

Real Church (Part 1)

I felt the Lord instructing me to revisit with you what it means to be a church – how to be an authentic church (not just some man-made structure that follows human design), a genuine church built accurately and following the precise blueprint of the Scriptures. It is so important that we go back to that ‘blueprint’ and become more and more the glorious church Jesus died for. That is the church the world needs.

Opening text: Ephesians 5:25-27, 30,32

In this one chapter alone, in Ephesians 5, there are 16 facts about the relationship between Christ and the church! Today I want to simply highlight 3.

1. Jesus loved the church

- a) *Jesus loved the church* – past tense: Even before there was a church. He looked to the future and saw a people sanctified, a glorious church not having any spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish.

Jesus saw a large church expanding from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and right to the ends of the earth. Jesus saw an influential church turning the world upside down for Him. He saw a church empowered, doing His works and even greater ones! He saw a bold church, not ashamed of the gospel, proclaiming it to all generations, right until He comes again. Jesus saw a victorious church that the gates of hell could not prevail against.

That is the church He died for, the church that He saw and the church that He loved.

- b) Sometimes people come and visit our church and ask me, *what is the vision of this church?* Our vision is simply to be “the church” – that church He died for, the church that was on His mind as He laid on the cross. When you understand what “church is” then you understand its vision. And by the way, there is only *one* vision. It was set by Jesus, the founder of the church. It is not our prerogative to add or subtract to it, nor to come up with our own.
- c) The church was not an afterthought, because the Jewish people rejected the Messiah. The church was not God’s plan B for mankind. The church didn’t come to replace the Jewish people. The church was on the mind of God from the foundation of the world. Many O.T. prophecies pointed to the church that was going to come.
- d) Jesus loved the church. The width, the depth, the length, and the height of the love of Christ passes knowledge, according to **Ephesians 3:18-19**. It can be compared in intensity to the love of a husband and his wife, but I am sure

exceeds any type of human love. Jesus loves us with immeasurable love. Jesus loves this church!

2. Jesus loved... and Jesus gave!

The second part of the verse says that *Jesus gave Himself for her*. Jesus gave Himself not to simply create a religion, a special interest group, some human organisation but the church - *Ekklesia*.

- a) The church is not a building, a place, a 'preaching point', it is not a spiritual service provider. **It is a people** – the new covenant, blood-bought people of God. Jesus didn't give Himself for a place but for a people – His called-out ones! (by the way, the word *Ekklesia* appears 114 times in the NT – and 90 of those times referring to a local church).
- b) Jesus loved us while we were still sinners, while we were not yet church. We were separated from God. We were nothing like the glorious church He saw. We didn't look anything like what He was looking for.

But that is exactly why He died:

Verses 26 – 27 ⁻²⁶ *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,* ²⁷ *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

No amount of human effort could achieve that. Only Jesus could give us worth, beauty, glory, forgiveness, and justification. We are what we are by the grace of God.

Jesus loved and He gave! He gave the church all of His affection, all of His love and all of His life.

David, a picture of Jesus in the OT said,

1 Chronicles 29:3 - *3 Moreover, because I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, my own special treasure of gold and silver*

Jesus gave us so much!

3. Jesus built

Jesus loves the church, gave Himself for the church and He is building His church

Matthew 16:13-19

V.18: *I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*

- a) The One who commanded worlds into existence, spoke the church into existence like this. Jesus looked into the future and declared the birth of a people that the very powers of hell could not defeat!

This statement has remained true for more than 2000 years – despite persecution, wars, heresies, and all kinds of attacks.

- b) He made this powerful statement not in Jerusalem but in a place called Caesarea Phillipi.

Caesarea Phillipi was no place for a Jewish person:

- It was a place of pagan worship about 190 kms from Jerusalem. It was built by Herod the Great's son, Phillip, and it was a Roman City.
- In this city there is a huge rock face and a cave where the 'god' Pan was worshipped. Out of that cave there was a spring fed by Mount Hermon. To the pagan people, this spring was a sign of fertility and life. At this place, there was a temple to this god, Pan, always represented as half man, half goat. He was a god of fertility.
- A good Jew would never go to such a place on purpose. There were temple prostitutes there and they would have to pay tribute.
- They believed that Pan would die every year and would go down to hell. They believed that he would resurrect to life again at the time of the rainy season to bring fertility and prosperity.
- The source of this spring and the cave was known as "*the gates of hell*". This was a very spiritually dark place.

(To a Jew a 'gate' was a place of authority and power, where important decisions were made. The "city gate" to a Jew was the equivalent of what a 'city hall' or a "parliament" is to us today).

- c) It was in this context that Jesus made this statement. He chose such a place to make the statement that He was going to start the church (interestingly not Jerusalem, nor the Temple). He walked very far on purpose to declare:

- He was building His church,
- His church was going to be glorious and would go to the dark places of this world to bring light. No place was going to be off-limits to the church.
- His church would possess the gates of God's enemies.
- The very gates of the power of hell would not be able to prevent the spread of God's kingdom and the triumph of the church!

