

LESSON 1



THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Texts: Matthew 16:13-21; John 14:15-26; Luke 24:48-53; Acts 2:1-41

Nearly two thousand years ago, God sent His Son, Jesus to Galilee. He taught the people that God wanted them to live together like one, big, happy family. He did not use the word *church* so much at first. He talked a great deal about the *kingdom*, the Kingdom of God, no doubt because the people understood that word better. He taught that one should love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind, and that we should love our fellowmen in the same way we love ourselves.

MEMORY VERSE: *"And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

Matthew 16:18

Jesus Chooses Co-Workers

As He went about teaching and healing the people, Jesus chose from among those who believed He was sent by the Heavenly Father twelve men to help Him and to learn His message. These men were from many different walks of life (Luke 6:13-16). This is still the way Christ chooses His helpers today. These men traveled about with Jesus on His continuous preaching mission. We, too, must follow Christ every day wherever He leads.

Read Matthew 16:13-21. At first these men were just interested in Jesus' message. They believed Him to be a great prophet such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Elijah were in the Old Testament times. But one day after they had been walking together for many months, Jesus let them know in this Scripture that He had a plan to build a church made up of those who believed as did Peter that "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He planned to share both His earthly and His heavenly power with these believers in His church. The church is not built on Peter. It is built on Christ, the foundation, the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Had the church been built on Peter, it would have failed because Peter failed.

Jesus Promised Special Help

Read John 14:15-26. The Heavenly Father and Jesus had planned that the people who were to carry on the work Jesus had started should have a special kind of help. They planned to give each follower a power within his heart that would make it possible for him to live as Jesus had lived among them. It would give him power to live right even when others were cruel to him. It would comfort them when their friends deserted them because of their belief in Christ (John 15:18-20). It would make them know that Jesus was with them, guiding them even though they could not see Him with their physical eyes.

Luke 24:48-53 After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus reminded His disciples that they would receive this power in order to be good witnesses—to tell others about Him. They were to wait in Jerusalem, and they would know when they received this special power from the Father. Christ knew that without this power they would fail in telling others. Without this power there is no message to tell. Colleges and seminaries cannot provide what is needed for one to take the message and witness. For three years Christ had been preparing a people to be His church and now they were ready.

The Holy Spirit Comes

Read Acts 2:1-4. It was now fifty days since Jesus' death and resurrection, ten days since He had parted from them at Bethany. Many people were in Jerusalem because it was the Jewish Pentecost festival, which comes fifty days after the Passover festival. Jesus had been crucified there at the beginning of the Passover.

Jesus' followers were waiting there—at least one hundred and twenty of them—because He had told them He would send them special power: the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

Acts 2:5-13 tells us that a large crowd gathered around these followers of Jesus. Amazing and marvelous things were happening. Some took their actions as "the wonderful works of God" (verse 11), others doubted (verse 12), and yet others mocked (verse 13). And so it is yet today.

In verses 14-21 we find that already this new power was at work. Peter stood before the great group of men and began to explain what was taking place. He pointed out that these were not drunk on wine, but that they were drunk on the Spirit—the Spirit spoken of by the Prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32). This prophecy was being fulfilled before their eyes.

Verses 22-37 tells us that Peter, who had been weak before, now found a new boldness. Truth that Jesus had spoken (that he had not understood) now became plain as this Spirit revealed them to him. Peter, who had backed off from these same people just a few days before, now stood boldly before them and claimed Christ as the King who was taking over David's throne. This great sermon that Peter preached was the first Holy Spirit-filled message of the Church of God. It brought heavy conviction on the hearts of these religious professors and murderers of Jesus. "They were pricked in their heart, and said . . . Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (verse 37).

Promise Fulfilled

In Acts 2:38-41 Peter told them what they must do. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ." Peter was not speaking here of water baptism. This was a baptism of the Holy Spirit, newly sent from the Father. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (verse 41). So three thousand were added to the church at their first service after Jesus had left them to carry on in His name without His physical presence. This must have been a great encouragement to them. The Holy Spirit was doing for them exactly what Jesus had promised. Thus, the Church of God began.

JUST A THOUGHT

**A good thing to remember, a better thing to do—
work with the construction gang, not
with the wrecking crew.**