



Old Testament Reading – Malachi 3:8-12

New Testament Reading – 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

HBC's Thirteenth Anniversary Sermon

“What God Calls a Great Church”

Acts 2:1-47

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With so many different styles of churches today, one might find it hard to believe, but the most perplexing problem for true believers today is finding a true Church.

- According to Dr. Stephen Olford, the great expository preacher who greatly influenced the ministry of Dr. Billy Graham, “much of what is called “church” today isn’t church at all, but rather it is “Evangelical Humanism,” the church designed by man for the benefit of man.
- Today’s “woke” evangelical churches can be compared with the church at Laodicea that Jesus described in Revelation 3:14-22. ***“I know your works, that you are neither***

cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. (Revelation 3:15-16 (NKJV))

- The true church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head. Ephesians 1:22–23 – ***“God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body.”***
- The body of Christ includes all who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior from the day of Pentecost until the day of the Rapture. Therefore, we may regard the Church in two ways: the universal Church or as a local assembly of believers.

In Acts 2:1-47, Luke described the birthday of the Church, and while the term “church” does involve a facility in which the believers gather for worship, the facility itself is not the church; the assembly of believers is the true Church, i.e., the Body of Christ.

- In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, ***“I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”***
- In John 14:16-18, Jesus said, ***“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”***
- Both of those monumental promises were fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, which was the birthday of the Church.

Understanding the Law of First Mention:

- To understand the true meaning of certain words or doctrines, we first must find the first place that word or doctrine is used in the Scriptures and get a clear understanding of how that word or doctrine was first used. Then, we can learn how that definition is more fully developed as it is used in other places throughout the Scriptures. However, regardless of the way that word or doctrine is used, it must be in agreement with its original definition.
- For example:

- In Genesis 4:10, “blood” equals life, and when one human takes the life of another human, God’s justice requires the blood of the offender. However, throughout Scripture, God accepted the life of an approved substitute for the offender.
- In Genesis, the Hebrew word “Shachah” is translated in our English Bibles as “Worship.” The word is used when Abraham *bowed before the Son of God*, when Abraham *was prepared to offer his son as a sacrifice unto God*, and when Isaac *was willing to give his life as a sacrifice unto the Lord*. Therefore, regardless of the way the word “worship” is used in the Scriptures, it must include the act of bowing or bending the knee, reverence, and sacrificial giving.
- In Acts 2:1-47, the Greek term “Ekklesia” was used to describe the beginning of the Church – the **“called out and assembled”** body of believers in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, people of every tongue, tribe, and nation. In Ephesians 3, the Apostle Paul referred to the church as a great “mystery” that God revealed unto him.
- In the first chapter of Acts, Luke described **the preparation for the birth of the Church** – the disciples were in prayer, having arrived at a unity of faith and a common desire to carry out their assignment, to get the whole gospel to the whole world, and in anticipation of what it meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- In the second chapter of Acts, Luke described **the demonstration of the arrival of the Holy Spirit**, which was manifested in the tongues of fire above the disciples’ heads, and the ability to share the gospel in the specific languages of the people who had come from various parts of the world for the observance of Pentecost.

When the people asked the disciples what this event meant, in the first sermon preached by a layman, the Apostle Peter began in the Old Testament, and he explained the progressive steps in God’s revelation of Himself to man, and His plan for lost man’s redemption.

- God first began to reveal Himself to mankind through the voices of the prophets and their writings of the Scriptures.
- Then, in the fullness of time, God sent forth the Seed of the Savior to be born through the womb of Mary and given the name Jesus, for He was to give His life as a ransom for

our sins.

- For three years, Jesus proved Himself to be the Savior God sent Him to be, and with His death on the cross, He finished the work the Father had sent Him to earth to do.
- To prove His deity, God raised Jesus from the dead, and to validate His physical resurrection, Jesus presented Himself to various groups of people in numerous places in Israel.
- Precisely 40 days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended back into heaven, where He now intercedes for those who believe in Him.
- Precisely 50 days after His ascension into heaven, as the disciples were praying in the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and enabled them to share the gospel in the languages of the various people groups who were in Jerusalem for the observance of Pentecost, proving to the disciples that God had empowered them to share the whole gospel with the whole world.
- In less than 100 years, these 120 men and women, aided by those who joined with them along the way, spread the gospel to the whole Roman Empire, which was then the known world.
- This is where the Church is today and where it will continue to be until Jesus calls us to “come forth,” and He takes His Bride to the Father’s House.

To “join the Church” is not being baptized and adding our names to the membership of a religious institution or to the rolls of a local church of our choosing.

- To join the Church is to be called of God to be saved, i.e., to be born again by the Holy Spirit, and then to be indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit, uniting us with every other believer in Jesus Christ, and empowering us to carry out our part in fulfilling the Great Commission the Lord gave the Church 2000 years ago.
- Therefore, to be a member of the Church that is soon to be raptured from this world, we need to make sure our names are written down in the Lamb’s Book of Life, and therefore, members of the true New Testament Church, the Body of Christ, and not just the one we like, or the one that meets our temporal needs.

After Peter finished preaching the first gospel sermon, describing God's sovereign plan to send His only begotten Son to be our Savior and how even their decision to put Him to death was allowed by the "determined purpose and foreknowledge of God," the people cried out, "**what shall we do?**"

- Peter said to them, "***Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***" Acts 2:38
- Three thousand people received Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, and were baptized in the Holy Spirit.
- They continued to study the Apostle's doctrines, those essential doctrines of faith that one must believe to be saved.
- They continued to share the Lord's Supper and to pray.
- Some sold their possessions to provide for the needs of those who had remained in Jerusalem to see what would happen next.
- They met daily in the temple for worship and prayer, then shared their meals from house to house.
- They praised the Lord for His goodness, and they had favor with all the people, even those who didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah.
- And **THE LORD ADDED** to the Church **DAILY** those who were being saved.

"If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference."

A.W. Tozer
