

The Church

God's Great Plan

Jesus told the apostles, *"You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). We read of the beginning of that work in Acts 2. As the Holy Spirit moved him, *"Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: 'Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words'"* (Acts 2:14). The workload on the Apostles became so great that it hindered the spread of the Word of God. Men were chosen to be in charge of certain duties so that evangelism could continue uninhibited, (Acts 6:1-7). Later, some of these men began to preach the Gospel of Christ (Acts 6:8-10, 8:5). Paul tells Timothy the judgment in selecting these men, *"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"* (2 Timothy 2:2).

The result of the Apostle's speeches on Pentecost was the obedience of thousands. "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 2:38). The baptism of the multitude resulted in the first people becoming citizens of the church, the long-awaited Kingdom, the one promised to David, and belonging to God's Son. *"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." ... "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved"* (Acts 2:41-47).

Jesus proclaimed that the church would also be the Kingdom when He stated that He would build His church. *"I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 16:18-19). The "key" to the church, the requirement to enter it, and the requirement to enter the Kingdom are the same. Isaiah wrote that the key would be given to Messiah, who would be over David's house. *"I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open"* (Isaiah 22:22). Jesus says that He is the one *"Who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens"* (Revelation 3:7). It is His kingdom, His church, and He is the one to place people into it. Jesus' apostles proclaimed the "key" when they preached the gospel, telling people what to do to be saved from sin and death.

It is interesting to note the excitement of an Ethiopian when Philip preached Jesus (Acts 8:26-39). Philip, *"preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?'"* And Philip said, *"If you believe with all your heart, you may."* And he answered and said, *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him." Just like those in Acts 2, this man could not wait to do what was necessary to enter The Kingdom. And Paul, who had persecuted the church, was baptized as soon as he heard it was required. *"So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'" And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized"* (Acts 9:17-18).

Years later, Peter wrote, *"Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God"* (1 Peter 3:21-22) Paul reminded those in Galatia, *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"* (Galatians 3:26-27). Peter reminds all who were baptized into Christ that, *"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy"* (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Are you a part of the Kingdom, the church, the family of God? If not, what hinders you?