

The Doctrine Of The Church

Matthew 16:13-18

Pastor John Miller

Matthew 16:13-18 says, “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi...”—that’s way up in the north of Israel—“...He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’” It’s one thing to wonder who others say Jesus is, and it’s another thing to know who Jesus is yourself.

Verse 16, “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” There it is. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah...’—or “Simon, son of Jonah”—“...for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades...”—or “hell”—“...shall not prevail against it.”

This is the first place that the word “church” or “ekklesia” appears in the New Testament. And there are only a few times that you see it with this statement in the Gospel. And it’s all through the book of Acts and in the epistles of the New Testament.

As Christians, we are not only to be committed to Christ, but we are also to be committed to His church. I believe the modern church today, the local church, is suffering from a low, non-Biblical view of the church. We think it’s kind of like we can take-it-or-leave-it. We often look for a church of our own joy and pleasing. We don’t have a Biblical view of the church, so it’s important that we see the church in an elevated, Biblical view.

In Ephesians 5:22, it says, “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” I know that in this context, Paul is talking about marriage—“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,” but the marriage relationship is a reflection of Christ and His church. Our marriages should reflect that. But the point is that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.

If Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, can we do anything less? Should we not love His church and give ourselves for it?

In Ephesians 5:23, it says, “Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” As Christians, we are part of Christ’s own body. One of the beautiful metaphors of the church is that we are His body. We are all individual members, but we are one body. In this body, is unity and diversity. And Christ is the head of the body, the church.

The Bible also uses the metaphor for the church as a bride, and Christ is our heavenly bridegroom, who is coming back for His church “without spot or wrinkle.”

The Bible also uses the metaphor of a building. Christ is building the church, we’re living stones

and the church is the habitation of God through the Holy Spirit.

So the church is the body of Christ, bought with the blood of Christ and one day the church will be “caught up” to be with Christ when it is raptured. The church was born on the day of Pentecost, and it will end when it goes up in the heavens at the rapture. When the Lord raptures the church, the church age will be over. Then follows the revealing of the Antichrist, a covenant made with him for seven years and once again God will be dealing with Israel in bringing them to repentance, ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Now the question is, what is Jesus doing now? He’s building His body, He’s building His bride and He’s building the church, a habitation of God through the Spirit. And we have in our text His promise to build the church.

In order to understand the Bible, you must understand the church. If you don’t understand the church—its program, plan and purpose according to God’s will—you won’t understand the Bible.

In Matthew 16, Jesus gives us a promise about His church. Beginning with verse 13, it says, “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi...” That’s a beautiful place at the base of a mountain where water comes out of the ground and flows into the Jordan River, running all the way down through Israel to the Dead Sea.

“He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’” He had all the popular opinions, verse 14. “Some say John the Baptist.” Herod had already beheaded John the Baptist by this time. And Herod thought that John the Baptist had come back to life in the person of Jesus Christ. Some thought Jesus was “Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” In Malachi 4:5, it says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” So the Jews were looking for and expecting Elijah to appear. And some thought Jesus was Jeremiah or a prophet. But they were all wrong.

Then Jesus asked His disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Jesus wanted His disciples to understand who He was. Then in verse 16, Peter speaks up. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The word “Christ” is the equivalent of the Old Testament “Messiah” or “Mashiach,” both of which mean “the Anointed One.” So Jesus is revealing who He is to His disciples.

Next Jesus says, in verse 17, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” So Peter’s confession—“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”—was given by direct revelation from God the Father. Here you have God the Father, by His Spirit, revealing that His Son is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Then in verse 18, Jesus said to Peter, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

Now in this one verse, Jesus gives us seven hallmark principles of His promise about His church. Number one, the church is a permanent foundation. He would permanently lay the foundation for the church. It is paramount. Jesus said, “You are Peter,” in verse 18. When

Jesus said "Peter," He used the word "Petros." It means "a little stone or pebble." The verse goes on, "And on this rock..." The word "rock" is "petra," which means "a slab" or "a giant stone." So Jesus was saying that you are a little pebble, but upon this big slab or giant stone, "I will build my church."

So the question is: Is Peter the rock on which Jesus would build the church? Biblically, the church is not built on Peter; he is not the first pope of the church. The church is built on Jesus Christ, who is "the Son of the living God." Jesus could have said, "You are Peter, and on you I will build My church." But He didn't say that. He said, "You are Peter, and on this rock..."—or "petra," this large, massive stone. Peter was just a little pebble—"...I will build My church." So the church is built on Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11 says, "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." There is no indication throughout the rest of the New Testament that Peter is the first pope. Yes, Peter was a leading apostle, a blessed apostle and a great man of God, but he was not the first pope. The church is not built on any human being. The foundation of the church was laid by the apostles, but it is laid on Jesus Christ. When Paul said, "I preach Christ," he's preaching the foundation of the church.

Number two, Jesus has a personal involvement in His church. In verse 18, He said, "I will build my church." The emphasis is on "I." Thank God that Jesus is the one—and the only one—who is building His church! He builds the church, and He uses us to help build His church. We are His fellow-servants, but He is the one who is building the church of Jesus Christ.

Number three, we see Jesus' positive expectation of building the church. He said, "I will." Here the emphasis is on "will." "I will build My church." The church will be triumphant in heaven.

Number four, notice Jesus' powerful advance. "...will build my church." The emphasis is on the word "build." "I will build" means that the church will grow and expand. In Acts 1:15, Peter and 120 disciples gathered together in the upper room to pray. Then, in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, they were gathered in one place, and the Holy Spirit arrived and the church was born. Peter stood up and preached, and "They were cut to the heart," verse 37, and they believed in Jesus Christ. Verse 41, "And that day about three thousand souls were added to them."

You talk about rapid growth! They went from 120 to 3,120. When Jesus said, "I will build My church," you can bet He will build His church! He promised He would build His church. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The church starts in Acts with 120 in Jerusalem, and it ends in Rome, which was "the end of the earth," at that time. It grew and expanded massively.

And even today, it is growing. If we look at the American church only, and it appears there is a decline in church attendance—don't be deceived! Christ is building His church. And He is

building and expanding His church worldwide, as many are coming to Christ.

Number five, Jesus has a personal ownership of the church. Matthew 16:18 says, “I will build My church.” We want to focus on the word “church.” The Greek word for “church” is “ekklesia.” Jesus bought the church with His own blood, Acts 20:28. “The Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” When Paul met with the elders, the pastors, in Ephesus, he said to feed the flock of God, which was purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ. So it was Jesus’ personal church.

Number six, it is a people-centered church. The word “church” or “ekklesia” means “called-out assembly.” The church is not a physical building or an organization or a particular denomination; it is a people who are called out to assemble.

And the church comes in two categories. First, we have the church universal, which consists of every person who is born again or saved and placed in Christ. We are part of His body and He is the head. You can’t be a Christian without being a part of the church universal. That’s the worldwide church. Some use the word “invisible” in describing the universal church, but it’s probably not the best term to describe the universal church.

And this category of the church is only for saved people. That’s how you get in the church: when you are saved. Then you are placed “in Christ.” It doesn’t matter where in the world you go to church, in what denomination your church is. If you are born again—and only if you are born again—are you part of the church universal.

The second category of the church is the expression of the church locally, which are the individual congregations or local churches. So Revival Christian Fellowship is a local fellowship of believers. We gather to worship, to share communion, to pray, to do the work of evangelism, we have pastoral teaching, we study the Word of God, we have Bible study groups and prayer groups. We are a part of the body that is locally gathered together in fellowship, expressing God’s love to the world around us. So we are part of a local church.

Yet not everyone in the local church, which would include our church, is saved. They may come to church, they may occupy a pew, they may listen to the sermons and they may even try, in their own strength, to serve God in the church. But you haven’t given Him your heart. You’re not born again. In order to be a member of a local church, you should first be a member of the universal church. We do our best to make sure that you know the Gospel and that you have trusted Christ. Only those who are born again are serving and leading in the church.

But the Bible says that there will be “tares among the wheat.” Only until the Lord comes to divide the wheat from the tares will we really know who is saved and who is not saved. In the local church, there is a mixture of tares and wheat, so the goal is to preach the Gospel and see everyone saved.

Now notice number seven: the building of the church is a promise of success, verse 18. “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” That’s the church. Jesus promised that He

personally would build His own church—it's not my church. Sometimes you say, "Pastor Miller's church," or "Greg Laurie's church" or whatever it might be. No, no. It's the church of Christ.

And when Jesus said at that time, "I will build My church," it was future tense. So those who say that the saints of the Old Testament were the church, are wrong. They're saved, they're saved by grace, they're saved by believing God, but only those after Pentecost who believed in Jesus and were born again are placed by the Spirit in Christ. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." Now the moment you are born again, you are placed in Christ.

The Bible also uses a metaphor of a flock of sheep in speaking of the church.

The pastor is the shepherd, but Christ is the chief shepherd. So any pastor is just "second fiddle" to the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. The goal is to feed the sheep, lead the sheep and protect the sheep.

"The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Satan will not win, because he's already been defeated at the Cross. In Revelation 2 and 3, you have the church on earth. There are the letters to the seven churches, wherein Christ is walking among them and holding their leadership in His hand. In Revelation 4 and 5, the church is triumphant in heaven. It is seen around the throne in the 24 elders. So the church will not be eliminated.

But Satan does all he can to persecute the church, to attack the church and to dilute the church. He attacks it from the outside and from within by false doctrine. Yet Christ promised that the church will prevail. He said, "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

Now what does the local church, such as our church, look like? Acts 2:41 shows us. This is a picture or a cameo of a Spirit-filled church. This is the church of Pentecost. This is the church that went from 120 to 3,120. What did they do? What is required to become a Spirit-filled church? And what is its function?

Verse 41 says, "Then [they] gladly received his word." In context, Peter had preached, they had been "cut to the heart," they repented and believed in Christ, they "were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." So the day of Pentecost had come, the Spirit of God had birthed the church, Christ is the living head of the bride, the body of Christ, and the church was born.

Now let me mention a couple of things. Today we live between Acts 2, the day of Pentecost, and the future rapture of the church back to heaven. This time period we are living in now is called "the church age," or some call it "the dispensation of the church." Once the church is "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air" in the rapture, it will be the end of the church age. Then the world will enter into a different period known as the tribulation. It's the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks. The Antichrist shows up, who covenants with Israel for seven years, and God begins to work with Israel again to prepare them, during "the time of Jacob's trouble," for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. So this will be the future of the church.

And I believe the church is a New Testament mystery. If you don't understand that, you'll be confused prophetically. A mystery is something that was not revealed in the past, but now has been made known to the children of God. So the church is a revelation given to Paul the Apostle and explained in his epistles. Previously, Jesus had just promised it.

Also, the church does not replace Israel. God's promises to Israel in the Abrahamic covenant, in the Davidic covenant, will be fulfilled in the new covenant. This will actually happen in the time of the tribulation, which is called "the time of Jacob's trouble." You can read about this in Romans 9, 10 and 11. In Romans 9, we see God's plan for Israel. They would reject Messiah and be cut off. In Romans 10, they would be blinded for a portion of time and rejected. In Romans 11, Israel would be restored. So we have their election in chapter 9, their rejection in chapter 10 and their restoration in chapter 11 of Romans. So what you need to understand is that God's purpose and plan and design for Israel is separate, distinct and different from God's plan for the church.

The church consists of Jew and Gentile. You can read about that in Ephesians 2. We are a new humanity; the wall of tradition is broken down. Ephesians 2:14 says, "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both..."—that's "Jew and Gentile"—"...one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation." So we're not Jew nor Gentile, not bond nor free, not male nor female; we're all one in Christ and in the church.

Now let me give you the four, essential ingredients of a local church. Number one, it has sound Biblical doctrine. It is a learning church. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Nothing is more important for the church—its life, its health and its growth—than the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

If you have been coming even a short time to Revival, you know that this is my commitment. At church on Sunday and Wednesday, we will study the Bible. We will preach the Word of God. We're not doing life lessons, or giving you a pep talk. We're reading the text. One of the reasons why I read the Bible to the congregation is because I believe the Bible is the Word of God. I believe that when the Bible is being read, God is speaking.

You say, "Well, I want to hear God speak audibly." Then read the Bible out loud.

That's what we do. When I read those verses from the Bible on Sunday mornings, I'm reading from the Word of the Lord. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Then if I accurately explain its meaning, that's "exigó" the text, then you are properly applying the text. You're getting the preaching of the Word. That's what we're doing at Revival.

So when Acts 2:42 says that "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," then they were a Bible-studying church. They were a Bible-centered church. They were given to the Scriptures. There's nothing more important for a church than to study the Word of God.

It's interesting that they were a Spirit-filled church, in Acts 2. And what did they do? They studied "the apostles' doctrine." The Word of God and the Spirit of God are not mutually

exclusive. The church needs both the Holy Spirit and God's Word to be a healthy, growing, vibrant church.

Now what was the doctrine of the apostles? It was basically apostolic teaching. They didn't have Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. They didn't have the book of Romans. They didn't have Galatians, Ephesians or Colossians. They didn't have 1 John, 2 John, 3 John or Jude. They didn't have the New Testament. It was just being written. They had the apostles to teach them.

That would be very cool; you go to church and find out Peter's preaching today. "I can dig that." The Apostle John is preaching. Can you imagine being in Ephesus and bringing John in to preach to you at the morning service? How cool would that be!

So they had the apostles' doctrine. Now for us, we have the apostles' doctrine in written form, in the Bible. That's why we study the Bible; it's the apostles' doctrine in Scripture. It's the Word of God. So we open the Scriptures and continue "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." It's so very important.

The number one priority of a pastor, which is an elder or overseer of the church, is the preaching of God's Word. The Apostle Paul is soon going to die, so in 2 Timothy 4, which is one of my favorite passages in the Bible, Paul is passing the baton to his young protégé, Timothy. In verses 1-2, Paul says to Timothy, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...Preach the Word!" The word "preach" here is the word "kerysso." It means "to herald" or "to proclaim." Speaking it with authority. You just speak the Word. Don't add to it. Don't subtract from it. Just take the Word and preach it. This is what we call "expositional teaching"; you read the text, you explain the text and you apply the text.

Paul says, "Be ready [to preach the word] in season and out of season." Preach it when it's popular and when it's not popular. And Paul tells us how to preach it: "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." Then he tells Timothy why he should preach the Word, in verses 3-4: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they..."—that is, "the church"—"...will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." Then Paul tells Timothy, in verse 5, "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

This is so important for these times. Pastors are to preach the Word of God. If we want healthy churches, if we want powerful, growing churches, we need to be preaching—nothing more, nothing less—the pure, unadulterated Word of God.

By the way, in 1 Timothy, in 2 Timothy and in Titus, we have pastoral epistles. And all through those epistles, Paul talks about "sound doctrine." The word "sound" is a medical word, which means "healthy, life-giving." And the word "doctrine" means "teaching." So sound doctrine is healthy, life-giving teaching. That's "continu[ing] steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

The second, essential ingredient of a true church is loving fellowship. It's a loving church. Acts

2:42 says, “and fellowship.” So the first two things are doctrine and fellowship. The Greek word for “fellowship” is “koinónia.” It means “to hold in common.”

John Stott said, “The word ‘fellowship’ was born on the day of Pentecost.” I like that. Today this meaning has been lost. We think fellowship is just when we get together and eat food. I used to think that coffee and donuts were koinónia. You can’t fellowship without coffee and donuts. But that’s not koinónia.

The word “koinónia” means “to hold in common.” What do we hold in common? Two things: we have a common salvation and we have a common, shared communion of service. We share in salvation and we share in service. Everyone in the universal church, and ideally in the local church, are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

When we gather on Sunday or Wednesday, we’re all brothers and sisters in Christ. Some of us are uncomfortable with that, just as you might be with your own, biological family. But we are all one family; we all have one Father, and we’ve all been saved by grace through faith in Christ. This is what we share together.

So if you are not saved, then you can’t really have communion, because our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. In Ephesian 4:4-6, Paul says, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, on faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Here Paul is describing the church. We “have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” It’s the fellowship of the saints.

Not only do we share in a common salvation, but we share out in a common service. Look at verses 44-45. “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common...”—here’s our word “koinónia”—“...and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

Now you say, “Pastor John, why did you have to read that verse? I have to sell my house, my boat, my motorcycle and give it to God?!” No. They met daily in houses, so they didn’t all sell their houses. But they had things they didn’t need that they sold and gave to people who had a need. There was a commonality, a camaraderie, a koinónia, a sharing-out what they had with the body of Christ.

True Christian fellowship shares out in service to others. Paul says we are to “serve one another” in Galatians 5:13-15. “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”

Galatians 6:1-5 says we should “bear one another’s burdens.” “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load."

In James 5:16, the Bible says that we should "pray one for another." "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

The Bible says we should be "forgiving one another," Ephesians 4:32. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

And this list could go on and on. These are the "one anothers" in the Bible. So we share a common salvation, we are one in the body of Christ—this is the oneness Jesus prayed for in John 17:11—and we are to share out of our substance to help "bear one another's burdens" and serve one another.

Are you living in loving fellowship with your brothers and sisters in your local church? I've met people who have said, "Well, I'm a Christian, but not the kind that goes to church." You can be saved and not go to a local church, but you can't be saved and be a good Christian without going to a local church. You won't be a healthy, strong, growing Christian. We need each other. The hand in the body can't say to the eye, "I don't need you." We're all different, but we need one another and we need to be connected to the Head.

I need your prayers. You need mine. I need your encouragement. You need mine. I need you to forgive me, as I forgive you. And God forgives us. We need to pray, bear each other's burdens and serve one another in the body of Christ.

1 John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death." I've met people who profess to be a Christian, but they say, "I don't like Christians." How can you be a child of God and say, "God I love you, but I hate my brother"? How can you love God, who you have not seen, and not love your brother and sister, who you have seen?

I remember when I got saved, I was 19 years old and just out of high school, and I loved going to church. I hadn't been to Calvary Chapel. I was a hippie and had long hair and a beard. I went to this little church full of seniors. But I loved them and they loved me and they accepted me. We were brothers and sisters in Christ. They were excited. "We got a hippie! A real hippie! He looks like Jesus, too!" And I knew I was saved, because I loved these people and loved being with them. Only God could do that! I knew He had changed my heart. So if you are part of the universal church, it should be expressed in a local church, as you fellowship with other believers.

The third mark, quality or essential in this cameo of a true church is a worshipping church. They were a learning church, a loving church and they were a worshipping church. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly...in prayers." They were learning the Word of God, they

were loving the family of God and they were worshipping the true and living God.

In this verse, the use of the definite article suggests a reference to the Lord's Supper and the prayer meeting. So it's actually "the breaking of the bread and the prayers." That's an indication that this is a reference to communion and the prayer meeting.

The two ordinances of the church are baptism and communion or the Lord's Supper. But the church is also to be involved in praying. You see in the book of Acts that the disciples were praying. They prayed together corporately, and they prayed individually. It was a praying church. So they worshipped the Lord through communion, "in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." They were fellowshiping together.

Two aspects of their balanced worship are that it was both formal and informal. Verse 46 says, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple..."—that's formal—"...and breaking bread from house to house," which is informal. So the church can meet even in a home and a living room. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

And their worship was both joyful and reverent, verse 46. It says, "They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." So there was joy in their fellowship. Verse 43 says, "Then fear came upon every soul," so it was also reverent. They had a respect or fear of the Lord. So worship should be formal and informal, joyful and reverent. And the church's highest priority is to worship God.

I said that the pastor's highest priority is the preaching of the Word. The Bible says that we are sheep, and the pastor, which means "shepherd" in Latin, needs to feed the sheep the Word of God. That's teaching the Bible. And he is to lead the sheep by example, and he is to protect the sheep from false doctrine.

But the highest priority of the church corporately is to worship God. That is upreach; we reach up to God. Then it comes to inreach; we teach the Bible, we love one another, fellowship and encourage one another. Then the outreach is reaching out in missions or in evangelism to the lost around us. So it is a joyful, reverent, worshipping church.

Someone said, "We congregate to worship God, we celebrate all that God has done and is doing, we commemorate the Lord's Supper, looking back at the Cross and looking around at others and looking forward to His Coming." We communicate by preaching and teaching God's Word. We consecrate our lives to serve God as an act of worship. Romans 12:1 says, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." That's the best thing we can do.

Worship also includes obedience. The prophet, Samuel, told the disobedient king, Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." So when you come to church and sing the songs, you worship the Lord and pray, are you walking in obedience to His Word?

The fourth mark of a true church is that it is an evangelistic church. Notice Acts 2:47: "...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." So Jesus said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Then no sooner than He said that, we have Acts 2, when the church is born, and "three thousand souls were added." Jesus is building His church.

A true, Spirit-filled church is not so preoccupied with inreach and upreach that they forget about outreach. A true, Spirit-filled church reaches up to God, reaches within to build up one another in love, but also does not forget to reach out to the lost and dying world. A Spirit-filled church is an evangelistic church.

Jesus said to the apostles in Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses..."—we get our word "martyrs" from that—"...to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

John Stott said, "Before Christ sent the church into the world, He sent the Spirit into the church. The same order must be observed today." Jesus said, in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," and in Matthew 28:19, He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Evangelism involves disciple-making. It's not just bringing people to Christ; it's also bringing them up in the Lord. It's so very important. So this is the church's mission.

I want to close with verse 47. I want to give you some facts about evangelism. It was the Lord who was working. "The Lord added." Jesus said, "I will build My church." He built it through mass evangelism, such as Peter's sermon in Acts 2 where 3,000 souls were saved; through personal evangelism, such as Philip's witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8; and through missionary endeavors, in Acts 13, where the Spirit said, "Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

So how does Jesus build His church? By mass evangelism, personal evangelism, through missionary outreach and by the church being salt and light in a dark world. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."

Now notice in Acts 2:47, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." He did not add them to the church without saving them; nor did He save them without adding them to the church. So He first saved them and then added them to the church. In the Greek, the word "daily" means "kept on adding daily." So evangelism was a daily part of the church's activities.

Let's review the marks of a true church. It is a learning church, in studying God's Word. It is a loving church, in loving God's people. It is a worshipping church, worshipping God "in spirit and truth." It is a witnessing church, reaching out to the lost world around us.

Timothy Dwight wrote these words in a hymn:

"I love Thy church, O God;
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy hand.
For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be giv'n,
Till toils and cares shall end."