

Who Do You Say I Am? Part 4

We are continuing our series answering Jesus' question, Who Do You Say I Am? This morning our answer: we say you are **Jesus, the Head of the Church**. Before we dig into this, let me share a bit of church news with you. For the past 10+ years Brian and Shawna White have faithfully served as our college and young adult pastors. In visiting with Brian a few weeks ago we concluded the burden had shifted in terms of ministry and focus. They've entered a different season of life. They aren't leaving, but Brian is going to step down as the college pastor in order to serve as our Discipleship Pastor. He'll focus on Christian Education and discipleship, taking on some of the load that Mike Atkinson has so ably carried for so long. Brian will also continue to serve in the areas of pastoral care and of course pastoring the New Community service on Wednesday nights. Pastor Bryce and Jessie Jennings are going to step into the role of leading our college ministry in addition to serving as our worship pastor. Bryce led college ministry in the church he served in Dallas before joining us. I think the Lord had this all planned and we are simply following his leading and timing. I believe there are good things ahead in all these areas of ministry. I know Brian and Shawna and Bryce and Jessie would appreciate your prayers as they take on new ministries and responsibilities and we look forward to all God is going to do in the coming days.

Now let's turn our focus to Jesus as the head of the church. How do we know he is the head of the church? Because the bible plainly says so. **"And he is the head of the body, the church.."** Colossians 1:18 **"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church which is his body..."** Ephesians 1:22 **"... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ."** Ephesians 4:15. There are many more verses we could recite, but you get the point. The New Testament declares Jesus died, was buried, rose from the dead, was seen by hundreds after his resurrection, then ascended bodily into heaven where the Father placed all things under his feet, seating him at his right hand and giving him all authority, appointing him head over all things and head of the church. Jesus is the head of the church, but what does that mean to us? What are the implications of that for us?

The word most often translated as "church" in our New Testament is the Greek word *ekkleesia*. The word means "called out ones" and is used 115 times in the New Testament referring to the church. It's interesting that while Jesus is the head of the church, he only mentioned the church twice. Certainly much is implied as he speaks to his disciples and

followers, and that's who we are as the church, but Jesus says only two things about the church, recorded in Matthew's gospel. In Matthew 16, in the very setting where Jesus asked "Who do you say I am?" Jesus said **"I will build my church..." Matthew 16:18** Then in Matthew 18, in the context of how to deal with someone who has sinned against you, Jesus says, **"Tell it to the church..." Matthew 18:17** Look at the implications of these two statements for us.

"I will build my church." Jesus attaches his name to nothing else, no other institution or earthly entity. It sounds like Jesus thinks the church is a big deal, doesn't it? If Jesus is building his church and thinks so highly of it, perhaps we should take it more seriously than we do. Jesus is in control as the Sovereign Lord and head of the church and he is building his church. What does that look like? The bible gives us several images of the church. Consider...

He is the builder and we are tools in his hands. Peter writes, **"As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."** 1 Peter 2:4-5.

Peter gives us more than one image here, stating that Jesus is a living stone and also in this passage stating he is the cornerstone, the foundation on which we are being built and the stone that holds all the others in place. Jesus is also the builder and we are living stones, building blocks that as we come to him, Jesus places us where he needs us in order to build a spiritual house, a living temple to God, where we offer sacrifice and praise to God. Paul says something similar in Ephesians 2, referring to Jesus, **"In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."** Ephesians 2:21-22

He is the head of the church and the chief architect and builder. We are the building blocks, the material he is using. Building blocks and materials don't choose where they belong. The builder chooses that. "I need those blocks here. I need those 2X4's there." Jesus builds with us, connecting us with other building blocks and each part is important, needed, essential.

"I will build my church." Not only is he the builder of that spiritual building, he is the head and the church is the body of Christ. If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are part of the body of Christ and you have a function to carry out within the body. You are absolutely essential to the life and health of the church because you are part of his body!

Paul writes, **"...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every**

supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Ephesians 4:15-16

He's the head and we are the body, parts joined and held together by supporting ligaments, i.e. by relationships with each other, connected, growing together, learning together, doing life together, "as each part does its work." Not as each part hangs on, but each part doing its work, contributing. None of the parts of your body are spectators. If parts stop contributing to the functioning of your body, you go see a doctor because something is wrong. We need you and your giftings, your function in this body. We can't be all God wants us to be if parts are missing! Jesus is building his church but he can't do it without you, the building blocks and the body parts. We can't be all God is calling Carbondale to be without you! We won't grow up into him as we should if each part isn't doing its work, each part functioning as it should.

What was the second thing Jesus said about the church? **"Tell it to the church."** I mentioned the context in Matthew 18 was a grievance. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens, you have won your brother...If he won't listen, take two witnesses, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."

This passage deals with relationships and settling disputes, but what I want us to consider is his implication of responsibility and accountability to one another in the church and to Jesus, the head of the church. Jesus is speaking of the church as a community of believers connected to one another, in relationship with one another, holding each other responsible and accountable, praying for, forgiving and supporting one another. Jesus indicates the church is greater than the sum of its parts. We are his body, alive, functioning, connected to him and to one another and a living witness and testimony to the world. We have a responsibility as the church. We are the place where together the Lordship and love and mercy and grace and truth and calling of Jesus is on display before the world.

With what Jesus has said about the church, it means we aren't self-selecting. We don't pick and choose who belongs to the church, Jesus does. He is building his church. He's choosing people of different ages and classes, color and ethnicity and backgrounds. He has redeemed them/us by his blood, his sacrifice and he then places us where he needs us and wants us in his body, his church. Our responsibility is to connect, to love, to serve, to honor, to support one another as members together of his church. It isn't always easy. The New Testament shows the challenges of blending cultures and ages and traditions but it's his church and he is building it. Our responsibility is to commit to the church, to his church, to make his church our church. We

have a responsibility to one another, to tell it to the church, to live our lives openly, honestly, for one another as part of a living, growing entity, the church!

We've gotten this Western idea that church is like a health club we join. We go in, work out, trying to get in better shape, improve our health. We meet a couple of people that are there the same time we go in and we get acquainted, we say "hello, good work out today, looking good." We might even have coffee once or twice after a workout, but it's all pretty casual. Then we get busy, stuff happens and we stop going. That's okay, that's life, but that's not the church. The church is the body of Christ. What did Paul say? "Joined and held together by every supporting ligament" growing and building itself up in love as each part does its work. We can't just walk away. Accountability and responsibility to Jesus the head of the church and to the body, remember?

I used that analogy of a health club before I found this quote from Terry Johnson in an article called *Jesus and the Church*. He wrote, "Without warning and without explanation families often leave a congregation with which they have been associated for more than a decade. The members who are left behind are grief stricken. They have sacrificed for those families through crisis after crisis. Prayers were offered, visits made, meals cooked, funds given and babysitting provided. Gone. Why? Because they, like so many others, see the church as a voluntary association like a health club rather than a commitment like marriage."

Listen, Jesus is building his church. It isn't some abstract idea, it's us, real people in real lives connected to each other in real relationships and it's important because Jesus says it's important. It's his church, and Jesus is here with us, among us, at work in us. We have to value the church the way Jesus does. It's a commitment we make. Accountability and responsibility. Let me show you one more thing about Jesus and his church.

John was exiled on the isle of Patmos when he had this vision and was instructed to write what he saw and give it to the churches. John said, "**I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.**" John gives us this dramatic description. "**His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters...out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he**

placed his right hand on me and said; ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the living one; I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.’” Revelation 1:12-18.

It is a revelation of the ascended, glorified, exalted Jesus. In verse 20 Jesus tells him the lampstands represent the churches. So John has this image of the risen, exalted Messiah and Savior, with authority and power, actually walking among his churches, wherever they are gathered together, speaking words of instruction, correction and judgment. No wonder John fell as though he was dead. Jesus the First and the Last, the Mighty one, dwells among his people in his church! He is Lord of His church. He is the head of His church and because of that, His church matters! What we do as his church matters. How we live as his church matters. What we post on social media as members of his church matters. How we treat one another as members of his church matters!

We aren't a social club, we are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a spiritual house, built together, connected to one another. That means we're dependent on one another. If you bail out, the wall is weakened. We're the body of Christ. That means we are dependent on one another. If you stop showing up, you stop participating, the body is weakened.

Next year Carbondale will be 85 years old. It's easy to take the church for granted at this stage. Carbondale will always be there. Pastor Phil will always be there. The saints of God and the ministries of the church will always be there. Sunday School and the choir, CAGY and children's church, college ministry, they'll always be there. But they won't. Those ministries won't continue, not unless you show up and make it happen. We'll only have a choir if you show up and sing. We'll only have Sunday School if you value learning the word of God and show up to teach or learn in class. We'll only have prayer meetings if you show up to pray. There isn't anyone else to do it. Just us. We are the people we've been waiting on. Not all churches last. We are a couple of generations away from oblivion. What will we do?

Jesus has placed a priority on his church. Have we? Have you? Paul wrote, “...**Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless...No one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body.**” Ephesians 5:25-30

Jesus is building his church. He loves his church and gave himself for it; he feeds and cares for it. We need to do the same. He meets us here as we worship together, as we feast on his word and pray together, receive his body and blood together, as we fellowship together, listening and learning and growing together. Let me say it again, Jesus is the Head of the church and he has placed a high priority on building and feeding, caring for and nurturing his church. As part of his church, his body, I believe he expects us to do the same

We are receiving members into our church today. As I call your name if you will come to the front and face the congregation. We are pleased to welcome you into this expression of the body of Christ. We are just one part of his church, his body of believers around the world but we are glad you are a part of us. We are better because you are with us. We benefit from the gifts and resources you bring to the body and I believe you are enriched because of the gifts and resources this church shares with you. I want to read a pledge to you that I've been making I guess for as long as I've been pastor.

“We are committed to you. You'll never knowingly suffer at our hands. We will never say or do anything, knowingly, to hurt you. We will always, in every circumstance seek to help you and support you. If you're down and we can lift you up, we'll do that. Anything we have that you need, we'll share with you and if need be we'll give it to you. No matter what we find out about you and no matter what happens in the future, either good or bad, our commitment to you will never change. And there's nothing you can do about it. You don't have to respond. We just love you, and that's what it means. (Adapted from *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness* by Jerry Cook)

You are a part of us. This is your church and it's Jesus' church. Defend it, support it, contribute to it, love and nurture it, share your gifts and talents with it, pray for it, participate in its life. Commit to it as the body of Christ and let's see what Jesus can do with all of us working together!