

THE224 Christian Narrative 2 Redemption

Unit 4c The Concept of Community

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Hello and welcome to Session 4C. Today we're going to talk about the concept of the community. We'll begin here to talk about ecclesiology or the church and the study of the church in Scripture. Let's start with our main teaching point for today. Our main teaching point is that the church is a God-revealed and Christ-ordered community. There are two core passages that I want to look at with you today that will help us understand the idea that the church is a God-revealed and Christ-ordered community. The first is the passage that you see in front of you, Matthew 16:16-18. Here we have Peter's confession of the fact that Jesus is the son of God, and Jesus responds to Peter. And here is where we find one of those first usages of the word church, and we'll talk about its significance. So, "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And 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.'"

So first, before we go any further, take a quick look at the word church. Here's the word ecclesia, that Greek word which means those who are called out, the called out ones. And so as we begin our conversation about the church, we recognize it is a group of people that have been called out by God. Yet what I want us to see in this text as well as the text that we will look at next is that there are four core components or four necessary elements to the church. First, we see a God-revealed confession. What the church confesses is related to exactly what God has revealed to the church. The church cannot create its own confession. It is dependent on what Scripture teaches us and what God has revealed to us about who God is and how he has called his community to relate. So if we look over to our left, we see in this passage, the first chunk of this passage really deals with the idea that God has revealed a core confession to Peter and that this confession did not come through Peter's own search for discovery or search for truth, but rather that it was given to him directly by God. Notice there that when he calls Jesus the Son of the Living God, Jesus responds to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." That's a keyword: revealed. "But my Father who is in heaven." The Christian community of the church must confess what God reveals to it and cannot in fact pursue anything else.

Next, we see that Christ-appointed leadership exists within the Christian community, within the church. Here in this passage in Matthew 16, what happens after Jesus points out that it was God who revealed this truth to Peter, he goes on to tell Peter that "You will have a part to play in the building of my church. You will be a leader." Notice. "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I (Jesus) will build my church." So there's this idea that Jesus is appointing the leadership in his community. And we're going to see this as a consistent theme throughout the New Testament: God-revealed confession and Christ-appointed leadership.

Thirdly, we see that there is Christ-ordered community. Of course, we notice here the word church is used. And I talked about that word just a little bit ago that it is this called out group. There's automatically a community that is pointed out in this Matthew 16 passage. Simon Peter himself is the one that notes that Jesus is the Son of the Living God, that he is the Christ. Jesus turns and says, "Blessed are you." But in confessing this reality, in receiving this truth from God and then being appointed, we see that Christ is immediately going to build a community around this truth, around this confession that he is in fact the son of God. And this confession will draw people to itself, will draw people into community with one another who are going to confess this together. And this is why God has appointed leadership in community. But notice both the leadership and the community related to the confession come from Christ. He's the one that's putting them together.

So we have God-revealed confession, Christ-appointed leadership, Christ-ordered community, and finally, we have Christ-appointed mission. There is a clear direction that this new community is going to take. And here we see it at the bottom, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” So there is going to be this mission and this purpose that is infused into this community that God is revealing through confession and Christ is appointing through his commands here, and they’ll have to do this. So the mission of the church will come against the gates of hell, but hell will not overcome the church. So here we have one of two core passages that help us understand this God-revealed community of the church. And in this Matthew 16 passage, we’ve seen four necessary components of the church: God-revealed confession, Christ-appointed leadership, Christ-ordered community, and Christ-appointed mission.

Now, I want us to look at another text here in front of us. It’s Ephesians 3:1-10. This is a second core text that is going to talk to us about the God-revealed community. And as we look at this text (and I’ll read it for us here in a moment), I want us to spot those same four core components that we’ve just found in Matthew 16. So as I read, you try and pick them out, and then I’ll review them with you and see if you found them. So Ephesians 3:1-10, “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”

So as I read that, I hope you were listening for and trying to spot those four core components of the God-revealed community. Let me review it with you now and see if you were able to spot those places. First, we see God-revealed confession yet again, that it is God who has made known a mystery by revelation to Paul. Paul could not, in his own research and his own study, come to the conclusion of the church the way that God has revealed it to him. And so as we consider the church, we have to recognize that what the church confesses is exactly what God has revealed to it. It is a unique revelation from God. Here we go. “How the mystery was made known to me by revelation... When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,” and this “was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy prophets and apostles by the Spirit.”

Next, we see Christ-ordered community. Verse 6, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body.” There’s that important word. “And partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel... so that...” and this is verse 10, “through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” Now, we’ll come back and look at verse 10 in a minute for another one of the core components, but notice there we have the word church used again. So that those called out by God may be made known the manifold wisdom of God. Now, again, this is Christ-ordered community. This is Jesus Christ connecting people together and putting them into the context of community that they might confess what God has revealed. God-revealed confession, Christ-ordered community.

We also see Christ-appointed leadership. Verse 7, “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.” Here Paul, like Peter, is directed by Christ to take part in the leadership of this community. This wasn't an application process that Paul followed. Paul didn't say, “Well, I'd really like to work in the church. It seems like a great organization. If you take a look at my résumé and connect with my references, you'll find that I'm more than qualified.” No. Christ was intentional in his selection of both Paul and Peter and others as well. And so we see that Christ-appointed leadership is a core component to the God-revealed community. God-revealed confession, Christ-ordered community, Christ-appointed leadership, and finally, Christ-appointed mission.

We come back to verse 10 and we notice that the mission of this church is to make manifold the wisdom of God and make it known to the rulers and authorities that are in heavenly places. So we have this opportunity now to understand that the community that God is putting together, the church, is really driven by the triune God. We see God the Father, God the Son, and actually God the Holy Spirit involved, all three involved in the process of revealing and building and establishing this new community, this new church, this group of people that have been called out. And that every stage, every boundary of the church, if you will, is directed by this triune God. God reveals the confession. Christ orders the community, who is in and who is out. Christ appoints the leadership for this community and appoints the particular reasons for its existence, its mission. These four ideas are all necessary components of the God-revealed community.

So let's take a slightly deeper look into each one of these ideas one at a time. We start with God-revealed confession. When we talk about this idea of God-revealed confession, we've already noted that the concepts, the confession of the church come from God himself, that in our own study apart from the revelation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we would not be able to discover the truth of the Scriptures. And so we read about the truth that the church is a divine concept more than it is a human concept in Galatians 1. There in verses 11 and 12, we read, “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Friends, we go to churches, and those of you who are participating in this course, if we were to take a poll, all of us are going to a pantheon of different churches that worship Christ. But what we have to recognize is that what we confess as Christians is not human wisdom. And in fact, it is divine wisdom. The church is a revealed mystery. We looked at this, right? This is Ephesians 3. “How the mystery was made known to me by revelation.” Right? “As you read what I speak to you, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, a mystery which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” The church is a divine concept which is revealed to us. And powerfully speaking, the church is for all believers.

Now, this is something that we've embraced readily in our world today. We might talk about some of the racial tensions that exist in the world, but this was a new concept because there was a God-ordered community of the Old Testament, the people, the nation of Israel. But the God-ordered community of the New Testament post-Christ is different in that it's more inclusive. And so when we look at Ephesians 2, we read an extremely powerful description of what God is doing. And so we must confess that this is what God has done. Starting in verse 10 of Ephesians 2, we read this. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should

walk in them. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Amen. What a powerful reality. And we confess exactly what God has revealed to us. God-revealed confession is a divine mystery that has been revealed to us. Now, let’s take a look at the Christ-ordered community. The church is Christ’s body. We’ll talk more in a later lesson about some of the visuals that we’re given throughout Scripture about how to understand the church community. But we start by saying we recognize ultimately that the community Christ is ordering is his body. Ephesians 1:22-23, “[God] put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” Jesus wanted to build for himself a communal body, and so this is what he calls the church.

We also see that the church is Christ’s purchased possession. As we talked through the act of salvation, we recognized that those who are saved are brought into this community. And so we read in Acts 20:28, another great passage related to leadership of the church. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” And so Christ is, if you will, zealous for his community because he has purchased his community. And as we saw in the passage we read just a moment ago in Ephesians 2, in Christ, Jew and Gentile are one body. There is not a first class and second class citizenship in the Christ-ordered community. When Christ ordered his community, he made it level within the community.

Finally, we see that God had a specific purpose in mind for his church. Ephesians 3:10, we looked at this, right? He wanted his church to take the manifold wisdom of God and make it known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. And so we’ll also look at some of the purposes behind why God put his church together and gave them a specific role. Christ-ordered community. We are Christ’s possession and his body, members because he has purchased us through his blood. We also see Christ-appointed leadership. God called Peter to be a part of church leadership. God gave Paul the responsibility to administer the gospel to the Gentiles. Both of these men were not given an option. Neither did either of these men apply for a position. They both received the call of God in their life. We’ve talked about call in an earlier session and I just want to stress the importance of receiving the call of God in our lives. It’s absolutely essential. Christ called both Peter and Paul to be leaders within his church.

And in the life of Paul particularly, we see several places where this reality of being called is underscored. So in Ephesians 3:7, we hear Paul say, “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to

the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power." He received this role of leadership through the power of Jesus Christ and the gift of God's grace. Also, we see that his responsibility to lead within the church was an obligation, not an option. 1 Corinthians 9:16-17, "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship." Paul was required to steward the leadership that he'd been given. It wasn't his to give back to God. He had to do what Christ had called him to do. Christ-appointed leadership.

Finally, Christ-appointed mission. The church is to make known the manifold wisdom of God that, in essence, those who make up the church are a new creation. Ephesians 2:15-16, "By abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that [Christ] might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." He took two old people, brought them together, and made them one new man. The manifold wisdom of God that the church professes, that the church makes known, is that there is a new creation in Christ, that the old has passed away. Behold the new has come. And so we learn that God is restoring humanity, in fact, through the church. The church is to make known to the rulers and the authorities of heavenly realms this reality that God has sent his church into the world to redeem it, that the gates of hell will not overcome it, that in fact, the church is to be both salt and light, arresting the decay in the world. Where sin decays the world, the church stands as a salt holding back the decay, but the church also stands as a light trumpeting the truth and bringing newness to the world. And so we see that Christ is going to give, and we'll look deeper at it in the sessions to come, that Jesus gave a particular and powerful mission to his community, the church.

So we see that the church is a God-revealed and Christ-ordered community, that it is completely within the realm and under the authority and leadership of, and has been empowered with the power of, God. The church that you are part of, the church that I am a part of, we exist to confess the truth of who God is and who Jesus Christ is. We sit under the appointed leadership of Jesus Christ. We participate because we've been invited through Jesus Christ. And we accomplish the mission that he himself has given us. The church is God's revealed and Christ-ordered community.