

The Foundation of the Church

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[0 : 00] are all taken from Acts chapter 1, verses 1 to 12, and we'll read that now, and then a further portion from Matthew 16.

So, Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, beginning at verse 1. In the first book of Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day he was taken up after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, you have heard from me.

For John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

[1 : 26] He said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. And then in Matthew chapter 16, there at verse 13.

Matthew 16, verse 13. Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Whom do men say that the Son of Man is?

[2 : 51] And they said, some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. But he said to them, Who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood does not reveal 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, and the powers of Hades shall not prevail against it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Amen. May the Lord bless those of these readings. May it be to his praise and to his glory. In the first two verses of Acts chapter 1, we read, In the first book of Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

[4 : 19] When we look at this question, the church in the Acts of the Apostles, what can we learn from it?

Somewhere about 1967, a book appeared on the market called The Normal Christian Life, written by Watchman Nee.

A book was written in Chinese about 1947, but wasn't translated over here until the latter part of the 60s. In that book, which is based on the epistle to the Romans, he concludes that what is being passed off as the normal Christian life is anything but the normal Christian life.

And similarly, if we were to take the title and change it to the normal Christian church life, at least according to the Acts of the Apostles, when we look at the contemporary scene, we would have to say that what we see is an abnormal Christian church life.

And so, looking at this in the Acts of the Apostles, he gives you in verses 3 and 4 of Luke 1 something of what he's about.

[5 : 41] And he says this, So that what we have in the Acts of the Apostles is in fact an accurate record of everything that took place from its very beginning.

So, I want to look first of all at this business of the foundation of the church. Now, when I'm talking about the foundation of the church, what I'm talking about is the process by which you and I are made the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Church in its wider sense means an assembly. What I'm talking about is what happens deep within us. And it seems to me as we look at this, and we look at these words that Luke has written, if we want to know something, and hopefully we do, of a great deal about what is presented in the Acts of the Apostles as the norm, not just for that day, but for this day.

We have to start with this phrase, with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

So, what is it that Jesus began to do? His ministry did not start in earnest until the arrest of John the Baptist.

[7 : 44] So, we read in Mark 1, 14, 15, this. Now, after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.

The gospel call. That's how his ministry started. It's also how his ministry ended. Passing along, the next few verses tell us, by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen.

Jesus said to them, follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men. Their reaction is this. Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. And then, going on a little further, he saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who were in their boats, mending their nets.

And immediately, he called them. And they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. So, here is the beginning of the whole thing.

[9 : 10] It's the ministry of Jesus addressing ordinary people. Who would have thought that these fishermen to whom he was addressed, it would be later said of them that they turned the world upside down.

That's the challenge. At the very beginning of the Gospel of John, it can be established that the early disciples came from the circle of the disciples of John the Baptist.

John 1, 35. The next day again, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked and said, behold, the Lamb of God.

And the text then goes on to inform us at least as to one of those that was standing there. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his brother Simon and said to him, we have found the Messiah, which means Christ. Now there's a distinct difference between the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus.

[10 : 34] Because if you study these early accounts of John, both in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and in the Gospel of John, there's no evidence whatsoever that he was attempting to create a circle of disciples who would carry on his work.

He rather saw his ministry primarily to prepare for the one that was to come. He himself said, when the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the priests from Jerusalem said, who are you?

I am the voice of one trying in the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord as the prophet Isaiah said. So there's no evidence that he was attempting to create a circle of disciples.

But in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, it's very clear that right from the beginning, he was in the business of creating a network of disciples who would form the body of Christ and who would carry on his work.

So in the beginning, we have Andrew, Simon, James, and John. And there would be others who would join this great group who would eventually form the body of Christ and carry on the work of preaching the gospel.

[12 : 06] So the very beginning of all of this, where it starts, is in the ministry of preaching the gospel, calling people to repent and believe in the gospel.

So that's where it starts. And we're in the business today of doing the same thing. We are calling people to repent and believe in the gospel.

Why? Because we want them to be saved. Yes, we do. But we also want them to join this band of disciples and carry on the work.

So that's the beginning. Then we come to a prophecy. In the first book of Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

Now the idea that there was going to be a church, a body of believers, is to be found initially in the teaching of Jesus when Peter made the confession I read from Matthew 16.

[13:33] But this too had a beginning. And the beginning, once again, is found in the gospel of John 1 and 42.

Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, So you are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas which means Peter.

Now Cephas is a Greek word. It's a rendering into Greek of the Aramaic word Kepa which means rock. The name Peter comes from the Greek noun Petra which also means rock.

And the rock that Jesus was identifying was the confession of faith that Peter had made. And what's going on here is he's stating in this word of prophecy that as a result of his ministry and by his death on the cross Peter would become a rock-like character in his testimony and his ministry.

So in other words we can say this. Why is there a church? Because Jesus said there would be. It's as simple as that.

[15:00] Jesus said there would be a body of believers. In the gospel of Matthew Peter it says this you are the Christ the son of the living God.

And Jesus makes the response. Blessed are you Simon bar Jonah flesh and blood is 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 and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

So here is the word being used for the first time. The Greek word ecclesia which means church, congregation, assembly, gathering of religious people.

We get the word ecclesiastical from this Greek word. So there in that teaching of Jesus as responding to the confession of Peter is the first statement that there's going to be a church.

[16:07] But it's not the only statement. Listen to what Jesus has to say about prayer. Matthew 18 verses 19 and 20. Again I say to you if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst. So this tells us something about the power of a body of believers even if that body only consists of two or three people.

What are the conditions? There has to be an agreement or a unity in the matter that is being prayed about and those who utter these prayers must have faith in the name of Jesus to answer these prayers.

If these conditions are met the power of the risen Christ is residing right in their midst. Now such conditions are seen to be effective in that first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles in a prayer meeting which was held after the ascension of Jesus as it's recorded in these words.

And when they had entered that's the disciples they went up to the upper room where they were staying. Peter and John and James and Andrew Philip and Thomas Bartholomew and Matthew James the son of Alphaeus Simon the zealot and Judas the son of James.

[17:54] All these were with one accord devoted themselves to prayer together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brother brothers.

It's a very interesting phrase this in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles they devoted themselves and what they devoted themselves to in the first instance was prayer.

Then in verse 32 42 of chapter 2 we read that the believers devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching to fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Prayers has a definite article in front of it because at this stage they were still in the synagogue and so what's being talked about is the regular prayers that were being uttered in a synagogue service.

Then in verse 46 of chapter 2 we read that they devoted themselves with one accord to the temple prayer. So we start with prayer, we carry on with belief and we end up with worship.

[19 : 20] They devoted themselves to return to the prayer meeting. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer.

They were of one mind. even the brothers of Jesus who had gathered there, if you read in John's Gospel chapter 7 it stays very plainly.

They didn't believe in him but now they had faith. They were acting in the command of our Lord who had stated to them do not depart from Jerusalem but wait for the promise of the Father which he said you heard from me.

So this revelation of the creation of the church based on the prophecy of Jesus his teaching has now come into being and you and I by grace are grateful to be part of God's eternal purpose.

Coming on and thirdly to the formation of the church again looking at that verse in the first book of Theophilus I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

[20 : 54] Now I want to think about this not so much in the fact that the Lord has founded the church but how it was formed in the life of a person how it's formed in your life and in mine.

And the one that we know the most about is Simon Peter so I return to him. In Luke 22 it only occurs in Luke verses 31 and 32 we read this Simon Simon behold Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat would I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail when you have turned again strengthen your brothers.

Now in this statement which only occurs in Luke there's a Job like kind of moment because the veil is taken away and you're given an insight as to what Satan is really about.

From your Bibles you will know that the word you in verse 31 is plural. He demanded to have you not just Simon all of you but I have prayed for you singular that your faith may not fail.

Satan wanted to put an end to all of this and so the prayer of Jesus is centered on the future role of Peter and his ministry and what this text reveals that is Luke 22 31 32 Simon Simon Satan demanded to have you is that somehow and the book of Job would bear this out he got an insight into the way that God was going to use Simon Peter so he sought to destroy what he got from God himself going back to Matthew 16 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

[23 : 35] Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it so here we tie these two things together there's Peter with this rock like ministry which is going to be fundamental to building up the church and which will be used to overcome the powers of hell so there's only one reaction that Satan has he's got to destroy the life and ministry of Peter now how does he do it from Luke 22 this will happen when Simon Peter denied who Jesus was hence our Lord stated I tell you Peter the cock will not crow this day until you three times deny that you know me so what is in the mind of

Satan is if he can get Peter to deny who Jesus was then any idea of him being fundamental to destroying Satan's kingdom will finish altogether now what happened Luke 22 verse 60 Peter said man I do not know what you are saying and immediately while he was still speaking the cock crew only recorded in Luke's gospel is the fact that when Peter made that final denial Jesus turned and looked at him and he went out and wept what stopped it all becoming as

Satan had wished was this I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail and when you have turned again strengthen your brothers the prayer of Jesus for you and me is invincible it cannot not be answered it cannot not be attended to he would have a ministry that would strengthen his brothers and sisters but something has to happen first when you have turned again there's a great verb used there which means to turn or turn around from that verb has come a noun only occurs once in Acts 15 namely the conversion of the

Gentiles and so this turning or turning around and facing a new direction is indeed a very accurate description of a conversion experience and this turning around this looking in a new direction is solely and utterly a work of grace because what was happening here was that he was being formed into a channel being prepared for a future ministry failure was behind him Satan's attempt had foiled from now on he would be used to build up and extend the kingdom of God to the glory of God so here we are looking at the end of this study which is really about the formation of your life and mine into a temple of the

Holy Spirit and as such we become part of the body of Christ what can we deal with this how can we assess all this well first of all we can assess it this way this turning around this conversion this work of grace the apostle Paul speaks about in his letters so much is something that God alone can

do and we sang about it recently in the great hymn by John Newton amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me what was John Newton before his conversion he was a slave trader what saved him undoubtedly was the prayer of

[29 : 03] Jesus but also the prayers of his mother a work of grace a work of grace that can take you from the very bottom and put you at the very top and if we would see the days of the acts of the apostles coming again as come they can all we have to do is to begin with what Jesus did and taught and if we will but do that there's no computation on the limit to the blessing that God will pour out amen we'll stand and sing glorious things we hear life

God love God God God you God He He Him