

# **JURASSIC CHURCH**



***A Sermon based from Matthew and Acts***

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## JURASSIC CHURCH: Basic Practices of the First Church

*Matthew 16:18 I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

*Acts 2:41-47 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

When two people share the same genetic heritage, we're not surprised if they look alike in many ways. Through the study of human genetics, we are learning that central in our design is something called DNA, a kind of code that represents much of our physical makeup. *A few weeks ago I asked my 4 year old daughter who she was more like, mommy or daddy. I was merely checking to see if she got it right. "Mommy" of course, the answer came back. Hoping to straighten her out I appealed to her sense of sympathy "Well, who's daddy like then?" Do you know what she said? "You're like Dick Gordon!" Now many of you know Dick, and he IS one of my good friends. But he's much older than me! Can you believe that! Then she said, You're almost like twins!". I decided to drop it there while I was ahead. Like it or not, Charissa does share a few of my features. And these features are in the genetic code, the DNA. DE-OXY-REBO NUCLEIC ACID. Powerful stuff.*

**In the best selling book Jurassic Park**, scientists uncover a small sample of preserved dinosaur DNA and find a way to clone it into living dinosaurs. They populate an island off the coast of Florida with interesting species and open the ultimate theme park of the future. It's all going great until, to their surprise, the dino's begin to reproduce on their own and soon overrun the island and escape to the mainland and surprise!: man is no longer at the top of the food chain. Mean little Barney's are everywhere squishing cars and making trouble. Fortunately, scientists tell us this whole idea is impossible. Thank goodness! It would just be one more excuse for raising insurance premiums! Dinosaurs on the loose would be bad news.

**That's a little like how Satan must have felt when Jesus created the church in Acts chapter 2.** Jesus had promised the formation of the church in Matt 16:18 when he said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Satan thought he'd eliminated that threat when they buried the Son, but just as Christ promised He rose again, and just as He'd promised, the church arrived right on schedule. It was bad enough, to see Jesus alive again, but even worse to see him begin to populate the earth with these ubiquitous little living breathing

outposts called churches. Too often in our culture we've come to see churches as insipid little weak collections of fussy people who worry about trivialities like brass plaques and pew pads, bell towers and rummage sales. But in Satan's eyes, a healthy church is like a full grown tyrannosaurus rex, because when Christ gave birth to the church and placed it at the top of the spiritual food chain, so to speak, by giving the church authority to represent Him and enforce the victory He won at the cross.

**Jesus said "I will build my church" and today, you and I are part of that church.** You can draw a line directly from Jesus promise to the birth of the church in Acts 2, to thousands upon thousands of churches around the world that serve Christ today. No doubt, today's church has many faults, but it is still tied to that first church and still shares that same DNA. And we can still change the world without weapons or armies or human power .

**So what was this DNA on which Christ built the first church and continues to build today?** This morning we'll explore four basic practices of the first church, the Jurassic church, a church in touch with who it was and connected to the true power source...the church as we must be in our generation. (NOTE:) These are not the **only** four practices of a church, but these four formed the foundation and are the most basic elements of church life. A local church can live without a building, or a library, or a budget, or even a paid staff. But a church isn't a church without these, and the health of a church is directly proportional to the health of these basic practices.

**Lets read Acts 2:42, a very short text, but packed with truth.**

**NOTICE: The Nature of Their Commitment:** We see here four basic practices of this first church. But before we look at these four commitments one at a time, I'd like us to notice the nature of their commitment. It's in this phrase translated "They continually devoted themselves". Notice, this was not just a one time commitment, or commitment repeated a few times, it was repeated continually. In fact, the word means to be continuously earnest toward a thing, constantly diligent in it...They understood that just as individuals don't grow to maturity overnight, so it is with our corporate life as a church. Churches don't just happen to be strong and vibrant and overflowing. They are strong and vibrant because people care and put their heart and soul into building up the fire at the core of the church. Churches don't just happen to split in two. Someone has to work at it to make that happen too. And someone else has to stand aside and let it happen. The spiritual life of a church is an ongoing effort, it's a continual effort in which these four most basic elements of our life together play a key role. They keep the life of the church fresh and new and vital. How can you and I help keep the life of the church from becoming stale and dry ? By attending personally to the fire of our walk with God and to the fire of the church as a group. It's a balance of individual and group life. Each of us is a part of this fire we call the church, each of us needs to attend to the flame in our own lives with God, and attend to the flame of the group as well. Elton Trueblood points out that it is very difficult to build a good fire with only one log, no matter how hard you try. But you can build a very good fire with several logs, even if they're bad logs. When you let go and let your spiritual passion grow cold and apathetic, it affects all of us and the ministry we have together. Keep this in mind as we look at the four basic practices of the first church. It's an ongoing commitment to both

individual and group life. And we need to ask ourselves about our own commitment to these basics. They're ordinary practices, with extraordinary power.

**Transition Statement: The first basic practice of a Jurassic church is:**

### **1. A Continual Recommitment to Study the Truth of God**

The text says "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching." When the first church was born there was no New Testament to study. God taught through the apostles who had been chosen by Christ himself, who had walked with Christ, been taught by Christ, seen Christ die and live again. This is what is meant by the apostles teaching. Later these teachings formed what we call the New Testament.

[In about the third century, the church developed a writing called the Apostles Creed that summarized the teachings of the Christian faith. To this day, the vast majority of orthodox Christian churches hold to this basic statement of faith. You'll find an insert in your bulletin with the Apostles Creed written on it. I'd like us to take a minute to read it together.]

The early church devoted itself to studying these subjects and learning the truths of God. They committed themselves to understand it deeply on an ongoing basis. Jesus had said that the truth would make you free. Throughout the first days of the first church the study of doctrines of the New Testament was central. Throughout the book of Acts as new churches were established they held teaching the truth of God as central to their purpose and practice. One group was commended for its excellent heart in studying the scriptures, we're told that the Bereans "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. "

In the book *Loving God*, Charles Colson describes a remarkable struggle that took place in Viet Nam prison camp around 1970. There, a number of soldiers who were Christians who found themselves ripped away from freedom, formed a rudimentary little church. As I prepared for today and tried to think of a way to help us revisit these ordinary practices in a fresh light. I recalled this story and I found that they practiced virtually all of these basic practices of the first church there in prison. I'll refer to this account two or three times to help us see these practices with new eyes. These men, broken away from fellowship in freedom, formed a Jurassic Fellowship behind bars. Listen to their hunger for the truth of God:

Illustrate It: For years these prisoners had asked for a Bible. One day in December they got to see one. The English speaking interrogator brought one into cell 4 and the men gathered around. Jeff Powell read the Christmas story aloud, then several psalms, then the Sermon on the Mount. The men were not sure how long they would have the Bible or whether they would ever see it again, so James turned to I Corinthians 13 and memorized the chapter. The Bible was in the cell for two hours....Later, in the Spring of 1971 the North Vietnamese permitted three prisoners to copy the Bible for one hour a week. James Ray was one of the three. He sat on a wooden chair at a wooden table and began copying the Sermon on the Mount. The guard standing close by, watching, repeatedly placed his elbow on the verse he was trying to copy. When the guard moved his elbow, Ray wrote so fast his hand cramped. **Each day when he brought the precious words back to the cell, Ray's cellmates recopied the words in the crude fashion**

**they had devised for other writing: on toilet paper with brick dust ink and quill pens.** The verses were also immediately memorized by different prisoners." In the absence to free access to the word of God, these Christians found ways to lap up every drop.

**Summarize:** Likewise, the Jurassic church continually recommitted itself to understanding God's truth.

Transition Statement: The second key practice of the early church was:

## **2. A Continual Recommitment to Participate in the Family of God -- this is Fellowship**

The word used here is "koinonia" and it speaks of partnership or participation together in the Christian life. Koinonia means simply **shared life**, it means sharing the journey together with other Christians who are on the same road, on the same walk with Christ, and with us.

a. The word blends two ideas together, the first is the idea of **exhortation**...koinonia involves exhorting or urging one another on, to grow in accord with God's truth. **Hebrews 10:25** "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

b. The second aspect of koinonia as used here is **comforting** one another over the bumps in the road. We go through many things, sometimes they hurt, but in koinonia we share those hurts together and they are lessened. 2 Corinthians. 1:4 says that God "comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." We share what God has given to us.

I need to experience koinonia because it is a kind of medicine for the bruises of life. I need close relationships with Christian brothers and sisters who care enough to listen and help keep me on track. I also need to offer koinonia fellowship to others to be healthy.

[Illustrate It: One day this week I was feeling sorry for myself and. I felt like saying "Lord, **only I** face such difficulties!" Then as I went to a meeting across town I ran into Wayne Hendrickson who works in the same organization as I , and he's facing similar hassles, but he was cheerful and trusting God. And I thought, this isn't so bad. And just sharing the road gave me a better grasp, reminded me of God's goodness. ]

Illustrate It: That little church in the POW camp went to great lengths to share their life together. Let me read this. "They made up a code based on Morse Code and communicated that way, with their ears to the walls and their bodies wrapped in blankets to keep the noise down. *The men recalled and taught each other Scripture and learned the names and serials numbers of every prisoner. They learned who had been transferred and who was being tortured. In this way they shared each other's pain. On Sunday morning, when the guards gave them a chance, the senior officers in each cellblock thumped on the wall five times, alerting the prisoners in solitary as well as those who had cellmates, that it was time to worship. Each man recited the Lords Prayer or the 23rd Psalm, then they sang silent hymns and private prayers. A new prisoner was stuck in solitary confinement at the end of the building. Each morning he ran in place to keep in shape,*

*shaking the entire structure. After the new man was taught the tap code, he began running in an odd, jerky way. Seven men at the other end of the cell block deciphered the jogger's message: "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help. I will lift up mine eyes to the hills..."*

Summarize: This little church behind bars found a way to fellowship, to share the journey together, we need that as much as they did. Koinonia.

Transition Statement: Thirdly, a Jurassic church practices

### **3. A Continual Recommitment to Remember the Son of God -- Breaking of Bread**

The early church shared the Lord's Supper, as we did a few minutes ago. It really goes way beyond just "remembering" Jesus. It is one of the most profound practices of the church. It is a ritual, an action we repeat over and over that in a powerful way transfers us to another time and place and allows us to experience the words and presence of Jesus as if we were there today. **"This bread is my body broken for you, this cup is my blood shed for you."**

As the early church observed this ordinance, they were repeatedly reminded that they represent the one who died and lives again. They were not an institution of human origin, but the community of followers of the Son. They had no confusion about who they were following. And they experienced fellowship with Him at the Lord's Table.

Illustrate It: Here's how this little captive church experienced the Lord's Supper together while they were in captivity: "Captain Tom Curtis woke up early and studied the notes and verses that he and James Ray had assembled the previous evening. Curtis looked at the roomful of sleeping prisoners around him. Twenty-eight men, all flyers. At about ten o'clock Curtis stood in front of the drab eastern wall and called the service to order. The men gathered in a semi-circle before him. It was Easter Sunday. A quartet sang "The Old Rugged Cross" and then everyone joined in Amazing Grace. Curtis recited the version of the passion of Christ that the men had patched together from memory, *"And when they had bound Him they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate and they stripped Him and put a crown of thorns on His head and spit on Him and hit Him and then they said Crucify Him."* As he listened to the familiar words, Curtis thought of the experiences they all had shared: being bound, chained, spit upon, whipped, lashed to trees, stoned. Then someone handed Curtis several pieces of bread that had been saved from their previous days rations. *"And He took the bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying, 'Take, eat, this is My body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.'"* The bread was passed and quietly eaten. Then Curtis repeated the versus about the cup *"This is My blood shed for you."* He thought, these men know about blood. From open wounds, lacerations, ruptured eardrums, torn out fingernails, blood that seeped even through makeshift bandages. Now they thought about Christ's blood shed for them. A cup of carefully saved seaweed soup was passed. Someone quietly hummed amazing grace. As Curtis brought the cup to his lips, he began to weep. He wondered if they had any right to identify their suffering with Christ's. But then, wasn't their presence in this place, alive against all odds, a sign of Christ's continuing presence? He remembered that Christ had said He would found His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. They were part of that church, a part of

the broken body of Christ in every way. Christ had prevailed, for here they were, **worshipping** Him in the jungles of a world gone mad.

When we share the Lord's Table, we remember his death and suffering, we enter into His presence, and we look forward to sitting down with Him in the kingdom.

Summarize: The first church that changed the world, continually recommitted themselves to Remembering the Person & Work of Christ.

Transition Statement: Finally, the first church made

#### **4. A Continual Recommitment to Seek the Face of God --**

We read that they committed themselves to prayer. The early church had a lot to pray about. They were poor, they were opposed, they were persecuted. And they gathered together to offer up their needs and hurts and cares to God. After one roughing up by the authorities we read this about the Jurassic Church:

Acts 4:24 "They raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. '...29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. "

They sought His will for them as a group and sought His power in their ministry. They sought boldness to share the Gospel. You and I need to share in corporate prayer. Whether in a Contact Group or a prayer cell or with a prayer partner. Corporate prayer is where we remember who holds up the heavens...remember who the Shepherd is, who the Comforter is, and who the Leader is. And as we pray together as a group we draw upon the life of Christ in our souls. The Jurassic church prays together.

**Conclusion:** So we've seen that a Jurassic Church continually recommits itself afresh to understanding the truth of God, Loving the People of God, Remembering the Son of God, and Seeking the Face of God. Each of us needs to find places to participate in each aspect of the life of the body--this is vital both to my individual health and to the health of the church.

**And these four commitments of the first church did not go without results.** When you build up a fire, it gets hotter and things happen. And throughout the book of Acts the church spread like a flame. Here's a list of some of the results or byproducts of their life together:

#### **Spiritual Byproducts of Dynamic Life with God....Acts 2:43-47**

1. Overflow of God's Power (43) ...things happened, lives were changed, God moved mightily.
2. Unity Among God's People (44)...we always need this.

3. Spontaneous Sharing of Resources (45)...they gave like there was no tomorrow.
4. Family Closeness (46)
5. Celebrative Praise (47)
6. Spiritual Attraction (47) -- People just wanted to be around the life and joy they saw in these people.
7. Church Growth. (47)

**Close:** Let me close with this quote from Elton Trueblood. "Renewal will not come merely by the acts of professional renewers or by top down operations, it will come only when Christians understand and implement the idea that the call to ministry is universal. Renewal does not come unless the members accept unreservedly and unapologetically the fact that each one is called to be an active member of Christ's team. There are meant to be exactly as many missionaries and evangelists as there are members. The only way to be loyal to the fire of Christ is to spread it.

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[Much of our present danger is that we do not see our task in its proper magnitude. Even when we accept the basic figure of the church as a fire, we tend to interpret our calling as keeping the little flame in the effort to keep it flickering a little longer. What we ought to know is that a flame cannot in its very nature be contained. Without growth, extinguishment is inevitable, because, with fire, there is no third way."]



## THE APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;  
He descended into Hades,;  
the third day He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty;  
from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Christian church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

## *Then what happened?*

1. An Outpouring of God's Power (43)
2. Profound Unity Among God's People (44)
3. Spontaneous Sharing of Resources (45)
4. Family Closeness (46)
5. Celebrative Praise (47)
6. Spiritual Attraction (47)
7. Church Growth. (47)

