

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter from Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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Church and Kingdom

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Introduction

We are living in the days when the times and seasons of the Lord are being fulfilled. God's intention is coming together to complete His will as this age closes. Many of the things that we have not understood or that have been twisted and perverted by carnal understanding are being revealed by the Holy Spirit as part of the end time revelation of the Lord. A couple of those areas are the Church and the Kingdom of God.

It is the gospel of the Kingdom that is to be preached to all the nations before the end comes¹, not the weak, watered down gospel preached in our churches. For this to happen, we have to understand what the gospel of the Kingdom is and what it means to preach it to the nations. This is an end time revelation that is occurring now as the people of God seek His face and understanding.

Typical Understanding

There are basically two typical methods of looking at the Church and the Kingdom. They are

- the Church and the Kingdom are the same thing, that is, they are synonymous with no differences
- the Kingdom particularly relates to the Jews only, whereas, the Church relates to the Gentiles only; each is operating in the earth as a separate “dispensation” of God.

It is my opinion that both of these interpretations are incorrect and are not justified scripturally. God's intention was established in Himself before the world was created. His foreknowledge knew of the rebellion of Satan, the fall of man, the need of a Redeemer and all of the things associated with each of them. God in his many faceted wisdom implemented a plan that would solve all problems created by the situations listed here and accomplish something additional that was hidden in the heart of God. This was all settled in God before the foundation of the world and is being worked out, that is, revealed or unfolded in time.¹ There are no separate

¹ For further study in this area see “[The Kingdom of God Series](#)” available on the website.

dispensations of God. While we may not see all of the connections with our finite minds, all that God is doing is focused on only one goal and that is to bring to completion all that He purposed in Himself.

The Church and the Kingdom are not synonymous.

We have focused all of our attention on the Church and neglected completely any aspect of the Kingdom that might vary from our understanding of the Church. Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God in some form in approximately 100 scriptures. He spoke of the Church only 3 times and two of those were in the same scripture. So, we have Jesus speaking about the Kingdom of God in about 100 scriptures and speaking of the Church in only 2 scriptures. This, in itself, should tell us about the relative importance and priority of each.

Anything that the Lord referred to over a hundred times deserves some diligent study. Obviously, Jesus placed much more emphasis on the Kingdom than He did on the Church. Why have we reversed the emphasis? What possible reason do we have for changing the Lord's priorities? Can we even do that?

Could it be that the answer to these questions lies in the fact that we believe that we understand "church". We have made church to be a building, a program, an institution. We have said that the people of God are contained in the building or institution; therefore, it is the kingdom of God.

If the Church and the Kingdom were truly synonymous then we could substitute "church" for "kingdom" in the scriptures without changing the meaning. Does it make sense if we do that in these verses [*the only change I have made is "church" for "kingdom"*]:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the *church* of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1-2 NKJV)

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the *church* of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17 NKJV)

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your *church* come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10 NKJV)

And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the *church* and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:13 NKJV)

But the sons of the *church* will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:12 NKJV)

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the *church* prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (Matthew 25:34 NKJV)

Jesus answered, "My *church* is not of this world. If My *church* were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My *church* is not from here." (John 18:36 NKJV)

. . . strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and

saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the church of God." (Acts 14:22 NKJV)

Well, you get the picture. Doesn't make sense does it? That is because Jesus meant something different when He said "kingdom" than when He said "church". We need to understand the difference.

The Church and the Kingdom are not different dispensations.

To me, the idea that the Church and the Kingdom are different dispensations makes less sense than the idea that the Church and the Kingdom are synonymous. Under the Old Testament, it was God's intention to establish a kingdom of priests. At Mount Sinai God told Moses to tell the children of Israel this.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Exodus 19:5-6 NKJV)

Israel as a nation never fulfilled the requirements of obedience and faithfulness to His covenant. Peter brings the promise forward to us under the New Testament.

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10 NKJV)

This verse is Peter's restatement of what God said to Moses at Mount Sinai. A "royal priesthood" is a "kingdom of priests". We are now that holy nation, a special treasured people, a generation chosen to be a royal priesthood.

This enlargement of the Kingdom of God is also made clear by Jesus, Himself.

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. THIS WAS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES' ? "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. (Matthew 21:42-43 NKJV)

Jesus was speaking to the "chief priests and elders of the people" when He said this. Obviously, the promise of the kingdom was being taken away from the children of Israel for their failure to meet the prerequisite criteria given by God at Mount Sinai—their rejection of Jesus was a rejection of the kingdom. But, not only was it taken from them it was also given to "a nation bearing the fruits of it". We can be citizens of that nation, citizens of the Kingdom of God.

This says clearly that the Kingdom of God is not for the Jews only and that it is not national Israel either. In light of this, how can we say that the things of the Kingdom do not pertain to the Church? That is is a different dispensation?

By seeing two "dispensations" of God—the Kingdom for the Jews and the Church for the

Gentiles—many have then tried to pick and choose which scriptures apply to which. That way if you don't like a particular scripture you can always, by your interpretation, move it into the “other dispensation”. This is particularly true of scriptures about end time events.

God's purpose is one—one people, one covenant, one holy nation, one New Man. He deals with His people as one not as two different types with different promises and covenants.

The Priority of Jesus

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus spent 40 days speaking with His disciples before He ascended to the Father. In His last days before His ascension, He spent His time with the disciples speaking of the Kingdom.

to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3 NKJV)

Notice what He considered important. He was not going to be with these disciples in this manner any longer; so, He used the time to speak of the Kingdom not the Church. From our perspective, knowing what was coming, He should have been telling them how to establish churches; how to structure and order them; how to conduct proper services; and all of the other aspects of church that we consider so important. However, HE DID NOT DO THAT! He, apparently, didn't speak about “church” at all, but devoted His time to “speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” Why? Could it be that *He* is building His Church and that *He* knows what He is doing? Could it be that we don't need to understand it just *be* it?

Are we guilty of mis-placed priorities? Have we twisted the Scriptures to give a place of importance to something that is out of proportion to the Lord's intention? The Catholics have done this with Mary. There is a proper place in Scriptures for Mary and for her place in the plan of God; however, her place and purpose have been blown out of proportion by the Catholics to the point that Mary is an idol, detracting from the place and function of Jesus. It seems possible to me that we have done the same thing with “church”. We have blown it out of proportion to the point that it has become an idol, detracting from the place and function of the Kingdom.

If Jesus' priority was the Kingdom, should it not be our priority also? He told us to seek first the Kingdom of God². That sound to me like He established the Kingdom as our first priority. If we will do that, maybe, “church” will take care of itself.

What is Church?

We need to be able to see what the Lord intended when He said “church”. To do this, we have to lay aside our traditions about “church” and look at the Scriptures and let the Holy Spirit bring us revelation, open our eyes so that we might see.

The very use of the word “church” is false. It is not a proper designation of what the Lord intended for His Body. Use of church as this designation was introduced by the King James translators when they used the Scottish word “kirk” as the translation for the Greek word “ekklesia”. The Scottish word means “house of the Lord”, or “house of God” and to the translators this meant the basilica, that is, the cathedral on the street corner—a place. The Greek

language has a word for “house of God” also, but it is NOT “ekklesia”. In the Greek language, “ekklesia” cannot mean a place but can only mean people.

We use “church” in our English scriptures to identify the building and the assembly of the people of God. However, this is not the meaning of the Greek word “ekklesia”.

Many times Greek words are simply transliterated into English without actual translation. An example is “baptize” which is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo”. When words are transliterated they will look and sound similar to the original word. We see this scenario for “ekklesia” in languages other than English. For example: “ekklesia” in Spanish is “iglesia”; “ekklesia” in French is “eglise”. Notice how similar in look and sound the words are. However, in English we have translated “ekklesia” as “church”. It doesn't look or sound like anything similar. Does it? That's because “church” doesn't come from “ekklesia” but, instead, comes from the Scottish word “kirk”³. So, immediately with the translation of the Scriptures into English, we have a wrong name designated for the Ekklesia¹. We have to strip this error from our thinking or we will never understand the truth.

Now that we know that “ekklesia” is not a place but a people, we need to further determine what the Scriptures mean when this word is used. Jesus used this word only three times, once in Matt. 16:18 and twice in Matt. 18:17.

The first occasion when Jesus used “ekklesia” occurred when He was asking the disciples who did men think that He was and who did they say that He was. In response to His question Peter had answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Jesus told Peter that this was revelation from the Father, that it did not come from men. Then Jesus made a pun.

And I also say to you that you are Peter [petros], and on this rock [petras] I will build My church [ekklesia], and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18 NKJV)

The word for Peter in Greek is “petros” and means a small rock, a pebble. The word for “rock” is “petras” and means a large rock, a boulder. Jesus used a play on words to make His point—you are a little pebble but upon this boulder (the revelation of “you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”) He would build His ekklesia.

We see two things in this, (1) the error of those who say that Peter is the basis, the foundation for the ekklesia; and (2) the real basis or foundation of the ekklesia is the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

A little later in Matthew, Jesus is talking about a situation where your brother sins against you. He said to go to him and confront him with the issue and if he won't deal with it then take one or two more with you and confront him again. Then He says:

And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church [ekkesia]. But if he refuses even to hear the church [ekklesia], let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:17 NKJV)

The ekkesia, in this instance, serves as a type of judicial function, judging and correcting the situation between you and your brother. If the brother doesn't heed the judicial function of the

ekklesia, he is to be treated as a heathen, as if he was no longer a part of the people of God.

[*Note too that an ekklesia is not just two or three gathered together in the name of Jesus because in this instance there was you, your brother, and one or two that you took with you, making at least three or four gathered together, yet if the brother doesn't respond you still have to take it to the "church". So, the gathering of 3 or 4 could not be an "ekklesia" or you would not need to take the problem to the "ekklesia".*]

I think that in these two instances where Jesus spoke of the ekklesia, we have the seed of what the ekklesia is to be. First, its basis is the revelation of who Jesus is. Second, it serves a judicial, governmental function between brethren.

We sometimes forget that "ekklesia" as a word was used before Jesus used it. Would not Jesus use it with its normal meaning? If He didn't use it that way, then would He not have explained its meaning to us? It is used in the Scriptures with its common meaning in the book of Acts, chapter 19.

The idol makers were upset with Paul and his companions because they were losing a lot of business when people heard Paul saying that "gods made with hands are no gods at all". Demetrius, a silversmith that made silver shrines of Artemis, stirred up the other artisans to deal with this issue before they lost all of their business. They grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's Macedonian companions, and dragged them into the theater, the meeting hall where the group of people were gathering.

Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly [*ekklesia*] was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. ([Acts 19:32 NKJV](#))

Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly [*ekklesia*]. For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly [*ekklesia*]. ([Acts 19:38-41 NKJV](#))

[Technically, if we were to follow the King James translators, *assembly* here should be "church", which would make it a ridiculous translation based on our current meaning of "church" since it was a gathering of artisans who were idol makers. This alone should tell us that the way we have used this word is incorrect.]

We can reach some conclusions from the normal usage of ekklesia. Many of the people were confused because they didn't know the reason that they had been called together. Therefore, they were in danger of become a riot rather than a lawful assembly. So, before that happened they were dismissed as an assembly. This means that a gathering or meeting of a number of people does not, necessarily, constitute an ekklesia. There can be an unlawful gathering or a lawful assembly. The lawful assembly are those who have been called out to come together for a reason, a purpose that would deal with governing decisions.

In the usage of "ekklesia" that discussed above, there were certain criteria required to participate in a lawful assembly (ekklesia). This assembly was called in the City of Ephesus to deal with the

effects of Paul's ministry there and is an example of the normal usage of *ekklesia*. We can learn several things from this instance.

- 1) they went to gather in the theater; this establishes the fact that *ekklesia* is not a place but people.
- 2) not all people in Ephesus were allowed to attend, only those that met the requirements of citizenship and were freemen.
- 3) They came together for the purpose of deliberating an issue and were dismissed when that was no longer possible.

The same is true of the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ. This is how the Thayer Greek Dictionary defines *ekklesia*:

Thayer Definition:

- 1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly
 - 1a) an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating

This primary definition fits with its usage in Acts 19. The normal meaning of *ekklesia* can be stated as “people called out to convene for a purpose as a public council.”

This is also consistent with the way Jesus used the word *ekklesia* in Matthew. The **basis** of being called out is the revelation of who Jesus is. The **function** or purpose of convening is governmental. The **result** is the administration of the things of the Kingdom of God.

Can it be that we have created something, a church thing, that is far removed from the intention of the Lord? Are we seeking the church or the Kingdom?

What is the Kingdom?

The Kingdom of God is the government of God; a society functioning under the authority of the King. The current manifestation of the Kingdom is in the Holy Spirit⁴ as a personal application of the Lordship of Jesus. Later the Kingdom will be manifested physically with Jesus reigning and ruling for a thousand years⁵. When the last enemy has been put under His feet, Jesus turns the Kingdom over to the Father and it continues as the Everlasting Kingdom, Eternal in the new heavens and the new earth.⁶

However, the sobering thought for us is what Jesus said about who would enter the Kingdom.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (Matthew 7:21 NKJV)

Saying that Jesus is Lord is not enough. Jesus has to become truly King of your heart. Only those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom—practical, experiential Lordship not theoretical.

What does this do to our gospel of easy grace—just receive Jesus into your heart and you are saved? Or, what does it say about our “no more problems gospel” being preached in our

churches? Look at what Paul said:

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22 NKJV)

Tribulations, that is, problems come when we seek to do the will of the Father. As we seek to do His will, His Kingdom comes in us just as Jesus said it should. Any gospel that leaves out obedience to the will of God is not a gospel at all. Any gospel that neglects obedience is not the gospel of the Kingdom

Application to us

We need to lay aside any idea of building the church—that is Jesus' job not ours. **We have never been commissioned by God to build His church.** We have, however, been commissioned to proclaim the Kingdom of God and demonstrate the coming of the Kingdom in power.

We must see the Church through the lens or from the viewpoint of the Kingdom, not vice-versa. Trying to see the Kingdom from the viewpoint of the Church is incorrect and results in a false picture of the Kingdom and an incorrect view of the purposes of God.

We need to ask the Lord to bring revelation and understanding to us in these areas. It is the end times. We don't have the luxury of playing games with theology. We need to do the will of God and we need to do it now not later.

- 1 Matthew 24:14
- 2 Matthew 6:33
- 3 For more information about how this happened see "[The House of the Lord](#)" on the website.
- 4 Romans 14:17
- 5 Revelation 20:4-5
- 6 I Corinthians 15:25-28

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