

Where in the World is the Church?

Leonard C. Albert

Text:

Matthew 16:13-18

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (14) So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (15) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (16) Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (17) Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (18) And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. NKJV

Introduction—did you ever play a game of “Who Am I?” See if you can guess this one.

- ✓ *I am in over 300,000 locations in just the USA alone.*
- ✓ *The fair market values of my properties are worth over one trillion dollars.*
- ✓ *People willingly give over 80 billion dollars to me every year.*
- ✓ *Over 100 million Americans visit my properties every week!*

Who am I? I am the Church!

The church is a powerful force in our nation. Our text says, “*the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*” Doesn’t that give you the idea that the church is on the offensive—storming the very gates of hell?

What has happened to the church in these 20 centuries? For years we have heard sermons on the great commandment that went something like this: “*The Mandate, Message and Method of the Great Commission.*”

It seems that we have a good understanding of the first two items but has happened to the “method?” Why is it we are told now that 95% of

believers have never even shared their testimony let alone win a lost soul?!

- The message has morphed into “come and hear” rather than “go and tell.” It appears that many churches today have turned their focus inward. For many, the modern-day church has become the “me” church. It’s all about me! Whatever happens in church life happens within the four walls of the building.

Consider the contrast between the early church of **Acts 2:44-47** and the church today of "**Facts 20:22**".

Early Church "Acts 2:44-47"
And all who believed Were together With all in common They sold and distributed As any had need And day by day Attending the temple together And breaking bread From house to house They partook of food With glad and generous hearts Praising God And having favor with all the people And the Lord added daily to their number Day by day Those who were being saved.

Our Church Today <i>"Facts 20:22"</i>
Every individual Each with his own opinions Competing for his own competition Looks out for his own Assuming there are no needs And once a week Going to their private church (with an annual picnic) Each return to his castle Fellowshiping with his family Over good "native" cooking After a short silent "grace" And glad to be away from everybody Occasionally there are New faces at church And last year Someone was saved.

Here's the reality. The church is not a rest home—it is a hospital. It is not a spiritual outpatient clinic where people go on Sunday morning to get a holy dose of religious sedative. It must be a hospital where hurting people can go and be made whole. It is also a place where believers can be equipped to go out into the world as Christian business owners, doctors, lawyers, journalists and salespeople.

- The church is the melting pot where it all comes together. It is a discipling center, a place where all of the believer's gifts can be in operation.
- Illustration: During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, there was a shortage of currency in the British Empire. Representatives carefully searched the nation in hopes of finding silver to meet the emergency. After one month, the committee returned with its report. "We have searched the Empire in vain seeking to find silver. To our dismay, we found none anywhere except in the cathedrals where the statues of the saints are made of choice silver."
- To this, Oliver Cromwell eloquently answered, "Let's melt down the saints and put them into circulation."

Yes, why don't we? Let's melt down the saints of God with the fervent heat of the evangelism spirit and put them into circulation in the world—not just inside our church buildings. Isn't that what the Great Commission is all about? So we ask the question: *Where in the world is the church?*

Message:

The answer can be found by asking and answering three questions:

Who are we? Our **identity**

What are we supposed to do? Our **goal**

How are we supposed to do it? Our **plan**

First: who are we—our *identity*

One poet (author unknown) wrote, *“The church is never a place but always a people, Never a fold, but always a flock, Never a sacred building, but always a believing assembly, The church is you who pray, not where you pray. A structure of brick or marble can no more be a church than your clothes of wool or cotton can be you.”*

- Our text reveals the first time the word “church” appears in the Bible, and it refers to an assembly of people, not a building (Matthew 16:13-18).
- Jesus intended for the church to be an extension of your family and His world-wide family. It would be those you celebrate Him with. It would be the people you would lean on in hard times. It would be the group of people that you look to help you understand more about God's purposes.

The Greek word for “church” is “*ecclesia*.” It is where we get the term “ecclesiastical.” It literally means, “*the called-out ones*.” Those who have been called out of a life of sin into fellowship with Christ.

We have been called out of the world and then called to go back into the world as Christ’s ambassadors.

There are some erroneous views of the church:

- “**Fortress**” view. This is a view that believes the church is surrounded by a wall and it is fighting for its existence against a world that is trying to destroy it.
 - Those “inside” are saved. Those “outside” but be converted and brought inside.
 - A natural result of this way of thinking is what some have called “commando evangelism.” A type of “mugging mission” where the people go out from the “fort” and engage the “enemy.” One writer said, “We have heard enough truths to melt the Iron Curtain but we can’t even get our neighborhoods warm for Jesus!”
- “**Cultural**” view. This view shows a church that has lost its effectiveness in ministry. It no longer has a message for the unsaved world. It is literally swallowed up in the world.
 - It has “blended” into the world and endorses its values.
 - The “gospel light” in the lighthouse has gone out.
 - It has lost its true identity and its sense of mission.
 - There message goes something like this: *If you do not repent to some extent, and confess your sins, so to speak, and live right, in a fashion, you will be condemned and go to the place below, in a measure.*

- **Biblical** view. The New Testament church is a church in motion! It is a church that knows that not all the “work of the church is at the church!”
- It is a church in “motion with a mission.”
- It is a “gathered people” who do not forsake the assembling together, but it is also a “scattered people” who in the world but not of the world. They are salt, light and yeast in a world that desperately needs to hear the gospel message.

So, what about the *people* of the church?

- We are to be “lively stones” NOT just pillars of the church. I Peter 2: 5 says, “*You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*” NKJV
- We are not “pillars.” The “pillars” of the church are sometimes those who are “unmovable!”
- It is better to be a “lively stone,” one that is totally committed to Christ and His purpose for our lives. We were designed and made for a grand purpose (*offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God*).
- This is a very important notice. We should never assume or adopt a faulty notion that we are for ourselves to live and do as we want. This is a *scared* notice.
- We are to be “rivers of blessing” NOT just “reservoirs of truth.” We are to be like a cool, fresh, and refreshing river of blessing, NOT a stagnant pool of truth.
- The message of Biblical Christianity is not just “God loves me.” Added to that statement is, “God loves me so that I might make Him known to others!”

Second: what are we supposed to do—our goal.

We are to:

- **Wage war.** Our Christian life is a battle and we are soldiers in the Lord’s army. We are not on a “cruise ship” but, rather, a battleship. Our true enemy is not the unsaved world—they are the *victims* of the enemy. The true enemy is the devil and his hoards of demons whose one desire is to prevent people from hearing the gospel of Christ.
- **Run a race.** The Bible teaches that our race is not to the “swift” but to those who endure to the end. Our job is to run the race with patience!
- **Labor in love.** We are to go out into the highways and byways and compel them (in love) to come in. You can always recognize a church that labors in love. The evidence is obvious. They:
 - **Evangelize.** Luke 19:10 tells the real reason Jesus came to this earth, “*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” NKJV Can we, as believers, do less?
 - **Reproduce.** One writer said it well when he said, “*What we need are more ‘heir conditioned’ churches!*” Yes, we need to reproduce the life of Christ that is in us to lost souls who can hear the gospel and respond to Christ and become believers.

- **Change. People** should be changed. **Places** (like our communities) should be changed (Acts 5:18). **Things** should be changed. In Matthew 17:20 even the mountains got changed!

Third: how are we supposed to do it—our *plan*.

Victor Hugo once said, “*A church is God between four walls.*” What are those four walls of the church? Here’s one description that not only names the walls but provides us with the best plan for evangelism and ministry:

- **A wall of *worship*.** Much of what we do as Christians every week is considered worship. We pray to God throughout the day. We listen to worship music on our devices. We sing hymns and songs of praise at church. More importantly, the Bible repeatedly commands us to worship God, using words like "Praise the LORD, all nations!" (Ps. 117:1).
- **A wall of *education*.** Christian education is important in the spiritual development of believers because it provides a forum for learning. Sunday School is an excellent example because it encourages spiritual interaction between the students and the teachers and provides a comprehensive way of learning as a group. Ephesians 4:11, includes teachers within the five-fold ministry of the church. Sunday School/Christian Education is a vital part of the anointing of this office and God's plan for the church.
- **A wall of *fellowship*.** Fellowship is important from the perspective of God’s purposes. Many believers think the church can make it without them. But just imagine listening to a symphony where half the orchestra members didn’t show up to play! Likewise, 1 Corinthians 12 makes it very clear that every single member of the body is necessary for proper functioning and for the fulfilling of God’s eternal plan and purposes. Because of the importance of fellowship, no one has the right to remove themselves and not play their instrument in the orchestra!
- **A wall of *outreach*.** Think about how so many churches today do programs and ministries which no one will ever partake of except themselves. They plan elaborate programs, musicals, sporting events and marriage retreats, and then fail to tell anyone other than the immediate congregation. The result: no outreach! The attitude of so many believers is: if they want it, they’ll come.
- All of this is so foreign to Biblical theology. The most basic assignment of the people of God is to “go and tell others” about the good news of Jesus salvation.
- Our Lord said to the man previously known as the Gadarene demoniac, “*Go home and tell your people what great things the Lord has done for you and how He had mercy on you*” (Mark 5:19).

Close and challenge

There are many ways to tell someone about Jesus. One of the very best books ever written on evangelism is from Steve Sjogren titled “Conspiracy of Kindness.”

Steve writes on what he calls “servant evangelism” which consists of deeds of love plus words of love with adequate time. He shares that “good deeds create ‘phone wires’ for transmitting the spoken message.

Here is a brief list of some of these “good deeds” that can be done by God’s people:

- Cut flowers from your garden and give them to someone
- Send a card of appreciation to someone
- Cook a meal for someone coming home from the hospital
- Give a gift to the trash men
- Clip coupons and give them away
- Give food coupons to homeless people
- Cook supper for a neighbor
- Help a friend move
- Sweep your neighbor’s walk/driveway
- Learn to say “God Loves You” in Spanish
- Help someone carry their groceries
- Mow your neighbor’s lawn
- Visit someone in the nursing home
- Pick up trash in the park or public area
- Pay for the person behind you in the McDonald’s drive-thru
- Buy someone a coffee and sit with them to enjoy it
- Buy an extra bag of groceries for the food pantry
- Listen to someone
- Write a letter or make a phone call to someone you like (or don’t like!)

For sure, there’s plenty to do. Let’s put the “go” in Gospel and be the church in this world!