

BEING CHURCH



1. Discovering Church



26 APRIL, 2020

Please click on text in **RED** to listen to music or sing along.

When finished, close and return to this page.

Good morning and welcome to worship on Day 35 of Lockdown in the UK! We continue to be instructed not to congregate for worship, but that does not stop us from worshipping our Great and Almighty God, our Loving Father, our Merciful Master this morning. As you enter into worship this morning, you join others of our Church community, and many Church communities across this land and the world, worshipping our Risen Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father, preparing for the time when He will unite us with Him in eternity!

Pause for a moment and listen to **THIS** music (*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow*) as you gather your thoughts to focus on the Person who gave you life and the One who has transformed your life into the likeness of Christ, His Son!

PRAYER

Eternal God! We live in your world, but confined in our own space. We gather once again in virtual space, united by the Holy Spirit. We gather to give You thanks our Father, for You are good, You alone do mighty miracles, and You care for each of us and all of us. Your faithful love endures forever!

Father! The Holy Spirit is around us doing Your work and beckons us to join Him. Dispel all alarm, fear, panic and worry because we are in Your presence. Bathe us with Your peace Father, the peace which passes all understanding and quenches all thirst.

This morning, we want to celebrate all You have in store for us, for in You, all our needs are met. **AMEN.**

HYMN **I stand amazed in the presence
of Jesus the Nazarene**

PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER IN THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES

O Lord our God, whose home is the perfection of Heaven. Your Glory shines through the universe, and the sound of unbridled Praise of Your Name echoes every corner of Your creation!

Make the earth an extension of Your Kingdom in Heaven.

O Lord, help me believe, my present condition is not my future, nor does my present determine my future. Today, more than ever, we need the radical values of Your Kingdom in our families, our community and our nation. Inspire and encourage us as the light of Your kingdom seems dim across the earth, during this time of crisis.

Father! Out of Your unconditional love for me, and Your unthinkable mercy towards me, three things I ask:

Continue to provide for my physical needs today. Nourish me, that I might nourish people on the front lines of service, each working to prevent others from succumbing to the virus; protect them, Father!

O Lord, I have walked without You. I have not made You my Anchor and my Guiding Light, and I have offended You by seeking the wisdom of the world. Master! You have never exercised foreclosure on my sins, offences and debts and called me to account. I owe you my life. You choose to forgive me; may I have the grace to follow your lead and forgive my family, friends and neighbours. Lord have mercy; Lord teach me to have mercy.

Finally, the evil one is merciless and cruel. In my weakness, I will not be able to survive his relentless onslaught. Spare me from being tempted by him, to disobey, disregard and doubt You.

Your Kingdom is unlike anything I know, the One and Only Kingdom in which You as King, enjoy all power and all authority, beyond all time, and rule with perfect love, justice and mercy, not known on earth. **AMEN**

HYMN Righteousness Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghost

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 16:13-18 (NLT)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*

“Well...,” they replied, *“some say John the Baptist, ...some say Elijah, and ...others say Jeremiah or, ... one of the other prophets.”*

Then he asked them, *“But who do you say I am?”*

Simon Peter answered, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*

Jesus replied, *“You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (‘rock’), and upon this rock **I will build My church**, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.*

MESSAGE **Being Church - 1. Discovering Church**

Undeterred by the lockdown, we continue as planned and embark on a six-week series on *Being Church*, very appropriate for the calm after Easter and the storm at Pentecost, and pertinent to the current spell in which we are having to consider our practice of Church. When in doubt, the saying goes, go back to the very beginning, and so we shall, to discover afresh God’s intention for His Church and its rightful place in our community and for this world. I hesitate to say, *re-discover*, as it might lead us to examine Church with the same prejudiced lens.

During a private one-on-one with His Disciples Jesus asks, *Who do people say I am?* The Disciples muttered in uncertain terms, *(Umm..) some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets?*

Jesus persisted, *(But...) who do YOU say I am?*

Simon Peter, the smart-alec, know-it-all type of student, always-saying-the-right-thing, teacher’s pet whom no one really likes, blurted out, *You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*

Peter was impulsive, often **not** remembering to put brain into gear before putting mouth in motion, but this time he nailed it, and Jesus put

His stamp of approval! *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it*".

i.e. "What you said about Me is true Peter, because God revealed this to you. I will build my Church on your rock-solid declaration".

This was the first time anyone heard the word, "Church"! Jesus claimed the word, and every word with it, is significant.

First, God intended the Architect of the Church to be His Son, to shape it, direct it and protect it. Jesus alone is its rightful Head.

Second, the three words, *I will build* convey four important Truths:

1. It conveys Jesus' promise, *I will....* He did not say, "*I have built*" or, "*I am building*", but "*I WILL build.*"
2. It conveys Jesus' determination: *Make no mistake, I **WILL** build....*,
3. It conveys Jesus' excitement, like a 'crescendo' mark in music, He disclosed His planned future to His disciples. *I want to let you into a secret: My plans which **ONLY** the Father and I know*
4. It conveys Jesus' continuous activity as He shapes its growth until its perfect expression in Heaven is realised and reflected on earth.

Finally, Jesus stamps His ownership and authority over His Church: *I will build **MY** Church.*

Matthew selects a word for 'church' which was familiar to the Greeks at that time, which meant, *to be called out from and made recognisably different*, referring to an assembly of people separated from others, given a unique identity and commissioned for a distinct purpose. We, Jesus' Church are defined by Peter's declaration, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!* We are called out from the world to know this Truth, to believe it, live it and declare it, in and through our lives. This is God's only intended structure for the Church; everything else is superfluous.

Fast forward one year. The religious leaders of Israel and civil leaders of Rome are jostling to condemn Jesus to death on a cross, without either being seen to be responsible for it; three days later, true to His promise, Jesus is seen alive, having conquered God's old enemy, death.

Before returning home to Heaven, Jesus told His followers to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5), who on the day of Pentecost, transformed that small group of about 120 women and men, into bold and courageous witnesses of God's work (Acts 1:8, 15; 2:5-11).

Jesus was building His church! People who had spent time getting to know Him, learning from Him worshipping Him, who knew Him well enough to speak the Truth about Him, this was The Church. They met in people's homes and the response was remarkable! *"Those who had received His word were baptised; and that day there were added about three thousand souls"* (*The body of Christ in Jerusalem multiplied 26 times from 120 to 3,120*)¹, *continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer* (Acts 2:41-42).

This is Church: where people gather to learn the Word of God, hear good news about the Kingdom of God (amidst the cacophony of negative news), and through fellowship are encouraged to Christ-centred living, forgiveness and healing, (including healing our relationship with the Father, through the simple observance of remembering Christ's death in broken bread and His resurrection in a poured-out cup, the promise of Christ's return in glory!) All this, undergirded by continual and earnest prayer.

Christ's Church cannot function if any of the above is missing.

Eh, Voilà! We have discovered the **REAL** Church! Jesus its architect who directs it, protects it, manages it until He comes to reunite the earth with Heaven. All the power of hell will never overpower it!

Does this describe our Church? Have we let Jesus be the Head of our Church? Does He have first place in all we do? Is our main focus, teaching, preaching and healing? Or have we drifted from God's original intention of Christ's Church? **AMEN.**

¹ I read it in John R.W. Stott's book "Acts", but cannot seem to locate it.

LISTEN TO **THIS SONG AS YOU REFLECT ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ/HEARD THIS MORNING**

PRAYER

Eternal God! You have purposed in Your heart to reconcile us to You and into Your Kingdom, through the Church which Jesus Your Son and our Saviour is building. Teach us to set aside our own thoughts, plans and ambitions, listen to Him and follow The Holy Spirit as He leads us into the fulfilment of Your history, as Heaven absorbs this earth into one

May all of us who profess our faith in Jesus as Your Son, in His sacrificial death and in His Resurrection, and who wait for the end of these days and the beginning of eternity with You, know our wait is not in vain.

AMEN! Come Lord Jesus!

CLOSING HYMN **The Church's ONE Foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord**

BENEDICTION

This worship service is ending, but your life's service continues.

Do not live anxiously, nor with undue concern, fear or worry.

The Church belongs to Jesus, and YOU are His Church.

Follow Him into the presence of the Father!

Let His love renew and transform you, and shape you as His Church here, fit and ready to be His Church to come!

In the Name of Jesus the Christ, the Head of the Church!

AMEN.

As we close this time of worship, enjoy **THIS blessing.**

As a member of Botley Baptist Church, please do not forget to remit your tithe and offering, either directly into the bank or drop-off your envelope at Church.

If you are not attending this Church and would like to contribute to its ministry, please click "EMAIL US" at the top of the home page. Thank you