

I Will Build My Church – Part 8

Matthew 16:18-19 (KJV) And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

- This series is about discovering God's blueprint for building His church!

PRINCIPLE #11: REACHING THE RELIGIOUS

(Acts 16:9, 16:25-26, 17:23, 18:24-26, 19:2)

Acts 18:9-10 (KJV) ⁹Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: ¹⁰For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

- Note that the further we get from the life of Jesus and the Day of Pentecost, the more we begin to find people or groups that know SOMETHING about Jesus without knowing everything they NEED to know about Him! That is definitely the case TODAY!
- The Bible says in Acts 11:26 that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Only a few months removed from the first Gentile convert (Cornelius in Acts 10), these disciples definitely had an “Acts 2” experience. But today, many religious people consider it an insult if you want to define the term “Christian” according to the Bible!
- As the church begins to grow and reach the Gentiles, Paul in particular begins to “reach the religious.” Let’s look at some of the principles that his story has to teach us ...

A. God doesn't do everything according to our EXPECTATIONS.

- **Acts 16:9 (KJV)** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.
- We don't know how Paul envisioned the Macedonian revival that God called him to, but we do know that it wasn't anything like it turned out! It was a MAN that Paul saw in his vision, but it was a WOMAN (Lydia) that first responded to the gospel.

- **Acts 16:25-26 (KJV)** ²⁵And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. ²⁶And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.
- For example, the Lord allowed Paul and Silas to be put in PRISON to further the revival in Philippi! Look at how God used this experience ...
 - **They prayed and sang praises at midnight.** What do we do when our circumstances say “prison”? Do we forget about evangelism? Or do we look for an opportunity in our crisis?
 - **The prisoners heard them.** You can't witness to prisoners if you don't hang out with prisoners! We've got to get to where the “prisoners” are, even if it inconveniences us!
 - **There was an earthquake and foundations were shaken.** The earthquake affected everyone, but Paul and Silas knew the reason behind it! When the “foundations” of society (or the lives of your friends) are shaken, let them know that you know the Answer!
 - **Doors were opened and bands were loosed.** When they allowed God to work through a situation that was not of their choosing, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and miraculous deliverances were the result!
- What will your reaction be if God chooses to use you in a different place than the one you have envisioned? Is evangelism your FIRST concern, or is it much further down your priority list, behind personal preference, comfort, position, etc.?

B. The greatest enemy of truth is PARTIAL TRUTH.

- **Acts 17:23 (KJV)** For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.
- Paul basically had a REVIVAL or a RIOT (or both!) everywhere he preached ... except in Athens, where the reaction was a puzzling indifference and polite curiosity. The problem with the Athenians was that they had been polluted by the “Graeco-Roman Pantheon.” It was the spiritual equivalent of the geographical statement, “All roads lead to Rome.” In their theology, everyone's opinion of God, salvation and the afterlife was equivalent. They were willing to hear Paul out, until He began to preach to them Absolute Truth (in this case, the judgment).

- Listening to the religious rhetoric of today, you would think that God's greatest concern is that Christianity becomes more tolerant of other religions, that doctrinal walls come down, etc. But this is not the Christianity of the Bible! Jesus, the Prince of Peace himself, said: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)
- Jesus constantly talked about the "division" His teaching would bring, and often contrasted the two types of disciples that would follow Him:
 - **TWO ROADS:** Two word pictures of a "narrow way" that is restricted and confined, like a difficult mountain pass, and a "broad way" that is wide-open country with no fences or boundaries, allowing its residents to go anywhere they want, for there is no road! (Matthew 7:13-14)
 - **TWO TREES:** Jesus gave us instructions to evaluate other believers, not by their professed doctrines, but by the practical outward effects ("fruit") of their teachings. (Matthew 7:18-20)
 - **TWO HOUSES:** One house is built on a foundation of obedience ("heareth ... and doeth") that withstands the storm while the other one has no foundation and collapses. (Mathew 7:24-25)
- Jesus faced those who wanted to be in the covenant of salvation without obeying the terms of the covenant. The Apostles faced the same thing with the Judaizers on one extreme and the Nicolaitanes on the other. Today, with more breeds of "Christianity" than ever before, we also must deal with this same problem.
- **What about all those "good Christian people"? Is it fair for God to exclude them from His covenant on a mere "technicality"? Why do they seem to be blessed by God also?**
- **The answer lies in a beautiful Old Testament type: There were two sons of Abraham, but only one was the son of promise!**
- **Genesis 17:20-21** And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.
- **Notice that Ishmael gets many blessings, but only Isaac gets a covenant!**

OLD TESTAMENT COVENANT	NEW TESTAMENT COVENANT
As long as there were no children of Sarah, Hagar was quite content to be a bondmaid. After all, her son Ishmael had love, gifts, favor and food throughout his childhood and into his teen years. He had no problem with any of Abraham's other children – until the <u>HEIR</u> was born.	Other "Christian" religions are content to co-exist with each other, and fellowship around the "lowest common denominator." They interpret God's blessing on them as His stamp of approval on what they preach and practice. An Apostolic with a non-negotiable message throws this status quo into chaos.
Hagar, Keturah, and all the other women that had relationships with Abraham (Genesis 25:1-6) had a much easier time conceiving than Sarah. But when Sarah conceived, she gave birth to the son of promise, because the relationship was according to God's covenant!	It is apparent that many other religions and groups have an easier time "giving birth" than the Apostolic church, because they preach a gospel that appeals to the flesh. But if people are not being baptized in Jesus' name, no one is getting into the covenant, no matter how large the crowd!
Hagar's roots were in <u>Egypt</u> , and although she had a <u>one-time intimacy</u> with Abraham, she knew her son would never have a <u>COVENANT</u> . Only the legitimate son of a legal relationship had that!	Occasional intimacy with God that begets "children after the flesh" is no substitute for covenant relationship. The children of the bond woman are fascinated by their Egyptian roots, and all they do is "Egypt-friendly."
It took the birth of Isaac to bring out the true nature of Ishmael. Imagine a 16-year-old being so jealous that he would viciously persecute a 3-year-old just because he was the heir! Ishmael, like his mother, had his roots in Egypt – and they were never eradicated!	The watchword of modern religion is "tolerance without absolutes." A thin veneer of "brotherly love" covers the vast quagmire of conflicting doctrines and beliefs. That is, until God's absolute plan of salvation is preached; then the true fighting nature of the bondwoman's son comes out!
The last straw was when Ishmael mocked Isaac on the day he was weaned (when he graduated to solid food). God agreed with Sarah that he and his mother should be cast out for this action. He was now not only outside the birthright (covenant), but outside the blessing (presence of Abraham) as well. <i><u>Galatians 4:29-30</u> But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.</i>	Where the dividing line really comes is at the point of "weaning," when the Apostolic church preaches and practices the meat of the Word . As long as they are walking toward truth, God has patience with them. But when they see it and reject it, God lifts His presence from them. Their work from that point is accomplished totally in the flesh. BE SURE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE TWO IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE! Are they walking <u>toward</u> truth or <u>away from</u> truth?
Because Hagar had a "common-law" relationship with Abraham, God promised to make Ishmael great. But though he was blessed and multiplied, Ishmael still was not <u>part of the covenant!</u>	God's blessing is never a sign of His blanket approval, but only of His inherent goodness. God always meets faith wherever He finds it. But crowds, miracles and blessings are not the seal of the covenant!
The prophetic command to barren Sarah is to rejoice, because she ultimately ends up with more children than Hagar. That's because only covenant children "count" in God's sight! <i><u>Galatians 4:27</u> For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.</i>	The prophetic picture of the endtimes is one of rejoicing for the Apostolic church, because of the great revival God is bringing. It is not time to think small because you have been intimidated by the bondwoman in the past! It is time to enlarge our thinking – we have the Covenant message!

- **Matthew 19:24-26** ²⁴And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a **RICH MAN (“plousios” – from root word meaning “fullness” or “abundance” – pictures a self-sufficient, full-of-their-own-goodness, very religious person)** to enter into the kingdom of God. ²⁵When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? ²⁶But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, **With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.**

C. The greatest friend of truth is a TEACHABLE SPIRIT.

- **Acts 18:24-26** ²⁴And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. ²⁶And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.
- The best opportunity for God to “reach the religious” is for a caring, concerned Apostolic to find ONE HUNGRY HEART and share with them what you have! Then the masses can be affected!
- Look at what is happening on the foreign field – and look at what happened in the book of Acts!
 - In Acts 3 it was one lame man at the Temple Gate
 - In Acts 8 it was one anonymous Ethiopian Treasurer
 - In Acts 9 it was one Pharisee named Saul
 - In Acts 9 it was one coat-maker named Dorcas
 - In Acts 10 it was one Roman Centurion named Cornelius
 - In Acts 14 it was one anonymous crippled man
 - In Acts 16 it was one seller of cloth named Lydia
 - In Acts 16 it was one anonymous Philippian jailer
 - In Acts 18 it was one ruler of the synagogue named Crispus
 - In Acts 18 it was one eloquent preacher named **Apollos**
- NOTE WHAT AQUILA AND PRISCILLA DID NOT DO:
 - They did not set the Apostolic message aside for the sake of fellowship with Apollos just because he preached Jesus
 - They did not deal with Apollos publicly, but rather privately
- NOTE WHAT AQUILA AND PRISCILLA DID DO:
 - They brought Apollos from where he was to where he needed to be by teaching him with a kind spirit
 - They connected him with other Apostolics immediately

- When Paul came to Ephesus, he found a group of disciples (almost certainly those of Apollos) who also had hungry hearts!

Acts 19:2 (KJV) He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

- Once again, although these disciples believed in Jesus, Paul expected them to get baptized in Jesus’ name and receive the Holy Ghost.
- **THIS EVENT IS RECORDED IN ACTS TO SET A PRECEDENT AS TO HOW TO DEAL WITH RELIGIOUS PEOPLE!**
- They had already been baptized “unto John’s baptism.” WHY WASN’T THIS ENOUGH?
 - John’s baptism was only ordained of God to be temporary, during the LIFE of Christ. Apostolic baptism has to do with obeying the gospel, which is the DEATH, BURIAL and RESURRECTION of Christ.
 - But more than that, John’s baptism was NAMELESS. Apostolic baptism invokes the name of Jesus Christ!
- Sometimes we have a misconception that the best way to win groups of religious people to the Lord is to WIN ARGUMENTS. But that only isolates us further from them.
- The best way to win groups of religious people is to WIN SOULS. No one can argue with changed lives!
- When the Apostolic church becomes as excited about SHARING the Truth as it is about KNOWING the Truth, revival will be inevitable!

Our Target

Fred Ricton

He is a high school graduate with some secondary education.

He is in his middle thirties, married with one child.

He likes upbeat and contemporary music.

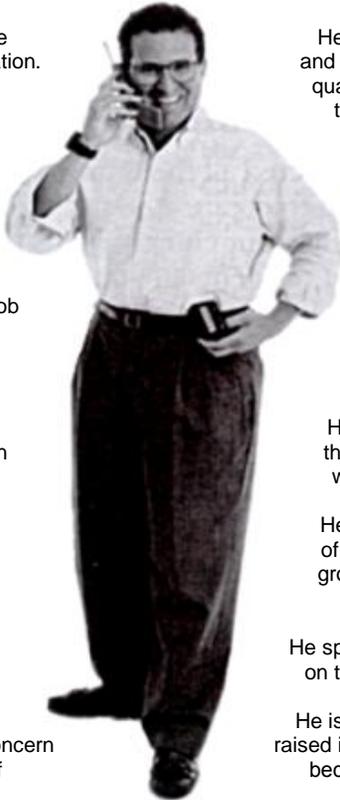
He works in a white collar service industry, and his wife also holds down a job to help make ends meet.

He prefers the casual and informal over the formal.

He is content with his station in life, and feels fortunate to have a job when many Atlantic Canadians do not.

He never complains when faced with unfriendliness or something he dislikes, but he does vow silently never to return.

He instinctively trusts those who are unselfish in their concern for others, but is skeptical of organized religion.



He grew up in New Brunswick and wants to stay here because quality of life is more important to him than pursuing wealth.

He is a great neighbor and a frequent volunteer for community projects.

Conflicting schedules are a major source of stress for him and his wife, interfering with their desire for more family time and recreational activities.

He lives in a modest home in the urban area, and is careful with his hard-earned money.

He is relaxed in a small group of friends, but prefers a larger group in unfamiliar settings so he can remain anonymous.

He spends over 25 hours a week on the internet, TV and movies.

He is loyal to the religion he was raised in, but never attends church because it doesn't speak to his spiritual needs.

