**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Resurrection Series**

The Ekklesia of Jesus – The Alpha and Omega

June 2nd, In the Year of Our Lord 2024

Pastor Matthew Diehl

(All Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.)

Sermon Audio: roundtopchurch.org / Under Member’s tab

We have been in a sermon series with the overall title “The Resurrection” with subtitles focusing on particular events or topics. Remember before Christmas, we were in the “Incarnation” sermon series which covered from the birth of Jesus to many events in Jesus’ life. But then Resurrection Day came March 31st. . . and we had not covered many events in the life-ministry of Jesus, but it was important to shift to the observation and worship of the Resurrection and the events that were commissioned as a result.

 I observe that both the Incarnation and the Resurrection are at the core of Christianity. It is impossible to talk about one and not the other. The primary mission of the Incarnation is the Cross in order for Jesus to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17) and pay the price for the sins of the world. Jesus, the Messiah, fulfilled what the Law was never intended to accomplish. God spoke through His Apostle Paul that the Law was just a “tutor” (Galatians 3:24-25). God declares in the New Testament book of Hebrew. . . Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, (Hebrews 10:11-12)

 With this said, I want to be clear about what happened after Jesus fulfilled the Law at the Cross, rose from the grave and ascended to the right hand of God (Luke 22:69, Psalm 110:1).

Before His ascension, Jesus directed the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). It is obvious that God planned for the disciples to be in Jerusalem at Pentecost in order to use the holy Jewish day to gather attention from the large gathering of people to hear the Gospel Message. Like God’s prophets (messengers) in the Old Testament, He chose to speak through the disciples so the world would hear His Good News. But the Pentecost event did not start in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. No. Remember, Pentecost pointed back to the time of the Exodus when God gave the Law to Moses. This giving of the Law to Moses is tied to the superiority in Jesus’ Cross that we just read in Hebrews 10.

Regarding God communing with people. . . God has been communing with people, He created in His image, since Adam and Eve. I make this point because there are some who say that the Church did not start until Pentecost. . . that the Holy Spirit did not come until Pentecost. Both of the views are not correct. Concerning the Holy Spirit, we see God’s Spirit move over the surface of the sea in Genesis 1:2. King David prays (Psalm 51:11) to retain God’s Holy Spirit. (Also see: Genesis 6:3; Isaiah 63:10,11; Haggai 2:5.)

And, as with Adam and Eve in the Garden, God’s Holy Spirit speaking through Peter gave people, at Pentecost (Acts 2), the instructions on how to overcome this fallen world. Under God’s plan, people can achieve an *overcoming life* as opposed to a life controlled *by sin and death filled with fear and unforgiveness* leading to eternal death.

Regarding the first time God communed with people. . . remember, God has no beginning and will have no end. I also know God’s Ekklesia has no end. That is His congregation, the assembly of overcomers who heed the words of His Book are commonly called the ‘Church’ in English. However, it is my opinion that this word “church” created a detrimental shift in the understanding of Ekklesia.

Believers are God’s people, People of the Book, who gather under Him as seen in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and in the last book, Revelation. In the book of Revelation, God’s creation is described as a New Heaven and New Earth where Believers worship Him (Revelation 22:9). God’s communion with Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, chronicles the first time God walked and talked with people, and they received life instruction from Him. So, the gathering of Believers is to commune with God in His sharing of life’s essential lifesaving truths. We accomplish this today by reading and teaching from God’s Word, the Bible. In addition, we sing songs of praise and with an act of thankful remembrance in the Lord’s Supper, we make a claim to our eternal life with God. This is the assembly of the overcomers, the congregation of the Believers that has no end.

**Here is a good time to talk about this word “Church”.**

The English word “church” lends to a misunderstanding of God’s purpose to commune with Believers directly without a mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). The Greek word “Ekklesia” is translated “Church” (KJV 1611) in Acts 7:38 for the Greek word πλῆθος plethos - meaning: “a great number” or “congregation” and not structure or organization. The English word *congregation* or *assembly* is more accurate (Plethos = congregation: Acts 4:32, 6:2,5, 15:30). Concerning the King James translators, they supplied 19 of 20 times the English word “church” for the Greek word “Ekklesia”. This KJV translations lends to identifying the Ekklesia as a physical structure or mediating organization and takes away the idea of the body of Christ is the gathering of Believers who directly commune with God.

The difference is in the mental picture the word “Church” makes. Again, to drive the point. . . the word “Church” is more associated with a building or organization, brick and mortar, and mediating man-made institutional denominations and the State Church are not personal. The first time Jesus used the word ἐκκλησία (Greek: Ekklesia) is in Matthew 16:18. "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My **church** (Greek Ekklesia); and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Since the KJV of 1611, many English translations, including the NAS, followed suit. In Matthew 16:18 The Greek word *Ekklesia* means an assembly, gathering a congregation with a personal relationship with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit. This personal application supports the fact that Jesus was building His “Believer’s Assembly” with people who have faith upon the Rock (Jesus) and not upon an institution that meets in a location officiated by overlords.

**Regarding Matthew 16:18,** I have provided a fuller teaching in this online version of the sermon. I feel that there was not sufficient time given to these passages of Scripture in Sunday’s sermon, and I made observations that needed fuller explanations. Due to its historical value consider the following:

It is obvious that Jesus referred to Peter’s display of “faith” in his response to His question. It is often taught that Jesus is referring to Peter’s display of his “rock of faith” that Jesus would build His *Ekklesia*. Let us examine the texts of. Matthew 16:16-19

16 Simon **Peter** answered,

 "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

 17 And **Jesus** said to him,

"Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, ( Greek: Πέτρος )

and upon this rock ( Greek: πέτρᾳ ) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, (Peter)

 noun nominative **masculine** singular

 καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ (rock)e4dr4

 noun dative **feminine** singular

οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ᾅδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς. (BGT)

19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Biblical scholars point out that Jesus’ response to Peter (v.18) is a play on words. Jesus parrots Peter by calling him by his fuller name “Simon Barjona”, and, in verse 18, “I also say to you that you are Peter”, as Peter had called Jesus “the Christ, the Son of the Living God”. By Peter’s answer to Jesus about His identity, it was apparent that God the Father revealed this **truth** to Peter. So, in Jesus’ response to Peter, He is pointing to the **truth** that was revealed by God the Father to him. The **truth** is that Jesus, the Christ, is the Son of God. . . Jesus, the Christ, is **the rock** (*petra*).

Jesus uses the word **rock** because it was the accepted Jewish reference for God. We have correctly taught that the word **rock** in the Old Testament refers to God (Deut. 32:18,31; 2 Sam. 22:2, 32; 23:3; The Rock of Israel). Therefore, Jesus is to build His “assembly, congregation, gathered ones” upon the Rock, that is God. Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:1,14). Again, it is **this truth** (this rock) that the Jesus’ Ekklesia will be built that the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Obviously, Peter can be overpowered as was displayed when he denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:34, 75). And three verses after Matthew 16:18, Jesus calls Peter Satan (v. 22). Therefore, Peter is not the rock to build Jesus’ Ekklesia.

Another important distinction is that *Petros* and *petra* or similar words. Note that the parsing of *Petros* identifies the word as a “masculine” noun. *Petra* is a “feminine” noun and not referring to Peter the man. *Petra* means rock. Jesus used a word that the Jews associated the identity of God with in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul makes the same use of the word **rock**.

1 Corinthians 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the **rock was Christ.**

**πέτρας,** noun genitive feminine singular common from **πέτρα**

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**Friberg,** *Analytical Greek Lexicon*

[Fri] **πέτρα**, **ας**, **ἡ** (1) literally, living *rock, bedrock* (MT 7.24), in contrast to πέτρος (isolated *stone*); *cliff rock*, in which tombs may be hewn out (MK 15.46) or caves and clefts may be found (RV 6.15); *rocky ground* or *soil* (LU 8.6); (2) metaphorically, of Christ; (a) as the antitype fulfilling the event foreshadowed by the rock in the wilderness, offering "living water" when struck (1C 10.4); (b) as the rock of offense to Israel when it rejected him as the spiritual cornerstone or capstone of the invisible temple of God (RO 9.33; 1P 2.8); (3) figuratively, as the spiritual foundation of the church (MT 16.18), interpreted variously to refer to the affirmation Peter made (MT 16.16), to the apostle Peter (ὁ Πέτρος) as the leader of the apostolate, or to Christ himself

**πέτρα** N-NF-S πέτρα

Regarding Peter to be the person Jesus founded His Ekklesia upon. . . news to Peter, he never claims anywhere in the New Testament that He is the Rock of the Church. Peter refers to Jesus as the Rock (1 Peter 2:8). Peter preaches in Acts 4:11. . .

He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. (Acts 4:11).

**So, why go into this much detail concerning Matthew 16:18?**

Because the Roman Catholic, state church, quotes this verse to hold Peter up as the person the Church is founded. They claim a double Apostolic founding from Peter and Paul. But Paul writes the book of Romans to a church he had never seen (Romans 1:10-11). So, through correct hermeneutics (the study of the methodological principles of interpretation) and exegesis (the critical explanation or interpretation of a text) anyone can see that their claim is baseless.

**Translating the word “Ekklesia” . . .**

**What is the difference?**

It is of note that translating from Greek New Testament texts. . .the Bishop’s Bible: 1595 A.D.; Matthew’s Bible: 1537 A.D.; Tyndale: 1534 A.D., all do not use the word “church” in Matthew 16:18 and are consistent in translating “ekklesia” into “congregation” or “assembly”. The translators of the King James of 1611 translated the Greek “Ekklesia” as “church” and did not follow the 16th c. translators. There are Old English (West Saxon dialect of Old English) called the Wessex Gospels (c.1175 A.D.) and the Old English work of John Wycliffe (1382 A.D.) that translated from Roman Catholic Latin text that did use the word “church” in their English translations. Again, they translated from the Latin which was the State Roman Catholic text.

**Benefit of the Believer’s Gathering**

To non-believers, what we Christians do in communion with God needs to be explained. . . like who is God? And why do we commune or worship Him? It is impossible to define God, but there are observations we can make. I see there is value in one of the leading Christian Apologist, Dr. William Lane Craig’s explanation of God:

“Philosophically speaking God is a maximally great being… God is a being that is the greatest conceivable being. God is a beginningless, uncaused, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, enormously powerful, personal creator and designer of the universe, who is the locus of absolute moral value, and who exists with metaphysical necessity.” https://bestofapologetics.com/2021/11/24/william-lane-craig-defines-god/

**Old Testament Descriptions of God**

**Isaiah**

41:4 "Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He. "

44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.

48:12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last.

**New Testament Description of God**

**Revelation**

1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

1:17 When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

2:8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

21:6 Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.

 With these foundational understandings aforementioned as to explaining God and who His Ekklesia is founded, let us now look into some of the significant historical settings surrounding the book of Acts. I tress that it is a spiritual effort to understand God’s workings in the lives of people. Believers congregate together to receive spiritual fulfillment and life-nourishing words from God. To accomplish this, God worked through the lives of the Apostles and leading disciples to teach the New Covenant in His gatherings.

Last week, we read from the book of Acts to receive the witness of the transitional time in the new movement called “The Way” (Acts 19:9,23). Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6).

The “Way and Truth of Jesus” contrasted the historical Jewish and Roman culture in which God Incarnated Himself. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons people responded. Two-thousand years ago, the Roman-Greek culture with its pantheism of mythological gods dominated the Roman Empire from Spain, North Africa, to the Middle East. The gods were sought-out to seek appeasement from life’s hardships. Again, the Jewish monotheistic belief in the one Creator God was and is in contrast to the Roman-Greek pantheistic religions and all ritual practices associated with them. The Romans tolerated the Jewish beliefs as long as they paid their taxes and stayed peaceful. The Romans viewed Jesus’ followers as an offshoot of Judaism that would soon dissipate into history as had all the other religious movements. But then. . . there was the Resurrection and Resurrection appearances. . . and the Roman and Jews could not produce Jesus’ body and the tomb remained empty.

The Resurrection witnessed that there is one true God of the Creation, and all other made-up gods were just an extension of fallen man’s desire. The God of the Resurrection overcame death and promised that those who surrendered to Him would also inherit eternal life. Jesus’ Cross proclaimed that all the deadly forces in this life were to no avail over His resurrection power. The one Resurrection event directly witnessed the promise of eternal life to all who had a heart-surrender to God and called upon His name to be saved from sin and death (Acts 2:37, Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32).

No government in history can stop the Gospel Message from reaching the hearts and minds of people who are desperate to be relieved of their fear and guilt of the sin that has accumulated in their life. The criminal on his cross beside Jesus surrendered to Jesus and called out to the Lord to be remembered. Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" (Luke 23:42). This is why the Roman Empire eventually (312 A.D.) called-out to Jesus to be saved. We have recounted many times the epiphany that the pagan Constantine experienced which was the turning point in his military effort to become Emperor of Rome in 312 A.D. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/constantine>

**Explaining Acts 1**

The book of Acts is named for the Acts of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Disciples of Jesus Christ who suffered and died for the sins of the world to resurrect Himself. . . thereby demonstrating His superior creative-life-power over sin and death. Remember, all things were created by Jesus Christ in the beginning (John 1:1,2). The power to create life has the power and authority to resurrect life. This is the power behind the New Covenant. Why a New Covenant?

God brought about, that is made happen, many events in nature and in people’s lives to bring about the New Covenant to fulfill what the Old Covenant could not do nor was ever intended to accomplish. The New Covenant is also a refutation that any kind of human works/merit can justify a person to God. The New Testament book of Hebrews is the transitional book that details every aspect of God’s plan. There are two New Testament verses that highlight God’s transitional plan. Remember, Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17), and, in Hebrews 10, God provides the details.

For your convenience, I have copied (below) the complete chapter of Hebrews 10. I have color-coded some focus verses for our application today, but all these verses completed together, with the whole book and the entire Bible, make the witness that. . .

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

I greatly encourage you to spend time in reading and studying the entirety of the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews is the gateway from the Old to the New Covenant.

**Hebrews 10:1-39**

**1** For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

 3 But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year.

 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

 5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;

 6 IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE TAKEN NO PLEASURE.

 7 "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"

 8 After saying above, "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*" (which are offered according to the Law),

 9 then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

 11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

 12 but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

 13 waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.

 14 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

 15 And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

 16 "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," *He then says*,

 17 "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."

 18 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.

 19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,

 21 and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God,

 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

 28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses.

 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

 30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."

 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

 32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

 33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

 37 FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

 38 BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

 39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

**In review**, God’s acts chronicled in Acts 1 is a transitional narrative from the Gospel’s account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ to the History of the God’s Spirit Believer’s Assembly. So, in preparation for the launch of Jesus’ ‘empowered by the Holy Spirit Believer’s assembly’ . . .

**Jesus Commissioned the Congregation of Disciples, “The Ekklesia”**

**. . . To Witness His Gospel Message and Then. . . He Ascended to Heaven.**

**Acts 1:1-9 1** The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, **2** until the day when He was taken up *to heaven*, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. **3** To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of* forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. **4** Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," *He said*, "you heard of from Me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

**6**So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" **7** He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; **8** but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and **you shall be My witnesses** both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." **9** And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

**AMEN**