

More About Jesus, Week 33: Jesus had a vision for the church today

by Paul Hammons

In John's gospel, read about Jesus in his final weeks of earthly ministry focusing more of his attention on his apostles, preparing them for the work they would have to perform after he had left this earth. Because after Jesus ascended, he left them to complete the construction of his greatest creation: the church.

The formation of Jesus' church was always in his mind as he walked this earth. Not an afterthought or a "Plan B," as some argue. The assembly we are brought into through Christ's blood today (**1 Peter 1:19**) was always Jesus' purpose: the manifestation of God's wisdom to the world (**Eph. 3:10**).

As Jesus reminded the twelve during the last supper about their need to love each other and live as servants, he prayed to God that the model would be repeated throughout history in each of us!

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." - **John 17:20–21**

It's a reminder that while Jesus was preparing his apostles for their special ministry of witnessing to the resurrection and opening the doors to the kingdom of Heaven, Jesus was also teaching them to set the example for the disciples to come, providing a model to God's people of how they ought to live with each other, and how his body would function moving forward.

Jesus pictured people from all nations responding in faith to the gospel message not by being overwhelmed by the miracles and signs that the apostles had seen, but by apostles' testimony. The church would be – and now is - a group of people whose hearts are seeking the Lord and willing to accept the evidence of scripture and the eyewitness accounts of men who had been with the Lord and seen all that he had done.

That's not a new development - God has always desired for His creation to seek him in faith, not demanding that God come down and reveal Himself fully to us and prove his existence, but instead for us to see His works around us, hear the power of His revealed word, and recognize our creator.

Jesus reminded the apostles of this after his resurrection, when he appeared first to the 10 apostles, and then to the 11 along with Thomas, who had insisted *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe"* (**John 20:25**).

After Thomas had been convinced, Jesus asked him, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (**Jn 20:29**).

Jesus' focus during his time on earth wasn't just the apostles, it wasn't just the people around him who needed his healing and salvation. Jesus was thinking of us, setting in place a way by which his power and grace could be extended to each one of us – even though we did not have the honor of meeting our Lord in person, or seeing the power he showed to those who lived then.

The apostles were empowered to speak all the things Jesus had taught them (**Matt. 28:20**), being assisted by the Holy Spirit to remember all the things we would need to hear (**John 14:26**), in order that centuries later, we might be bound together by the same love, faith, and purpose as those first Christians.

When Peter confessed his faith that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, Peter told him that what he had just confessed would be the basis on which every soul from then on would be called into fellowship with God: *"I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (**Mt 16:17–18**).

In **John 21**, shows us one of Jesus' final exchanges with the apostles, and during that discussion with Peter, Jesus impresses on him the importance of that mission, three times telling him, *"Feed my sheep"* (**John 21:17**). The sheep Jesus had died for (**John 10:11**). The sheep Jesus said had yet to be gathered from the nations around them (**John 10:16**) to share in the unity that he instilled in his apostles. The sheep that Jesus desires to call into his flock today, under his grace.

We are called to accept the gospel by faith, just as so many were expected to believe and seek God without seeing miracles before Christ came to the world. But we can have the assurance that we were always in Jesus' mind and his prayers as he trained the men who would teach us through their inspired writing today.

As John writes near the end of his gospel account: *"These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* (**John 20:31**).