

N.T. ECCLESIA

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

Welcome back to Ecclesia: Finding Your Place in His Mission! If you remember, in the last lesson, we learned that God gave Israel a mission to tell the world about a God of love. They were to do this through their five part message. Try and remember as many as you can in the blanks below.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The Old Testament ends with the hope that this Messiah would come soon to deliver Israel and the whole world from sin. Israel however, had lost sight of its mission and message and thought that when the Messiah would come, it would establish Israel as the ultimate kingdom on the earth. This is why they were so opposed to Jesus and His Messianic claims. In a conversation with His disciples Jesus asks them, "Who do people say I am?" And it is in the next few verses that Jesus introduces us to the word we translate "Church" in our Bibles.

Read **Matthew 16:13-29**

The word Jesus uses for "Church" is the word Ecclesia and it means: "*A gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place.*" It is interesting that Jesus uses this word when talking about what He is about to build. He is focused on building a "gathering of citizens" that all share a common belief.

What do you think this belief is????

This is an incredibly important moment in the New Testament as well as God's church! Jesus will eventually be killed because of this proclamation and through His death unite the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church. Two groups: Israel, the Old Testament "gathering of citizens" whose message was to proclaim to the world a Savior, and the twelve apostles, whose mission to proclaim the good news that Jesus is that savior who has come, would join together to accomplish His mission! Both Testaments meet at the cross where Jesus proves through His death and resurrection that He is the Messiah.

Have you ever realized that the apostles had proof that Jesus was the Messiah? Look at these following verses to see for yourself what the disciples saw.

Acts 1:1-3: "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had _____. After his suffering, he _____ himself to them and gave _____ convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my _____ in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

To be a witness means that you have seen evidence of what is being spoken about. Jesus says that these 12 men are going to be His witnesses throughout the whole world! And that's exactly what they did. Paul, in his letter to the Church at Corinth says this about the gospel of Jesus:

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, and jot down the basic message that the disciples were sharing about how Jesus was the Messiah.

The apostles had plenty of proof that Jesus indeed was the Messiah and that this message needed to go to the whole world. But, they couldn't do it alone! And God wasn't just going to leave them with a world-wide task. He had a plan where He would go with them and help them every step of the way.

Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the _____ comes on you..."

God knew that this message would change the world, and so He empowered humans, through the Holy Spirit, to take that message to the ends of the earth.

BASIC POINT

The New Testament Church was empowered to share a message about a risen Savior.

When Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles they were empowered to go and proclaim a risen savior who is able to save to the uttermost. The book of Acts captures the rise of the New Testament Church and the apostles faithfulness to being witnesses of Jesus. After a sermon by the same Peter who first proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, hearers were convicted and asked "*brothers what shall we do?*" Peter said to them, "*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" **Acts 2:37-38**

It's in this verse that three most basic and powerful principles of the church are seen. It's the backbone of the church, this group of people carrying a message to the world. It's the mission, the message and the method all in one verse.

1. Jesus is the Messiah
2. Repent and be baptized and you will receive the Holy Spirit
3. Having received the Holy Spirit, you too are to proclaim Jesus is the Messiah

The apostles fearlessly went to the remotest parts of the earth to tell of Jesus Who was the world's savior, the only name upon which someone can call. Many of them lost their lives in the process sealing their witness with their blood, thus encouraging others to commit fully to this gospel. These men and women in the New Testament took the mission of spreading this message so seriously way back then, but even now, there are disciples that are willing to die for the sake of the mission of the church. Here is the story of one who did just that not too long ago.

It was the morning of April 20, 1999. Most thought that it would be a normal day. Some had tests in Algebra or Chemistry. Others might have had a quiz in English. Some were late to school as usual, and others forgot their lunches. The day continued on like every other day like nothing different would happen. Cassie Bernall, a blonde, blue-eyed 17 year old, went about her normal routine as if nothing would happen. She had already gotten up early and had her morning devotions, one of her favorite times of the day where she could spend time alone with the Lord. This hadn't always been her habit in the morning. Just a couple years before, she would have nothing to do with church. In fact, she had messed around with witchcraft, the occult, and had been fascinated with suicide. But now, after spending some time at West Bowles Community Church, a very strict Presbyterian program, she became a converted Christian and dedicated her life to living for the Lord. But on the morning of April 20, her life would become a testimony forever of having the courage to stand. She was in the library when the doors opened with a crash. She could hear voices. Then, one of the two young men, Eric Harris-18, or Dylan Klebold-17, said, "All those who love Jesus, stand up!" Without hesitation, Cassie, rose from her chair and came forward. The gunman pointed the gun at her and asked, "Do you believe in Jesus?" Cassie responded, "Yes, I love Jesus!" The gunman then asked her, "Why?", and pulled the trigger.

Cassie knew the importance of the incredible message of Jesus, and she was willing to give her life to this mission. She would rather die than stop telling the story about her Savior. She had given her all to help others know Him, and she would share that message even in her death.

Cassie's bold commitment to the mission of Jesus speaks loudly to my life. And it makes me ask the question, "Am I as committed as Cassie to share the message about Jesus?" Are you? Have you made that commitment to take His message to the world? If you haven't, why not do it today??

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the hardest part about committing to the mission of Jesus?
2. How can you better share the message of Jesus to others?

LESSON 2: NEW TESTAMENT ECCLESIA



Ecclesia

— finding your place in His mission —