

# Jesus, the Bible and You in 7 Steps - Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. The reading today is from Matthew chapter 16, verse 13 to 19, which can be found on page 983 in your church bibles.

! Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah. When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say the Son of Man is? They replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But what about you? He asked.

Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, blessed me, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Thank you. Cheers, mate.

Morning, everybody. Lovely to see you all. Keep your Bibles open there. We'll come back to it in a second. Let me pray before we start. Heavenly Father, you are good, and you love us, and we are so thankful that you have saved us, if we trust in you. And we pray, Lord, as we come to your word, and we hear your living word speak to us now, that we would know that it's your living word, that we would be convicted by your living word.

[ 1 : 58 ] And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I want you to think of, in your mind, what is the greatest thing on earth?

Just think about that. What is that image that's coming into your head? Is that thing church? Is that thing church? Now, you might have known the last few years, we've had a few complaints about people parking on the roads around here on Sundays, and sometimes it's a little bit justified.

You know, maybe we could park a little bit more conscientiously, considerably, but that's not why I've mentioned that. I think it's kind of a good example of how lots of people think about church. Church is nice. Church is good. But not important enough that lots of parking spots, too many parking spots are filled up on Bethel Lane.

Now, most of us are believers. We like church. But even for most of us, I think maybe church doesn't always feel like the greatest thing on earth.

[ 3 : 07 ] Maybe you think to yourself, is it worth it? Dragging my kids here for this. Coming out in the rain for this.

The social awkwardness for this, maybe, you think. The hard service with little fruit for this. Maybe if you're a teenager, you probably think church is a little bit uncool, a bit lame.

And I think, you know, there are churches meeting right now that are lamer than us, right? Just a couple of believers. No building.

Their slides aren't slick. Whatever. Haven't got microphones and all that kind of stuff. Church doesn't even, sometimes church doesn't even feel like a contender to feel like the greatest thing on earth.

Look, we've been in a series seeing the story of the whole Bible and it's centred on the Lord Jesus. Here's what we've seen. God made the world. This is the big story. God made the world. We broke it.

[ 4 : 13 ] Jesus came to save us. But then he went to heaven and he left us with this. Really? Is that good? Sometimes church can feel small.

It can feel skippable. It can feel, quite frankly, underwhelming. Underwhelming. But God wants us to know this in his words.

That church really is the greatest thing on earth. And we are part of it. So we should be in awe at Jesus.

Today we're doing an aerial view over kind of the whole New Testament about what the church is and God's plan for the church. So we're not going to be looking at details.

We're going to be flicking around the Bible a little bit. So strap yourselves in for that. Let's get our bearings first. What is church? Now if you put a microphone to some people walking down there, I wonder what they would say.

[ 5 : 17 ] Probably it's a building. Churches are kind of loads of religious things going on. It's not the state, maybe some people might say. Here's the Bible's definition.

It's way, way more than this. It's quite incomplete, but it's not less than this. Christians gathered by Jesus.

Gathered around Jesus. Now church just means gathering in the Bible. It just means gathering. There's no way around that. It's not an institution.

It's a gathering. It's a major Bible theme. From the beginning, God wanted a people gathered around him, listening to him. It started, look at this on the screen, it started in Eden.

Humanity walking with God, hearing from him, living under his word. But that gathering breaks, doesn't it? That relationship there breaks. There's no gathering around God anymore because of the fall, because of human sin.

[ 6 : 15 ] And God, fast forward a bit, God rescues his people from Egypt and brings them to the rock at Mount Sinai.

The rock at Mount Sinai. And they gather to hear him speak there. And this verse in the Greek Old Testament, it calls that thing going on there, church.

The Lord proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire on the day of the assembly, the church. Didn't stay there for long. They got exiled out of God's presence.

This is the big story again. But God promised a new gathering. See Isaiah 2 or something like that. A new gathering, a new mountain, on a new rock. Keep your Bibles now.

Open at Matthew 16. Matthew 16, verse 15. Verse 16. Simon Peter said to Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

[ 7 : 17 ] And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church.

My gathering. The rock is no longer a mountain. But Christians, gathered by Jesus, like Peter, who confess who Jesus is.

That's the new rock around Jesus. Now it feels absolutely criminal to miss out some really big things about what actually makes up church.

Regular commitment to one another. Baptism. Lord's Supper. Another time. Fundamentally, church is a new sort of Sinai moment.

The word is that common thing to gather them. Jesus and his word is the common thing to gather us. So there's lots of really nice Christian buildings out there, isn't there?

[ 8 : 26 ] There's lots of really nice Christian community out there. There are lots of things that might look and sound and smell like church out there. Go to the churchiest place you might know.

I kind of think Westminster Cathedral or something like that. And this is the kind of thing you might hear from the pulpits. Oh, me and Paul, we've got some disagreements on this. Oh, I don't really like this bit of the Bible.

They're no longer gathering around the thing that gathered them in the first place. The words. They're not a church. Church isn't just community.

It's not just influenced by the words. The word gathers. We know.

We know this. We know the church is a word-centric thing. But here's what one Christian says about this, about the gospel, but I think it applies to other things as well.

[ 9 : 29 ] First generation believes it. The second generation assumes it. The third generation denies it. We don't want to get even close to assuming, do we?

Church is a gathering by Jesus around Jesus. And the thing that the Bible really wants us to know, that it's the greatest thing on earth.

Firstly, it's Jesus' greatest miracle. Jesus' greatest miracle. Look at Matthew 16 again. Peter's been walking with Jesus in the book of Matthew.

And he's been talking with Jesus. And he's been seeing Jesus do loads of these amazing miracles. But he still doesn't get who Jesus is. He still doesn't get him. He needs a miracle.

Verse 15. He said to him, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

[10:31] And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. Can you see that? But my Father, who is in heaven.

You don't gather around Jesus because you are convinced of him logically. You don't gather around Jesus because you figured it out.

You don't gather around Jesus because you muster enough faith. Not flesh and blood. That's what it says, isn't it?

Not our will. God. If you trust in Jesus, you are part of God's greatest miracle because of him. God in the flesh, he did lots of miracles.

Sick healed, dead raised, blind can see. But he didn't just raise one person or unblind one person. How about doing that for two billion people? That's a miracle.

[11:41] Two billion people, you can estimate, across all time and history, wanting nothing to do with God, gather back to him again. Two billion people, in millions of different congregations, across hundreds of thousands of different towns in the world, spanning thousands of years of time, are gathering in different local bodies, around the one God, because of the one Lord, in the one spirit, around the one word.

Two billion people, who should all be enemies, but now doing family together, loving each other. praying for each other. How did that happen?

It sounds like the start of a bit of a dodgy joke, but what do you call a Ukrainian holding hands with a Russian, eating lunch cooked by a grandmother, served by her grandson, hosted in the house of an investment banker, opening his home to a homeless person?

Church. Church community. Isn't that a miracle? How do you explain that? You need a saviour for that. You need Jesus for that.

Willing to die to unite. We are the end goal, of all of Jesus' salvation work, to gather a people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

[13:05] We see it here. We do see it here, don't we? We look around. We see it incompletely. I mean, if we were in heaven now, we would see it completely.

The Bible talks about the heavenly assembly of believers, all believers. One day we will see it with our own eyes, if we trust in Jesus. The church is Jesus' greatest miracle.

There's more. The church is part of an eternal plan. Part of an eternal plan. Matthew 16, again, verse 18.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. The gates of Hades.

Death. Not even death prevails over God's church. The church is indestructible.

[14:11] I heard someone say recently, the church is 2,000 years of failed assassination attempts. Isn't that right? Think about the amount of people and nations and philosophies that have tried to stamp out the church.

Roman persecution, hard communism, Hitler. They all tried burning Bibles, shutting down congregations, imprisoning, killing thousands. But Caesar and Stalin and Kim Jong-un are all forgetting one thing.

Jesus said, I will build my church. I will build my church. I will build my church. So many things look way more solid than this here, don't they?

I walk through London most weeks, like some of you might do for work, and you look up at the buildings, and you see all these amazing big companies and everything, and you think, wow, that's so solid. Solid.

But they're not as strong and as solid and as indestructible as God's church. We often look at the church like it's the Titanic, and the world like it's the unsinkable ship, other way round.

[15:26] The world is the Titanic. The church is the unsinkable ship. It's the only thing worth investing in.

Look at this verse on the screen. Don't turn to it. Ephesians 1. God is making known to us a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ, under Christ, things in heaven, and things on earth in him.

The plan for the whole of history, the universe under the headship of Christ. That's the big story that the Bible tells. And as Jesus' church, we are included in that too.

We are in him. He's the head. He's the head of the church. We are the body. The future of the church is being connected to Jesus and where he's going to end up.

It's where all of history is headed, isn't it? Have you ever felt like you've got on the wrong train? I think I've actually done that before. It's horrible. It's horrible to feel like you're getting on the wrong train in life, doing the wrong thing, investing in the wrong thing, on the wrong side of history.

[16:49] Have you heard that phrase? On the wrong side of history. You want to be on the right side of history. Whole industries are set up to tell you where history is heading and where to invest, but they're all wrong.

They're all wrong. History is not heading for everything under the rule of Amazon or Tesla. It's not worth investing everything into your grades.

It's not worth investing everything into your job or a good pension fund or whatever it is. There's only one thing that's worth backing to the hilt. There's only one thing that's worth sacrificing for. The thing that the Lord Jesus himself came to sacrifice for. The church. His church. If you're connected to Jesus in his eternal church, part of his eternal plan, you couldn't be, you couldn't be on a better train.

You couldn't be shaping your life around anything better. You're part of God's eternal plan. And lastly, if you're part of his church, Jesus' church, well, you're given the highest purpose.

[18:02] You're starting to get a picture that this is the greatest thing in the world. Turn to Matthew 28. I only want you to turn to two passages today because there's lots of ones on the screen. Matthew 28.

We know this passage well. Probably know where I'm going to go. Matthew 28, verse 19. It's a great commission. Go from verse 19.

Jesus says to his disciples, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. This is the church's purpose. Be disciples who make disciples.

Be disciples who make disciples. Disciples who trust and obey Jesus who get baptized. Becoming more like Jesus. Don't turn to this, but in the book of Acts, I really think you see this lived out.

[19:07] It's on the screen here. After they're gathered as a church and they're filled with the Spirit and then they're baptized, Acts 2, verse 42, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. That's Jesus' teaching.

That's the word. And to the fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer. They became disciples of Jesus. But by living that discipleship out in community, have a look at this.

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had needs. That's beautiful, isn't it? Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts and they broke bread in their homes and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of the people.

I think there's another word that better sums this up, actually. I think it's worship. Yes, verse 47, they sing praise to God. They meet in temple courts.

But when we gather, we must do that. We must do that thing that's reflecting what is going to happen on the last day. All of the church worshipping around God.

[20:13] But it's a whole life of devotion and worship in these verses, isn't it? Discipleship is worship. It's growing in our love and worship of God expressed in our love for one another.

But then it's a worship that leads to witness. Acts again, you see it lived out. They gather around the word and community. This is the story of Acts and then the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Disciple making, disciples. Here's the big picture of Acts. They worship and then the word of God continued to increase. The word of God continued to multiply.

The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. We are disciple making disciples who do that thing of worship and witness.

Is that how you think of the church's mission? If you're honest, surely, you might think, we could be involved in something much more earth shattering than that.

[ 21 : 25 ] Huddling around a Bible and growing spiritually together. Social action, isn't that a much better thing to prioritise?

Political reform, cultural change, that feels way weightier and bigger, doesn't it? let's take a step back.

10,000 years time, what is going to last? What is going to last in 10,000 years time? Is it going to be political policies that are made? Or people? Or social influence?

Or people's souls? Of course we should care about those things. Of course, as Christians, we love people. We love others outside of church, definitely.

But the point is that it's not our highest purpose. In 10,000 years time, our grandest plans, your job, all the things you've worked hard for, even all the good things that we can really do here to build here, to make things better here, they're not going to last.

[ 22 : 31 ] The work and mission of the church lasts. Meet CT, stud. Whenever I see a picture of an old-looking picture, it kind of switches me off a little bit.

It's a good story, so stay listening to this. It's really good. Back in the day, he was a really successful cricketer, cricket player.

He kind of had the equivalent success, I think, of someone like Harry Kane, who's the England captain, football captain. He's famous. He's living the dream. He's got a really high purpose, but he dropped it all to become a missionary.

Why would you do that? Why would you do that? He got confronted with this question. What is all the fame and flattery worth when a man comes to face eternity?

His words, I know that cricket would not last and honour would not last and nothing in the world would last, but it was worthwhile living for the world to come.

[ 23 : 42 ] The church does lots of things and we should do other really helpful things for society. The church's mission, its marching orders, is living for the world to come and that's the highest purpose.

It is the highest purpose, isn't it? You get to know God, you get to worship God and you get to bring other people to know God too.

It's not just about making converts, as amazing as that is, saving people from hell. It's putting people together on a discipleship path that will give them true freedom.

Isn't that right? Jesus' big project for the church is people made truly human again. That's what discipleship is. You're made truly human again.

Do you want that? That's a high purpose. Worship and witness. And we've been seeing in our Bible overview the whole story of history is centred on Jesus.

[ 24 : 50 ] We've seen that today as well. If you're really honest, you could look around and think, really, this is what Jesus has left us with. Underwhelming, sometimes a nuisance, hard work, uncool, skippable church.

A couple of years ago, I went to a little village church in Kent to help on a kind of a mission week. And I walked in the room, I was with the Amy as well, the kids, and they couldn't afford a full-time pastor.

No youth group, not slick at all. Website from the 90s. Most people are about 90, I think, as well. Slightly gone off tea. about eight or nine people there.

But from the outside, it looked like the least significant thing that was going on in England that morning, in the world that morning. If the Bible is true, which it is, if the Bible is true, that little group of eight or nine baptised believers regularly gathering to listen to someone preach from the Bible, committing to one another, looking out for each other, that's the greatest thing on earth.

It's a miracle. It's right at the centre of God's plan for history. Isn't it so hard to see that though? Isn't it so hard to see that? We're enamoured by looks, bigger, better things.

[ 26 : 19 ] We're weary from serving. I get it. But, the Bible pulls back the curtain for us. Church is the greatest thing.

Are you an aura of church? What you get to be a part of when you serve, whatever you do here to serve, is no small thing.

It's the centre of what's going on in the universe. I think a choice between investing in something in the world more or investing in church, I think that decision just becomes a little bit easier when you realise what church is.

Above all, are you in awe of the one who is the head of the church? whose idea it was to bring the church into being? The Lord Jesus.

You belong to something that outlasts everything because of his rescue and his grace and his love. This just shows how wonderful Jesus is when you view church rightly.

[ 27 : 28 ] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for what you have done through the Lord Jesus and you've filled us with your spirit and that you've created church.

This amazing miracle that's the centre of all of your plans. Thank you so much, Lord, that we get to be part of it. Help us to see your gathering, your people, your bride as beautiful as they are.

Lord, we pray that we would be in awe of the Lord Jesus more because of what he's done to include us and we pray that in his name. Amen.