

LESSON SIX

THE CHURCH AND HER FUTURE

A. JESUS TAUGHT CONCERNING THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH:

Scriptural Reference:

"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

This Scripture is an extremely important one for here Jesus taught three things concerning the church: (1) The church was still future; (2) The church would be founded upon Peter's confession; (3) The church would be permanent and victorious.

Let us carefully examine each of these truths taught here:

1. The church was born into being on the Day of Pentecost. While Jesus was here in the flesh it was impossible for the church to be here upon earth at the same time, for the church is the mystical body of Christ. It was necessary for our Lord to be crucified, be buried, arise and ascend, and the Comforter to come before the church could be born. Here Jesus made it very clear that the church was still future. "I will build" makes it very plain.
2. The church's foundation would be the revelation that Peter had received from God concerning Christ's Deity, and the confession of that revelation. *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Certainly Jesus did not mean Peter when He said, "Upon this rock" or a building stone to be placed into the foundation. However, He would build His church "on this rock" (petra, feminine) meaning a huge rock like Gibraltar.
3. In considering this statement of our Lord that the church would be permanent and victorious, we must understand the phrase "gates of hell." This may be interpreted in two ways:
 - a. Gates of Hades (Greek) or Sheol (Hebrew) which sometimes is an expression for "Death." The death of our Lord upon the cross would not hinder the founding of the church. Neither at the time nor at any other time would death swallow up His church. The church would be victorious over death.
 - b. The gates of Hades may also refer to the powers of the infernal region. The gates of a city was the expression sometimes used for the troops or armies which came forth out of the gates of a fortified city. This then would simply mean that the devil and all of his demon forces will never succeed in overpowering the church.

B. JESUS TAUGHT THAT THE CHURCH WOULD HAVE AUTHORITY:

Scriptural References:

"And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

Jesus taught that His church would be endowed with a definite power and authority. Especially would the action of the church be backed up by God in matters concerning salvation and judgment.

These statements of our Lord reveal the terrific responsibility which the Lord places upon the church in the binding and loosing of immortal souls.

C. JESUS COMMISSIONED HIS CHURCH TO PREACH THE GOSPEL:

Scriptural References:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19).

"And he said unto them. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

The Great Commission has been studied elsewhere in the Alpha Bible Course, and it should not be necessary to study the nature of the commission here. This commission was given by our Lord upon at least three occasions and was directed to His church. This is her marching orders.

D. JESUS TAUGHT A VITAL UNION OF HIMSELF WITH HIS CHURCH:

Scriptural References:

"At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20).

"Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4).

The Apostle Paul in his epistles taught the vital union of Christ and His church: "...church, which is his body..." (Ephesians 1:22-23). "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (I Corinthians 12:27).

This same tremendous truth which is taught by Paul is also taught by our Lord. The church simply cannot live in separation from Jesus Christ. Her life depends upon this vital union. "Ye in me" and "I in you" make this fact very clear. If one does not abide in Him, he is cast forth (John 15:6).

E. JESUS GAVE DEFINITE PORTRAITS OF HIS CHURCH:

Scriptural References:

"Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13).

"Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14).

"I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15:5).

"And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (John 10:4).

The Bible is full of portraits describing the church. Some of the most vivid of these pictures are given by our Lord. Such phrases as "salt of the earth," "light of the world," "branches," "sheep," reveal the fact that the church is not to be a dormant, lifeless body but was to be living with a definite ministry here in this world.

Another important truth is the fact that the qualities given to the church are qualities possessed by our Lord and transmitted directly to the church by His presence and the vital union maintained. For example the branches can only bear fruit as they abide in the vine. The church can only be the light of the world as Jesus Christ shines through her.

F. JESUS TAUGHT THAT THE CHURCH HAS A GLORIOUS FUTURE:

Scriptural Reference:

"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3).

Jesus taught very little about the future of the church except to state that he was preparing an eternal home for her. He makes it very clear that where He is there will the church be also.

By studying the book of Revelation we know that this place being prepared by our Lord is New Jerusalem, the city foursquare. This will be the church's eternal home.

LESSON SIX

SELF HELP TEST

A. Explain clearly the two ways Jesus used the word "rock" in Matthew 16:18.

B. Give THREE pictures the Lord gave of His church.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Write our TWO Scriptures with references to show that Christ would be dwelling within His church.

1. _____

2. _____

D. What truths did Jesus teach concerning His church in the following Scriptures: Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18?