that we belong to the great spiritual reality of which our Lord Jesus spoke when He said - ***"I will build My church".***

This is the first of two units on
The Church.

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A11 - The Church

Study 4 - Baptism and the Lord's Supper

BIBLE READING:

Romans 6: 1-14; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-29

KEY VERSE:

"We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."
Romans 6: 4

Local churches, from the time of Christ's apostles onwards, have tried to fulfil the instructions given by the Lord Jesus. These instructions are often called 'ordinances' - a name which emphasises the fact that they carry with them all the authority of Christ Himself. They are 'ordinances' because He is the One who commanded them to be observed.

We begin this Study by looking at BAPTISM, an ordinance which was commanded by the Lord Jesus just before His return to Heaven, following His resurrection. To His apostles He gave these instructions, ***"All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". (Matthew 28: 18-19)***

There are several points to note regarding the ordinance of baptism:

1. People were always baptised AFTER repenting and believing the gospel. See ***Acts 2: 41; Acts 8: 36-37; and 16: 29-34***. In the light of this, we should turn from our sins, and receive the Lord Jesus as our Saviour BEFORE we are baptised. Being baptised does not MAKE anyone a Christian!

2. They were baptised by being immersed in water. As we have seen previously, the word 'baptise' means to 'dip'. The Key Verse says that baptism is like being buried and being raised again; this shows that we should go completely under the water, when being baptised.

3. Baptism is a 'picture' or a symbol, of a spiritual truth. This is explained in the Bible Reading, ***Romans 6: 1-14***. Here Paul is teaching the baptism involves being associated with the Lord Jesus in His death, His burial and His resurrection. Just as He died, so God sees us as 'dead' with Him; as He was buried and was raised again, so, have we! Our former sinful lives are finished! We now must consider ourselves ***"dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus". (Romans 6: 11)***

The diagram at the bottom of the page helps us to understand that when a Christian goes down into the water at baptism, he is showing that he and his old life have been crucified and buried with Christ. As he comes up out of the water, he is showing that he is going to live a new life controlled by the Lord Jesus.

The second ordinance given by the Lord Jesus to His church is often called "THE LORD'S SUPPER". Sometimes other names are used - such as "The Breaking of Bread" or "Communion".

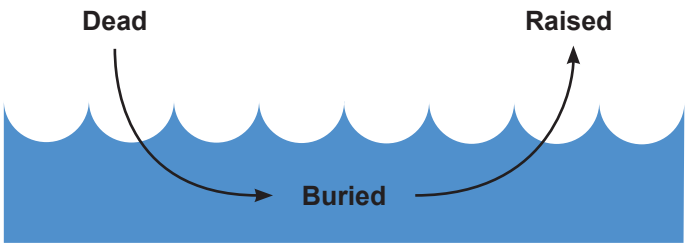
On the night of His betrayal, the Lord Jesus gave instructions to His disciples about this ordinance. They had all gathered in a large, upstairs room to celebrate the annual Jewish Passover. While they were so doing, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God for it, and then said, ***"This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me". (1 Corinthians 11: 24)***

He then took a cup of wine, and thanked God for it. He explained to His disciples that the cup was a symbol of the new covenant (or agreement) in His blood. He invited them to drink from it and went on to say that by carrying out His instructions, they would proclaim (or show) ***"the Lord's death until He comes". (1 Corinthians 11: 26)***

The Lord's Supper, therefore, is very special to Christians, because it is our Lord's chosen way to help us never forget His great sacrifice for us. We remember how His body was given and His blood was shed, for our salvation. We not only look back to the Cross, but we also look forward to His coming again, as ***1 Corinthians 11: 26*** teaches.

These two ordinances of the church - Baptism and The Lord's Supper - present a challenge! If you have become a Christian, you should be baptised, proclaiming your association with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and also proclaim the Lord's death regularly, by meeting with believers to ***"break bread"***. Behind these ordinances is all the authority of our Lord Jesus: we, therefore, should not treat them lightly. It is by being obedient and submissive to Him that we show that we truly love Him! ***(John 14: 15)***

BAPTISM



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