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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

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Tonight I'm very thankful for the privilege of being here, and for the emphasis that is being put upon this most important subject. I am sure that it is clear to any serious student of the Bible that in the days of the apostles there was a divine institution which was called "the church." It is also referred to in 1 Cor. 1:2 as the church of God, in Heb. 12:23 as the church of the first born, and in Matt. 16:18, 19 as the kingdom of heaven. So tonight I would like to ask the questions: What is the church? How did it begin? By whom was it started, or built? What is the teaching of the Scriptures on this most important subject?

What Authorities Say

I am going to read what two authorities say about the church. There is a wealth of information on this subject. Vedder, who is a Baptist historian said:

"The Day of Pentecost was the birthday of the Church of Christ. What existed before in germ then sprang into full being."

Pelobet's Bible Dictionary, which is found in many Christian homes says under the word "church:"

"The Day of Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian church."

Many other authorities recognize the fact that the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection was the birthday of the Lord's church.

Different Terms Used

Please do not let the fact that different terms are used to describe this institution cause confusion in your minds. It is called a "church" for the simple reason that that term means "called out." The Greek word for church means "called out" and at first it referred to an assembly which resulted when the town crier went through and called people out. Then it became known as that institution which Jesus built, which He called out the world and made His own peculiar people. Members of the church are thus "called out" of the world to live a holy life.

The same institution is called a kingdom, referring to the government of the church. Since its members have no voice in making its laws, it necessarily follows that a kingdom would be the only kind of government possible.

It is called a body, because of its likeness to the human body. Because it is a spiritual body, the church has to have a head, and that head, of course is Jesus Christ, Col. 1:18. Now there are those who try to argue that the church and the kingdom are two different institutions, and I will admit that there are differences in the two. But I believe that these terms refer to essentially the same institution, because if there are two different spiritual bodies, Paul said in I Cor. 12:20

"But now are they many members, yet but one body."

Paul said there was only one body, and if the church and the kingdom are two different things, then there are two spiritual bodies. Now if you still think that there are two different institutions, you might remember that at the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus said to his disciples in Lk. 22:29:

"And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." However, when Paul wrote to the church in I Cor. 11, he placed the table of the Lord in the church. So the table is in the church and in the kingdom, and unless there are two different tables, then this must be in

the same institution. I believe there are not two Lord's tables, but one, therefore this shows that the terms "church" and "kingdom" refer to the same institution.

The Development of the Church

But the burden of this lesson tonight is to trace the development of the kingdom, or the church, and its eventual establishment on earth. And I affirm that the church is not only relevant to man's needs today, contrary to modern teaching, but that it is also the culmination of the scheme of redemption. Paul said in Eph. 3:21:

"Unto Him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end."

I believe that it pleased God in His manifold wisdom to create the church, a divine institution, that through it He might have the glory in all ages world without end. Paul said in Eph. 5:27 that it is a "glorious" institution. So I affirm that the church is not a divine after-thought, but rather the result of the divine plan of God.

The Remedial System Prophesied

Now in the days that man first sinned and therefore needed a Saviour, there came the promise of a Redeemer, of a remedial system, and of One who could save His people from their sins. In Gen. 3:15, God said to the serpent:

"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.::

I believe that this refers to the fact that Jesus was to be born into the world and that His saving plan was to be promulgated and to be made known. He said to the serpent: "It (the seed of the woman) shall bruise thy head," (that is, give you a mortal wound), but "thou shalt bruise His heel," or in other words just give to Jesus a minor wound. Of course, Satan gave Christ a minor wound when he caused Him to suffer the penalty of death because of man's sins. But Christ bruised the head of the serpent, or the Devil, when He conquered death, hell and the grave by His glorious resurrection. God made a promise to Abraham when He told him:

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3).

Now in that last phrase, He said "in thee," that is, through the seed, through the line, or offspring of Abraham shall all families of the earth be blessed. Thus, the promise did not refer to the narrow lineage of the Jewish nation alone, but rather to something that was as broad as the scope of heaven.

Coming on down to the time of Isaiah, the prophet said:

"It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isa. 2:2).

I believe this is going to be a culmination of the wonderful promise that God made through Abraham. Isaiah said further:

"And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into Plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isa. 2:24).

Now, there are several questions I would like to ask about this wonderful passage of scripture. First, what is the "Lord's house to be established in the top of the mountains," (in Jerusalem, in other words)? I'm going to let Paul answer that. He said:

"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." (I Tim. 3:15).

When Isaiah said back yonder that "in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills," he was talking about that divine institution which we know as the church.

Second, note that it is to be "established in the top of the mountains" there in the old city of Jerusalem, and he said that "all nations shall flow unto it," (a repetition in a way of the promise that God made to Abraham).

Third, he said that God would "teach them of His ways," and that from Zion, from Jerusalem, the word of the Lord would go forth. He further said that he would "judge among the nations."

The Prophecies Fulfilled

I hope to be able to deal with each of these briefly for I believe that Jesus made a direct reference to this prophecy, and said it was to be fulfilled immediately, that is, upon the day of Pentecost, as it shall be seen. He said, furthermore, that the disciples would be witnesses of this fulfillment. Please note that Jesus said:

"Thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:46-49).

Thus Jesus explained that this prophecy was to be fulfilled immediately, and that the disciples would be witnesses. Now the "last days" of Isaiah's prophecy began on the day of Pentecost, in the second chapter of Acts. Peter said of the events of that day:

"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days..." (Acts 2:16,17).

Joel spoke of the "last days," and Peter said, "This is that." Somebody's always talking about the last days! We've been living in the "last days" since their inception on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection.

Peter later called this event in Acts 11:15 "the beginning." The beginning of what? The beginning of the "last days." The day of Pentecost marked the beginning of the "last days." And on that occasion, according to Isaiah, the word of the Lord went forth from Jerusalem, the law of the Lord was promulgated, and there upon Zion, His spirit was poured out upon those to whom it was promised (the disciples who were witnesses of these things), and upon that occasion the mountain of the Lord's house, the church, was established, and since that time, even on that eventful day, all nations flowed unto it. By the law of the Lord, which went forth from Jerusalem on that day, which is the standard of all divine judgment, the Lord is now judging among the nations. And as the prophet said (according to Luke), "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem."

When Jesus built His church, He made one spiritual body. That enmity which had long existed between the two nations, Jew and Gentile, should be broken down in this way, and in the church the nations should make peace, and become one. The unity of Jew and Gentile into one spiritual body was referred to by Isaiah as "the beating of swords into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks,"

and I believe that is a figure of the peaceful reign of the kingdom of Christ in the hearts of all men, whether Jew or Gentile, and the nations thus once at enmity would now be at peace and would learn war no more.

The whole passage there in Isaiah is a prophetic picture of the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, and the proclamation of the law of the Lord. The fulfillment of this prophecy is set forth in the Great Commission as given by Christ, and the result of all this effort by heaven was to be the conversion of the world. Under the Mosaic dispensation, Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Daniel, and Jeremiah all prophesied of events which transpired on the day of Pentecost. Some say that the

church was established way back yonder in the days of Adam, others say that it was in the days of Abel, and others come on down to the days of the various prophets. Some say that it was during the days of John the Baptist. I say that the establishment of the kingdom of heaven, or the church did not take place until the day of Pentecost.

The Time Of The Kingdom's Establishment

In the time immediately preceding the personal ministry of Christ, and even during His personal ministry, the statement was often made that the kingdom would soon come. I'd like to readjust a sprinkling of these. The burden of John's message, according to Matt. 3:2 was: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." And after His baptism and His temptations in the wilderness, Jesus said in Matt. 4:17, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." When He sent out the twelve, under the limited commission (Gentiles and Samaritans not included), He said in Matt. 10:7, "As ye go preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Later on, when He sent out the seventy, He said, in Lk. 10:9, "Say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." What does it mean when it says: "The kingdom of God is at hand?" Jesus said: "It's nigh unto you." That means that back yonder, in A.D. 32, during the preaching of John the Baptist, and before Jesus dies upon the cross, He said, "The kingdom is come nigh." It is near. It is at hand.

It was during the lifetime of the apostles that the kingdom of the church was established. In Matt. 16:18,19, Jesus said:

"Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

In Luke 9:27, Jesus said:

"I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God."

Now if they were to receive the keys of the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus promised in Matt. 16:19, it would have had to have been during the lifetime of His disciples. He said: "They're going to see the kingdom of God," and "They will not taste of death until they do." And in Luke 12:32, Jesus said:

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

What did He mean when He said "little flock?" He meant that when the kingdom was established, it would still be a "little flock" and not a multitude of people.

The disciples expected the kingdom. Luke 19:11:

"As they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."

In other words, back in Jesus' day, during His personal ministry, they expected the kingdom to immediately appear. Again, in Mark 15:43:

"Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus."

In Acts 1:6, just before Jesus' ascension into heaven, the disciples asked: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" No doubt they had a limited conception of what the kingdom of God was to really be, but there was an air of expectancy during the personal ministry of Christ concerning the kingdom or the church.

In Mark 9:1, Jesus said it just a little more plainly. He said:

"Verily I say unto you that there be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

Jesus said here that not only would they see the kingdom come, but that they would see it come with power. In Luke 24:49, He said:

"Behold, I sent the promise of my Father upon you. But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high."

Thus this power was to come as they tarried in the city of Jerusalem. Now if we can find out when the power came, we can find out when the kingdom came. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said:

"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 Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

He said the power would come when "the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Thus by inference it can be shown when the kingdom came. When the Holy Ghost came, the power came because the power was to come by the Holy Ghost. And when the power came, the kingdom came, because He said the kingdom was to come with power. If we can find out when the kingdom came, we can find out when that institution which is our quest tonight was established upon the earth.

In the Second chapter of Acts, Luke writes:

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:14).

Thus, the Holy Ghost came and brought the power. The power was that which ushered in the kingdom of heaven, or the church. And it was taking place upon the day of Pentecost, in the year A.D. 33, in the city of old Jerusalem in the land of Palestine.

Prophesied Events Occur On Pentecost

The prophet Amos predicted the end of Israel, and he said the sabbath would end when the sun would go down at noon, and the earth was darkened in a clear day, Amos 8:5, 9. Can you imagine when that time was in history? Yes, you all know it well. Amos predicted that the end of the Jewish nation with its law and its sabbath would come at the crucifixion of Christ, when the sun did go down at noon, according to Matt. 27:45, with darkness prevailing until the ninth hour, or 3 *PM*. And on that wonderful occasion, it seems as if heaven took note of it because the earth rocked and reeled on its axis. The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. The Roman centurion who was standing there said, "Truly this was the Son of God." When Jesus was crucified, the tombs of the dead were shivered and split open, and amid the darkness of Calvary, the sinless Son of God bowed His stately head and said: "It is finished!" And there the grandest drama that was ever conceived for the stage of mankind was acted out in our behalf. It began in Eden with the fallen, guilty pair. And here it is now, in the horrors of Golgotha, and the tragedies of Calvary. There the remedial system was finished. There the scheme of human redemption was effected, and the Law, having been fulfilled, was taken out of the way.

For 53 days after Jesus' death upon the cross, or on the day of Pentecost, that which was much expected and looked for finally came. Everything was in readiness. There was an air of expectancy hovering everywhere. On the third day after His death, Jesus came forth from the tomb, disappointing all the hosts of Satan, and emerging from the hades realm with the keys of death in His hand. For forty days, the Scriptures tell us, Jesus stayed upon the earth, showing Himself to be the risen Son of God by many infallible proofs. At the end of that time, He led His disciples to Olivet's brow, Olivet of sweet and tender memories, and there, bidding His disciples goodbye, He stepped aboard a glory cloud, and with that cloud as His chariot, and the

winds as His steed, He went home to heaven.

Daniel had predicted, in Daniel 2:44:

"In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

Over in the seventh chapter of Daniel is a beautiful picture. It is a picture of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven, as it were, coming to the Ancient of days, and receiving a kingdom. I believe that "Ancient of days" was God, and the One who came there was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. One thing that causes me to believe it is its likeness to a passage found in the nineteenth chapter of Luke and verse 11:

"As they heard these things, He added and spake a parable because He was nigh to Jerusalem and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come."

Here Jesus drew a picture of a certain nobleman going to a far country. Jesus did that! He went to a far country to receive His kingdom, and He's going to return some day. In Acts 1:9:

"And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

So in actual fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel, and the parable of Christ, He was taken home to heaven upon a cloud. In I Pet. 3:22, the Scriptures tell us that Christ is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, Angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him. And the Apostle Paul wrote in Phil. 2:9-11 :

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The Church Established and The Redemptive Plan Effected

Thus, Jesus came to this world for the purpose of dying for man's sins, and effecting the remedial system. And all we have as a culmination of that is God's holy word, the redemptive plan effected, and the church, which has as its holy mission to preach and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

On that Pentecost, Jesus was, for the first time, preached as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Now He had been confessed before that time, but never preached. When Peter said: "Thou art the Christ," even on that occasion Jesus charged them to "tell no man" that He was Jesus the Christ. And when from the blue-vaulted skies of heaven God said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him," the Scriptures tell us that Jesus charged the disciples to "tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead." Now I want you to think of this! If the church was established prior to this time, it was established without the wonderful fact being preached that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. Can you believe it? Certainly I do not believe it. Can you imagine a church of Christ without the gospel of Christ being preached that He is the Christ, the Son of God?

It was on Pentecost also, that the Holy Spirit began His work of conversion through the Apostles, through their preaching, because the Spirit was not given until Jesus was glorified. He ascended to heaven according to John 7:39, and Jesus said plainly that the Spirit would not be sent until He went away, John 16:7-9. So you see, Pentecost not only marks the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the beginning of the church, but also it's the beginning of the Spirit's dispensation of conversion. Now, Listen! If the church existed before Pentecost, it had neither the work of the Holy Spirit, nor the gospel of Christ. That may be true of human organizations,

but not Christ's church.

Furthermore, it was on Pentecost that the law of pardon was announced to all men for the first time. It was there that the full and complete gospel was preached for the first time. Prior to that time, they had worked under the limited commission, for the Saviour said, "Don't go to any of the ways of the Gentiles, or of the Samaritans, but you go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." They were the objects of His preaching. But now the world-wide commission is given after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection in which He says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Why? Because away back yonder, in the dawn of man's existence upon the earth, God had promised a Redeemer. He had promised a redemptive plan. He had promised Abraham, "In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed." And not it's in the church that this wonderful thing is going to happen.

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he gave the terms of salvation that Jesus encouraged him to give. He told that group of believing Jews, who were then crying, with tears of sorrow coursing down their cheeks:

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized."

And notice, the Scripture says:

"The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:38-41).

Since that time you will find the church being spoken of as a reality, not a promise anymore, but as a wonderful reality.

The triumphs of the church have been great in the past, but I believe the future is going to be greater. I believe it will continue until the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. When the ocean has wept herself dry, and when the moon and the stars have fallen from their orbits, when the sun has burned itself out, and when the earth has been dissolved in smoke, when the dead have been raised, and the judgment is past, then will Jesus, as the Head of the church, the King over this kingdom, deliver it up to God the Father, that He may be all in all.