

# The BEACON

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## THE CHURCH THAT JESUS BUILT - Part One

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Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is? And they said, Some (say) John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matt 16:13-19, ASV)

Heaven had long planned for it and both angels and men had long wondered about the church, which would bring to pass the fullness of the hidden purpose of God (**Eph. 1:3ff; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Eph. 3:1-11**). Involved in the plans of God for the church

were the demonstrating of His wise plan for man's redemption, and the securing of such a spiritual privilege for all human beings, Jews and Gentiles alike. It should not surprise any reader that the Christ would here introduce such a subject into the discussion with His trusted associates, into whose hands the work of establishing the church would soon fall. After gaining insight into the varied opinions of men about His identity, Jesus then directly asked the disciples of their understanding of who He was. Peter's response was so profound and timely that here Jesus used the opportunity to anticipate the church, as her existence would rest upon the solid base of truth acknowledged by the apostle. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

### The Foundation of the Church

In Peter's confession we hear the two elements of Jesus' person-His Messianic role and His divine nature. Squarely upon this foundation would the people of God, the church, rest. No building is any stronger and more permanent than its foundation; expensive and elaborate buildings begin with foundations planted deep in the earth. Thus God secured for the church a stable and an

enduring foundation.

In Old Testament prophecy the Messiah was depicted as deity (**Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:2**). Though they stress different aspects of His role in the world, the witnesses of the Christ all agree concerning His divine nature in their accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The full force of prophecy also presented Him as the Messiah, the "anointed one," which finds its New Testament equivalent in the word for Christ. Its meaning stems from the practice of anointing, used there to acknowledge one as God's choice for a particular office. Prophets, priests, and kings were often shown to be God's men for the office through the ceremony of pouring oil upon the individual's head. The question arises about which office of the three Jesus was meant to fill. We do not have to choose one over the others, for Jesus came to fill all three-prophet, priest, and king.

He is that prophet like Moses, speaking for God with authority and finality (**Deut. 18:15-18**). In fact, He is God's final prophet, coming after a long line of divinely sent spokesmen (**Heb. 1:1-2**). His prophetic role comes "in these last days," in connection with God's final arrangement for mankind. Jesus also is God's priest (**Psa. 110:4; Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17**). One of the astounding portraits of the Christ in the Hebrew letter is that of His high priestly role, as He offered Himself for the world's sins and then took the blood of His own offering into the holiest of holies in heaven. We lose something of the Christ's significance if we ignore Him as

king. The same passage in Psalms 110 also speaks of His people (subjects) being willing in the day of His power (royal, kingly), and Zechariah declares the simultaneous execution of His dual roles as priest and king on His throne (**6:13**). Jesus assumed none of these roles and undertook no initiative on His own, but He did all in subjection to the Father's will. For all of this work He had been "christed," anointed by the Father. So secure was His standing with God and the basis for it-His messiahship and His deity-that not even the gates of Hades would be able to prevail against the building of the church in the death of the Savior. What certainty the affirmations of the Approved One here conveyed!

Could there be any more solid and enduring foundation for the church? The attempts of men to start their own religious organizations have always manifested their own plans and ideals, but Christ came in demonstration of that eternal wisdom planned by God before the world began. When the church sprang forth on the earth, beginning on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection from the tomb, she came out of the divine womb as a consequence of people's willingness to hear the prophet, submit to the king, and benefit from the priestly work of Christ. Such was the substance of Peter's confession and such also was the very foundation of Christ's people, His church. Only in hearing Him, bowing before Him, and being cleansed by Him does anyone have any standing with God and any part in His church. Whatever foundation the

church has and whatever permanence Christians enjoy in God's long-range plan, we own to the foundation laid by Christ for His church. Such a foundation assures a people trusting in the One sent by the Father and anointed by Him.

### **Builder and Owner**

"I will build My church." Whatever might have existed in earlier times and have been called "church" was not what Jesus here promised to build (**Acts 7:38**). What He anticipated would be something that He would initiate and would be peculiarly His own. It is true that Jesus did not personally construct the church while on the earth but left such work for His apostles to carry out after His ascension to heaven (**Acts 2**). For this work He sent the Spirit of truth to guide them (**Jn. 16:13**). Through their proclamation of Him as Lord and Christ and people's reception of the gospel message, the church began to take shape as the materials were being formed. This building process was possible because Jesus had laid the foundation by this time through demonstration of His messiahship and deity.

It was for the belief of people that He demonstrated beyond honest and reasonable doubt that He was who He claimed to be; apart from that belief and the willingness to act upon it there could be no church. From heaven He sent the Spirit and from heaven He supervised the building of is His church.

It was and is His because all that pertains to it is part of His work: (1) His deity was His by essential nature and His messianic role was His by the Father's appointment, giving

the foundation its divine quality. (2) All who compose the church are His by their willing reception of the gospel, including its message that He is God's Son with power, giving the superstructure its relationship to Christ. To state the same principle another way, we would say that all members of Christ's body have been filtered through the gospel, which admits only penitent, baptized believers into the church. By virtue of their belief of the gospel and their penitent obedience in baptism, they are saved from their sins and added by Christ to the church (**Acts 2:38, 41, 47**). Thus saved and added by Him, they are His-"My church."

Only as we believe Him and act according to His instructions as head of the church do we honor the One who built the church. There ought to be no inclination to speak or act as if the church is "our church." Whatever positive traits characterize the body of Christ derive from Christ, our foundation and builder. Redeemed with the price of His blood, all in the church are His property, with no property rights of our own. Paul explained that "ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price" (**1 Cor. 6:19-20**). Only by viewing ourselves as being His possession and conducting ourselves in accord with His will can we glorify the Lord, whose we are.

### **Time of Building**

Jesus looked to the future in His promise to build the church. "I will build My church." Nothing that originated before this discussion between Jesus and the disciples was the Lord's church, for Jesus said it still

had to be built. It is sometimes claimed by men that the church had its inception at creation, in the call of Israel out of Egypt, or during the preparatory ministry of John the baptizer; but each such claim falls on its face as untrue against the clear light of Jesus' promise of the future building of His church.

A bit of study will reveal why Jesus could not have earlier build His church. Though Jesus was divine before His entry into this world by being born to Mary, His deity was not demonstrated to men. The same can be said of His role as messiah, for the Father's plan to send Him into the world with His approval did not become obvious to men until Jesus had come to earth, lived, died, buried, been resurrected from the dead, and ascended to heaven. Peter confessed Jesus in Matthew 16 because divine revelation caused him to do so. Divine revelation that would benefit all people awaited future events. Only when Jesus had completed His earthly career did people in general have a firm basis for belief in Him, and only after His coronation at God's right hand did He begin to exert His regal power as king. The foundation of the church thus depended on His life, death, resurrection, and reign. If the church had been build before Jesus ascended, there would have been no foundation. It is no surprise that Jesus built His church only after He had left earth. Only then was it demonstrable that the gates of Hades could not deter the building of His church. Only then would the gospel message be proclaimed in the name of the risen Christ (**Lk. 24:26-27**). Only then were people

called upon to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ (**Acts 2:38**). Only then were baptized believers added by the Lord to the church (**Acts 2:47**). Any attempt to build the church before Pentecost in Acts 2 would have been truly premature, lacking the certainty that it could have later enjoyed.

{ **To Be Continued In April's Issue** }

### **BRIEF EXHORTATIONS**

"But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict." (**1 Thess. 2:2**).

Some people might contend that religion has no place in the office, but a recent study proves otherwise. It might be to your advantage, the study concludes, if you profess your religious beliefs rather than keep silent about them. Professionals who actively expressed their religious beliefs were perceived to be more intelligent, more trustworthy, more moral, and better adjusted than those who did not. (**From Roger Bailey and Philip Doriot via "Pulpit Helps"**).

Let us boldly speak the word of God at every opportunity regardless of what men might say or think.

**THE LORD SAID IT THIS WAY**  
**Mark 8:38** - "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (King James Version)