

We Can Be Members Of His Church Today

The Bible is not only full of promises, it is full of, "...exceeding great and precious promises..." (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Some of these promises are conditional. For example, children who obey the Godly guidance of their parents are at a lesser risk to suffer premature death than those who are disobedient to their parents (Eph. 6:1-3). Other promises are unconditional. Our Lord promised to return again and He will (2 Pet. 3:4 and v-10). Then there are fulfilled promises and unfulfilled promises. God promised to send Jesus and He did (Acts 13:23). Although this promise has been fulfilled, it is as great and precious today as it was when it was first given because there is salvation in no other name (Acts 4:12). One of the unfulfilled and future promises is that of eternal life (1st Jn. 2:25). Thus, we can see that the Bible is overflowing with exceeding great and precious promises. And, we can rest assured that no promise of God will ever fail (2 Cor. 1:20).

Jesus Promised to Build His Church

The church was in the mind of God from eternity (Eph. 3:9-10). It was never an afterthought. God did not send Jesus at the wrong time as premillennialism teaches. Paul penned, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son,... that we might receive the adoption of sons," (Gal. 4:4-5). Nor were the Jews unreluctant to establish Jesus as a physical king, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone," (Jn. 6:15). They, like so many of today, misunderstood the nature of God's kingdom. Jesus had come to build a spiritual house not a physical kingdom (Jn. 18:36 and Luke. 17:20-21).

The prophets of old had foretold of the coming of this kingdom. Isaiah said that the Lord's house would be established in the last days, all nations would flow unto it, and His law would first go forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-3). Please note, the Lord's house and the church are one and the same, "...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God,...," (1 Tim. 3:14-15).

In Daniel chapter two we are told that king

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. In this dream he saw the body of a man divided into four equal parts. Each part represented an earthly kingdom. The first kingdom was Nebuchadnezzar or the Babylonian kingdom (Dan. 2:36-38). Both, secular history and the Bible, declare the second and third kingdoms to be the Medes and the Persians (a joint rule), and the Grecians (Dan. 8:20-21). Daniel said that in the days of the kings of the fourth kingdom the God of heaven would set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed and that this kingdom would stand forever (Dan. 2:44). Again, secular history records Rome to be the kingdom which followed the three listed above. It is interesting to note that Rome was the ruling kingdom when Jesus visited the earth as a man and when He built His eternal kingdom, the church (Jn. 11:47-78).

Jesus, likewise, prophesied of the promised kingdom, "... 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:...", (Matt. 16:18-19 – ASV). Before we proceed, we need to note two things. First, the terms church and kingdom are being used interchangeably in this passage. They are one and the same. Secondly, the meaning of the word "Hades" in this text is not a reference to the fires of gehenna but to the region of departed souls. Vine defines Hades, "the region of departed spirits of the lost ...," (pg 268). This is where all souls go when they die, wicked or righteous. This is where Jesus went and from whence He was resurrected, "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, ...," (Acts 2:31). Berry's Interlinear tells us our Lord's soul was not left in "...Hades..." – the realm of departed spirits (pg 315). Thus, the church (kingdom) of our Lord wasn't established until after His death, burial, and resurrection. Moreover, Jesus told those of His own day and age that some of them would live to see the kingdom of God (the church) come with power (Mark 9:1). His apostles were to receive this power when the Holy Ghost came upon them (Acts 1:6-8). And, they were to wait in the city of Jerusalem for the fulfillment of this promise (Luke 24:49). Then they were to preach repentance and remission of sins in His name to all nations (Luke 24:46-47). The logical conclusion to all this is as follows: when the Holy Ghost came upon the apostles, they would receive miraculous power,

and preach repentance and remission of sins to all nationalities of men. This would mark the establishment of God's kingdom (the church) upon the earth. And, some of those who were contemporary with Jesus would live to see this event transpire.

The Promise Fulfilled

The prophets of old not only foretold of the sufferings of Christ but also of the glory which was to follow (1 Pet. 1:9-12). This glory was not confined to His resurrection alone but was inclusive of the establishment of His kingdom (the church) and His inheritance of the Davidic throne (Acts 2:29-33). Daniel penned, "I saw in the night, visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him:...", (Dan. 7:13-14). Luke records the fulfillment of this prophecy and Jesus' ascension back to the Father shortly after our Lord's crucifixion and right before the establishment of His kingdom (the church) on Pentecost (Acts 1:9-11). No wonder Jesus told the grieving disciples on the road to Emmaus, "...O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory," (Luke 24:25-26)?

The day of Pentecost was to be observed fifty days after the Passover feast (Lev. 23:16). Vine defines Pentecost, "... an adjective denoting "fiftieth," is used as a noun, with "day" understood, i.e., the "fiftieth" day after Passover, counting from the second day of the feast,...," (pg 465). Since our Lord was crucified during the days of the Passover feast (Jn. 19:14-16), then placed in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40), after which He spent forty days teaching the disciples about His kingdom, the church (Acts 1:3), Pentecost could not have been more than eight days away, and perhaps less, when He ascended back to the Father (Acts 1:9-11). It was on this day, Pentecost, that all the prophecies concerning the kingdom and Jesus' glorification were fulfilled. Luke tells us that when the day of Pentecost was fully come, the power of the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, and they began to preach the message of salvation unto

all men, in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-5). Furthermore, this all took place, as prophesied, in the city of Jerusalem. Peter pointed out that this was the fulfillment of all the prophetic statements concerning the church: it would be established in the last days, the message of salvation would be proclaimed to all nations, and repentance and remission of sins would first be taught in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14-21 and v37-38). Thus, all the words of the prophets and of our Lord came to pass on this day, and God's kingdom (the church) was now existent upon the face of the earth.

Members of Christ's Church Today

While membership into this kingdom was now offered to all mankind, this promise came with certain conditions attached. When Peter responded to the question presented by the great Pentecostal multitude, "...Men and brethren, what shall we do," (Acts 2:37)? He replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," (Acts 2:38-39). The scriptures conclude, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there was added unto them about three thousand souls. ...And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," (Acts 2:41-47).

There are several schools of thought surrounding the phrases mentioned above – "the gift of the Holy Ghost" and "the promise". This writer believes both phrases refer to the same thing. Since the promise of this gift was being offered to the Jew and his children, as well as to those who were afar off, and as many as the Lord should call (Acts 2:39), we conclude that Peter was referring to the promise (or gift) of eternal life (1 Jn. 2:25 and Rom. 6:23). But, in order to be a recipient of this salvation, the text explicitly states that they were to repent and to be baptized (Acts 2:38). Their belief is already implied! So, in order to be saved, those of Pentecost upon hearing and believing the gospel message were told to repent and to be baptized (Rom. 10:13-14 and Acts 2:38). Since confession is also spoken of elsewhere in scripture as a prerequisite to baptism (Acts 8:36-

38 and Rom. 10:8-10), and we must consider the sum of God's word in order to obtain the complete truth (Psalms 119:160-ASV), we are left to logically infer that those who obeyed the gospel that day also confessed the Deity of Jesus Christ. They were now members of God's kingdom and added to the church. If we do the same today, surely, we too will become members in that same kingdom, the church.

Conclusion

The Bible refers to Jesus as the carpenter's son (Matt. 12:55). Joseph may have built some magnificent dwellings but it was the carpenter's son who built the greatest house ever made, the Church (Matt. 16:18)! Thanks be to God for the precious promise that "WE CAN BE MEMBERS OF HIS CHURCH TODAY".

Works Cited

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