



LESSON TWENTY - THE KINGDOM (THE CHURCH)

Text: Matthew 16: 13 – 20

In this lesson, we will define and identify the kingdom of God in terms of its organizational structure that was left upon this earth. Here we will discuss the mission of the church – what is its purpose. With all the denominational (i.e. church names) that exist in the world today among Christianity, how does one know the difference between church groups, what should a Christian look for in a church home; how can one be safe in choosing a church?

First of all let us define the word church and perhaps that will provide a little explanation for a start. There are several common definitions for church, which really do not accurately depict what the Kingdom of God is in the church. For most people, the word church means *a building* where people gather for religious services. With this definition any religious place of worship could be a church – and that would be synonymous with temple, sanctuary, mosque, or other building where people have religious services. When put this way – a church could be a temple of false gods or an idols temple and it applies to a place where even the most wicked of religious sects, such as Satanist could practice their religion.

But the church, when speaking about the kingdom of God is not talking about a building – it is talking about a group of people. The Greek work for church is *ekklesia* meaning “the called out ones” and it is that word that is used in the Bible. It refers specifically and Biblically to only one group of people. The word church refers to the Christians or disciples of Jesus Christ who have been born again and put into the invisible “body of Christ”.

There is Only One Church

The most confusing thing to most people is that they believe that anyone who believes in God and goes to a place of worship is a part of the church. The answer to that is – not so! Although there are good Christian, bad Christians, and Christians in between – the kingdom of God, his church, and his body is only occupied by *born again* Christians that have been born again of water and spirit, and ADDED to the body by Jesus Christ himself. A person cannot join the church. There is not a membership role for the church. A person can be a member of and join a local congregation that is represented as a part of the body of Christ – but the church itself includes all fellowships, congregations, denominations, and organizations that have believed in and obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ and were added through the *New Birth*. A person therefore can be a Christian and be in fellowship with people who are in the church – but until they are placed into the body themselves by the spirit, they are members of the denomination, organization, or local fellowship – but not yet a part of *the church*.

The Lord therefore did not start a denomination. Members of the church or body of Christ may belong to an apostolic denomination but that does not make them a part of the church. There are over 130 apostolic oneness organizations including the United Pentecostal Church, the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the Word, the True Church of Jesus Christ of China, the International Apostolic Fellowship, the Apostolic World Christian Fellowship – and many others that have people in them that are a part of the church – *But the Church is the people, not the building, not the denomination, not the organization, not the local assembly.*

Notice that the Bible declares that God only started ONE CHURCH. In looking at two very important texts, notice:



- Matthew 16:18 – upon this rock I will build *my church* – singular
- Ephesians 4:1-6 notice the use of the word ONE in these scriptures. Even if you should move to another city and go to another local congregation or even another apostolic denomination – you are still joined together with the brethren that you just left because you are still in the ONE church; the one body of Christ.

The Church (or Kingdom of God) is a spiritual Kingdom

Let us look at some facts about God’s kingdom, the church, that should help us realize that our citizenship is not of this world. We belong to a heavenly kingdom and nation that is not of this world:

- Luke 17:20-21: the kingdom of God is within you when you are born of the spirit. Here the Lord tells his disciples, “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation”. The Jews always were looking for a Messiah that would physically rule the world again and make Israel a powerful earthly kingdom like it was under the rule of David. They wanted nothing more than to overthrow the Roman Empire and be a free and sovereign nation – but in worldly terms.
 - Since the kingdom is within you, you are always free from being under the sovereignty of another nation. Your citizenship is in heaven.
 - Hebrews 11:8-10 Abraham looked for a city whose maker was God
 - Hebrews 11:13-16 We are strangers and pilgrims and belong to a different country
 - All people who go to a foreign country must abide by the laws of the country that they are in as they

pass through – but their home country still has authority over them.

- 2 Corinthians 5:20 As Christians, we are ambassadors in this world representing Jesus Christ, our king and head of our country.
- John 18:36 – since the Lord’s kingdom is not of this world, we do not fight to overthrow the government, or raise up a rebellion. We do not believe in converting the masses with a sword as the Moslems believe.

The Church as a kingdom has a Constitution (its founding charter)

The definition for “constitution” is “a system of rules and principles by which an organization or nation is governed”. It usually refers to a national government’s founding principles and establishes the governing powers of its rulers. The church’s constitution was written by Jesus Christ and then delivered to the apostles who were responsible for bringing the church into existence and developing it as a kingdom and nation for the citizens who were going to be born into this kingdom.

- Matthew 16:18-19 Peter was to have the role of original spokesman for the new kingdom that was going to come into existence on the day of Pentecost. Remember that since the church was a kingdom within, the church could not come into existence until the Lord poured out his spirit (the baptism of the Holy Ghost) and this could not happen until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 7:37-39)
- Peter was to receive the “keys of the kingdom”. He was not the author of the constitution (the keys), but he received them from Jesus Christ.
- Ephesians 4:20 The foundation for the church was the teaching of both the prophets and the apostles. We are not founded on the teachings and doctrines of John Calvin, or Martin Luther, or Jacob Amin. No



religious leader since Jesus Christ and the original apostles has the right to deviate in teaching or doctrine from the original constitution. There is no other plan of salvation or gospel that is acceptable.

- The Supreme Court for all constitutional interpretation of scripture is the original apostles. What they have written and how they understood what Jesus taught is the only acceptable interpretation of scripture.

What are the keys of the kingdom?

Jesus told Peter that he would receive the keys of the kingdom upon which the church would be built. Although the apostle Paul was given the role of apostle to the gentiles, he was not to deviate from the message that Peter was given by Jesus Christ. Paul was able to preach and teach with greater understanding because of the revelation that God gave him in order for him to be an apostle to the gentiles, but he could not change the gospel or plan of salvation.

Since Peter received the keys of the kingdom, the best way to understand the gospel plan is to examine what Peter preached in each instance of ministry in which Peter was involved. The Keys of the Kingdom become evident in Peter's preaching.

The Keys of the Kingdom however were not given as keys to open the doors of the church. I once preached a sermon pointing out that the Bible did not say "keys to the kingdom", but rather "keys of the kingdom". First of all, the church is not locked. The keys of the kingdom were not given to open the doors of the church, but to open the gates of hell. Notice that Matthew 16: 18 – and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Souls are locked up in the bondage of their sins, in the prisons of their darkness and the grasp of Satan and his angels. But when we use the "keys of the kingdom" we have the power of "binding and loosing". The gospel is not a gospel of enslavement

but a gospel that brings freedom by opening the doors of hell and releasing souls to walk in the Lord's marvelous light.

The keys of the kingdom were given on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the first message of salvation. Should we look for anything before that day to establish this truth. One thing is important to remember – when the Lord spoke to Peter about receiving the keys and building his church, he spoke in the future tense – something that was going to happen. It was something that was going to involve Peter. The story of the thief on the cross did not involve Peter – so it could not be considered a part of the building of the church. There are three important incidents where Peter was involved that related to the beginning of the church:

The Lord gives instructions for the churches beginning

In Acts 1:4 – 8: Here the Lord instructs his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they receive the Holy Spirit baptism. Notice however that he then tell us them how the church shall start:

Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 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.

The church would begin in Jerusalem, spread to Judaea, then to Samaria, and finally to the uttermost part of the earth (Gentile nations). On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the first salvation



message to the Jews in Jerusalem. Here he uses the “keys” and in Acts 2:38 he tells the Jews how they are to be saved.

The next incident where Peter is involved is in the Samaritan revival of Acts 8:12 – 16. Here Philip preaches Christ to Samaria, but Peter comes down along with John to lay his hands on the new baptized disciples in order for them to receive the Holy Ghost. This is how the Samaritans were added to the church.

And “the uttermost part of the earth” – refers to Peter’s ministry to Cornelius and his family in Acts 10. When we look at Acts 10:44-48, we find Peter using the same keys of Holy Spirit and water baptism.