

Manna

Issue 85

TJC at 100: Towards the Triumphant Church

The Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End

A hundred years is a significant milestone, and milestones are important if we are serious about our goal.

The end of a thing is better than its beginning (Eccl 7:8a)

*"Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure.' " (Isa 46:10)*

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." (Rev 22:13)

This second centennial issue looks towards the triumphant church—conceived in eternity and declared at the very beginning—when the promised Savior will crush Satan under His feet and ours (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20).

Christ is called the Son of David because the Davidic kingdom was God's prophetic model of His eternal kingdom (Ps 89:20; Ezek 37:24; 2 Sam 7:12–16; Lk 1:32–33). After the captivity, no successor ever sat on David's throne. But James explained that David's tabernacle had been restored, and he added: "Known to God from eternity are all His works" (Acts 15:15–18).

Paul linked Christ's kingship to His priesthood—at His resurrection, Jesus brought forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:23–24, 37–39) and established God's kingdom as David's ultimate successor (Acts 13:33–34; Ps 2:6–12)!

The inaugurated status of the kingdom coincided with the birth of the church (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor 10:11). As priests and kings, we should follow our Master in fierce battle to win the world for Him (2 Tim 2:3–4; Rev 11:15). As one writer in this issue warns, the fallacious view of "realized eschatology" has led some within the True Jesus Church to lose focus on Christ's second coming, thus impeding our growth into the glorious church. The exile of Judah and destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.E. and again in 70 C.E. give us the clear message that hearts matter more to God than buildings. As God's people, we cannot but find glory in God alone, just as He is glorified through us (Isa 60:19, 21).

Apostasy plagued the church soon after the apostolic foundation was laid. In "Our Story," we are reminded to continue the story of the church as the truly revived apostolic church. The self-questioning in another theme article is timely: "Is it possible that after a century on earth, the True Jesus Church today has retained the form but not the soul of God's true church?"

The significance of century—let it be a blessing, not bane. We know whom we have believed, and that we are indeed His elect community—both an assurance and a great responsibility.

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The True Jesus Church Shall Prosper

Shun Dao Hsieh
Taichung, Taiwan

Editor's note: On March 25, 2017, Elder Hsieh, a veteran worker who started his full-time ministry in 1955, delivered an insightful and stirring message on the future of the True Jesus Church during a Sabbath service at the Centennial Commemoration and World Delegates' Conference held by the Taiwan General Assembly. Below is an excerpt.

INTRODUCTION

Since my conversion in 1947, I have heard the declaration “the True Jesus Church shall prosper” repeated by many workers of the preceding generations. Do we continue to hold this same belief?

Let us consider this topic from three perspectives: the criteria of the true

church; the gospel preached by the True Jesus Church; and the gospel to be preached to Israel.

CRITERIA OF THE TRUE CHURCH

First, let us review the three biblical requirements that define the true church.

Filled with the Spirit of Christ

And He put all things under [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22–23)

The church is Christ's body, and

His Spirit fills the church. Thus, the first requirement of the true church is that she must be filled with the Spirit of Christ. The abidance of His Spirit testifies that the church belongs to Christ.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (Rom 8:9)

One who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. This is true for both individual members as well as the church as a whole.



True Jesus Church in Irvine, California, USA.

Proclaims the Words of Christ

The second requirement is that the church must proclaim the words of Christ. Her beliefs and her teachings must be in full accordance with the teachings of the Bible. She must correctly explain the word of God.

Knowing that the imparted truth might be lost over time, the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples, before His ascension, to: “[teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). The truth taught by the Lord Jesus had to be passed down from generation to generation; only then would He abide with the church until the end of time.

True believers live according to the words of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. Such fidelity to God’s word characterizes the teachings of the true church. We must never equate our own opinions to biblical principles. Nor should we accept teachings that are based solely on human rationale. This is the attitude that the True Jesus Church has held from her establishment. If the teachings of Jesus are altered, the Holy Spirit will leave the church.

Over the last year or so, I have undertaken doctrinal comparisons of the True Jesus Church and other Christian denominations.¹

1 Published by the True Jesus Church in the Chinese-language publication *Holy Spirit Monthly*, issues 464 (May 2016) to 484 (Jan 2018).

“ True believers live according to the words of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. Such fidelity to God’s word characterizes the teachings of the true church. ”

I find that the beliefs of the True Jesus Church are more aligned to early Christian theology than to today’s wider Christianity. Clearly, over time, biblical exegesis has evolved and been twisted to the extent that the Christian world today generally does not abide by Jesus’ words. They embellish and re-interpret the Bible’s teachings to suit their own agendas. Many changes occurred after the fourth century, when Emperor Constantine I decriminalized Catholicism and made it the official religion of the Roman Empire. After the sixteenth-century Reformation, the range of Christian beliefs multiplied and deviated even further from the Bible as the number of denominations increased.

There is only one Jesus Christ and one Bible. If every church is observing the Scriptures faithfully—without alteration or additions—why are there so many different denominations? The interpretation of the Bible must have changed significantly for this to happen.

Manifests the Power of Christ

The third requirement of the body of Christ is that she must manifest the power of Christ.

And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all. (Lk 6:19)

Jesus was full of power. Those who were sick needed only to touch Him, and they would be healed by His power. But since Jesus has ascended to heaven, how can we touch His body today?

The church is the body of Christ. A century ago, the True Jesus Church was established through the power of the Holy Spirit. Within the church, we have seen His power manifested in signs and miracles. Many from different parts of the world have come to believe through experiencing miracles in the True Jesus Church. When these believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, after hearing and believing the true gospel, they willingly forsake their former beliefs and religions to join the true church. God’s power is in the True Jesus Church.

Some believers in developed countries lament that there are fewer miracles in the True Jesus Church today compared to yesteryear. But let us not overlook the different contexts. Many of our early believers did not have the advantages we now enjoy. For example, before Taiwan established its national health insurance system, seeing the doctor was expensive for our impoverished members. So they sought healing from the all-powerful Physician, the Lord Jesus. In His grace and mercy, He heeded their supplications, so

“ There is only one Jesus Christ and one Bible. If every church is observing the Scriptures faithfully—without alteration or additions—why are there so many different denominations? ”



True Jesus Church in Eden, Mindanao, Philippines.

signs and miracles abounded. Now, we turn to medical doctors instead of our Lord Jesus Christ for healing.

It is not contradictory to the truth to seek medical help from a doctor; after all, Jesus Himself said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mk 2:17b). However, there are some believers who choose not to see a doctor when they are sick. They believe that Jesus’ power to heal surpasses any earthly doctor. In fact, in seemingly hopeless situations where medicine cannot heal or may even harm, Jesus is the only answer. Such willingness to rely on Jesus is a gift; it cannot be forced upon a person. Seeing a doctor does not automatically signal a lack of faith. But we should also acknowledge that the Lord Jesus still performs miracles—big and small—in the true church today.

Manifesting Christ’s power through miracles is one factor that proves a church is Christ’s body. But this cannot be taken in isolation—it is only one of three interconnected

and interdependent factors that together distinguish the true church. The True Jesus Church not only has miracles, but also the presence of the Holy Spirit, as proven by her believers’ speaking in tongues in prayer (Acts 2), and faithfulness towards the gospel of Christ. And it is this gospel of the kingdom that must be preached.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Mt 24:14)

According to biblical prophecy, we

can see that the end is drawing near. Before the end comes, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world.

The Gospel will Spread Rapidly

As the end of days approaches, the gospel will be spread more quickly.

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” (Rev 14:6–7)

In a vision, John saw an angel preaching the everlasting gospel. An angel is a messenger of God, so this angel refers to the servants of God who preach the gospel—preachers, elders, deacons, brothers and sisters. The Holy Spirit is upon the church, and we are the messengers sent by the Holy Spirit. The angel’s flight through the air indicates the rapid speed at which the gospel is preached.

Today, the reach of the internet is worldwide. Hence the True Jesus Church has put in much effort to develop the internet ministry. This allows us to share the gospel online so that those who visit our websites

“ Manifesting Christ’s power through miracles is one factor that proves a church is Christ’s body. But this cannot be taken in isolation—it is only one of three interconnected and interdependent factors that together distinguish the true church. ”

can come to understand our doctrines. In fact, quite a few truth-seekers have contacted our church through the internet. If the church can become even more active in this ministry, she will indeed be like an angel flying through the air, quickly spreading the gospel throughout the world “to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6).

Why does the gospel have to be preached with such urgency? Because “the hour of His judgment has come.” At the age of eighty-nine, I may not live to see the day that the gospel reaches every corner of the world, but I have every conviction that the True Jesus Church will prosper and fulfill this commission.

The Gospel of the Kingdom Preached by the True Jesus Church

Many Christians suggest that the gospel has already reached the whole world, as the Bible has been translated into more than a hundred languages and Christianity can be found in the remotest places. But that is not what the Bible means.

Jesus said that the gospel of the kingdom is the gospel that leads man to heaven (Mt 24:14). Only the pure and unadulterated gospel that the True Jesus Church preaches can lead man to heaven. The evidence of this is the abidance of the Holy Spirit with the church.

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. (Eph 1:13)

Members of the True Jesus Church have received the promised Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues. This seal of the Holy Spirit testifies that the church believes

and preaches the gospel of truth and salvation—the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. Importantly, the Lord Jesus has entrusted the work of global evangelism to us in the True Jesus Church. We must recognize and take up this noble and sacred commission.

THE GOSPEL WILL BE PREACHED TO ISRAEL

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

“The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” (Rom 11:25–26)

This is a profound prophecy: not only will the gospel be preached to the ends of the earth, it will also reach the whole of Israel. As Paul writes, this was a mystery to the believers at the time. But just as an open box hides no secret, the revealed mystery cannot be denied.

There are two parts to Paul’s statement. First, the number of Gentiles must be fulfilled—i.e., God’s chosen Gentiles will come into the true church. Second, the house of Israel will then be saved.

The Number of Gentiles will be Full

Now when the Gentiles heard [that salvation had been sent to them], they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

When Paul and Barnabas preached at Antioch, the Jews rejected the gospel because they were hard-hearted. This opened the way for the Gentiles to receive salvation. From this point onwards, Paul continued to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, establishing churches in Europe and Asia Minor. Every Gentile who was “appointed to eternal life” believed, meaning that none was left behind. This will continue “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). We who are believers today have



True Jesus Church in Rheinland, Germany and Janghang Seobu, South Korea.

also been appointed on account of our faith in the Lord Jesus.

The House of Israel will be Saved

Romans 11 records that when the full number of Gentiles has been reached, the house of Israel will be saved. This house of Israel is not the same Israel that existed at the time of the apostles. Nor does it refer to the modern nation of Israel. It refers to the remnant of Israel remaining after the great war (Rev 16:12–14; 20:1–10). When the time comes, only a remnant will be saved (Rom 9:27, 29).

A careful reading of biblical prophecy suggests that, in the future, Israel will be involved in a great war, where two-thirds of Israel will perish (Zech 13:7–9). The prophecy speaks of a great conflict among the nations of the Middle East. The small state of Israel is surrounded by much larger Arab nations, all of whom have strong military forces and are developing advanced weapons programs.

Future warfare will likely involve biological, nuclear and technologically advanced weapons. This is how two-thirds will be killed. The remaining third, the surviving remnant, will undergo great suffering and, through this difficult process, be refined as silver and tested as gold (Zech 13:9).

By that time, the True Jesus Church would have preached to every nation, including Israel. During this tribulation, the gospel of Christ will be shared with them, and they will believe with conviction that the Messiah for whom their forefathers had waited is indeed Jesus Christ. They will understand that the “word of truth, the gospel of...salvation” preached by the True

Jesus Church enables humankind to receive God’s promised Holy Spirit as the seal (Eph 1:13). Just like at Pentecost, when a simple message led three thousand to be saved, the Holy Spirit will descend mightily. Hearers will be filled with the Holy Spirit and their sufferings will be healed. They will repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. As God promised, “They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My people’; And each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God’ ” (Zech 13:9).

This salvation of the house of Israel will be the outcome of our evangelism.

BUILDING THE WALLS OF THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

This conviction of our status as the true church must motivate us to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven to all nations. However, besides evangelism, we must also guard against complacency over the state of walls of the church. As Micah prophesies:

In the day when your walls are to be built,

In that day the decree shall go far and wide. (Mic 7:11)

An alternative translation to the second line of this verse, offered in the footnotes of the NKJV Holy Bible, is “the boundary shall be extended.” This speaks of the nation of Israel expanding her territory. Her preparation for this expansion is to build her walls. Both Israel and the true church are the nation of God. This is why the Bible often uses Israel to represent the true church. God’s command to Israel to rebuild the walls is also a reminder for us in the true church.

The walls have two functions: to

separate the holy from the unholy; and to exercise control over our own spirits.

Separate Holy from Unholy

He measured it on the four sides; it had a wall all around, five hundred cubits long and five hundred wide, to separate the holy areas from the common. (Ezek 42:20)

Ezekiel, in his vision, saw a man measuring the temple’s walls with a measuring rod. Each wall was five hundred rods in length. One rod is a cubit, equivalent to 1.5 feet. The walls were long, thick and impenetrable. Their purpose was to separate the holy areas from the common. That which is within the walls is holy, that which is outside is common.

The height and length of the walls illustrate the importance God places on holiness. The message for us is clear: we must maintain our holiness and sanctify ourselves from the world. There is even a distinction between ourselves and any unbelieving family members—while they are still family, we are different. Some values and activities which are acceptable in the world must be rejected because they are anathema to our faith. We must vigilantly stay away from these and remain sanctified.

Rule over our own Spirit

The second function of the wall is to teach us to rule over our own spirits.

Whoever has no rule over his own spirit

Is like a city broken down, without walls. (Prov 25:28)

“[Having] no rule over his own spirit” implies the lack of spiritual discipline. “A city broken down”

needs to be rebuilt. A city without walls needs to construct its walls; otherwise, this city is open to attack. Spiritually speaking, our enemy is the devil, and the city we must protect is our heart. “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov 4:23). The Lord Jesus also said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his

heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things” (Mt 12:35). We must rule over our own hearts if we want to step up our spiritual cultivation. If we do not bring our spirit under control and spiritually cultivate ourselves, then we leave room for the devil to tempt and deceive.

In conclusion, the True Jesus Church shall surely prosper, with the gospel reaching Israel in God’s time. Meanwhile, we must embark on our own journey of building the walls of the church, through living a life of holiness and persistent spiritual cultivation.

Appointed to Eternal Life

God appoints His believers to the faith in two ways. The first is when a person is born into a believing family; he or she has the opportunity to be baptized from young and brought up in the faith. We cannot choose which family we are born into; it is God who chooses.

Ephesians 1:4–5 tells us that we have been chosen to be children of God before the foundation of the world. Humans experience time as past, present and future, but for God there is only the eternal present. In the eternal past, before the heavens, earth, and humankind existed, God had foreordained us as His chosen in Christ. Great indeed is this grace of election which has been conferred on us from so long ago.

The second way that God elects a believer is by giving him an opportunity to hear the gospel, opening his heart to understand the mystery of the gospel and accept baptism.

In Acts 16, we read that Paul and his companions went to the riverside in Philippi to pray on the Sabbath. A group of Gentile women who worshipped the God of heaven was there. Of all the women, the Bible only mentions one who believed in Paul’s words: Lydia. This was because God opened her heart and allowed her to understand the gospel. Lydia and her household were baptized, which was the beginning of the church in Philippi, the first church in Europe.

In other words, Lydia was foreordained because she not only had the faith to accept the gospel, but she also had the opportunity to hear and understand it. Some people will hear, but not understand. Some may never even have the opportunity to hear the true gospel. Does that mean God is unfair? Not at all.

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. (1 Cor 15:22)

According to this verse, the entire human race, descended from Adam, is already dead from birth. We are born spiritually dead from our mother’s womb—we do not have the life of God in us. We are conceived in sin, i.e., original sin (Ps 51), and the result of sin is death (Rom 5:12). But all shall be made alive in Christ. These refer to the souls who have been pulled out of Adam and placed in Christ, being born again through baptism. This is grace. Those who are not chosen simply remain in their prior state.

One analogy of this is if a wealthy philanthropist visits an orphanage to adopt some children. He has enough money to adopt all the orphans, but only chooses one or two. To be adopted is to receive a generous act of charity. But the orphans left behind cannot argue that this is unjust—the philanthropist does not owe them anything. He has the right to adopt whom he chooses.

In Adam, we were once spiritually dead in sin. Now, by God’s grace, we have been chosen and placed in Christ. Whether we were born into a Christian family or were converted, God’s grace put us in these circumstances and gave us the faith and opportunity to believe.

A Century of Grace and Spirituality

HH Ko
Heidelberg, Germany

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A CENTURY: BOON OR BANE?

In English, “a century” is a neutral term, bringing to mind a long period of time. However, the Chinese idiom “a century later”¹ carries somewhat negative connotations. For one thing, the crossing of the centennial mark evokes uncertainty. For another, “after a century” or “after a hundred years of age” is a euphemism for death—it is an inauspicious phrase, according to Chinese tradition. This century metaphor is used in a Chinese proverb to highlight the reality of death: *In the mountains there are thousand-year-old trees; but in the world, hundred-*

1 百年之后。

*year-old men are rare.*²

King Solomon was famed for his wisdom. But he realized that, despite his great achievements, no accomplishment under the sun can stave off death. On one’s deathbed, wealth and wisdom are completely useless. When Solomon was close to death, he summarized his life in frustration and grief:

Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. (Eccl 2:17)

Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. (Eccl 2:20)

2 山中虽有千年树，世上难逢百岁人。

Indeed, a century of life on earth is often filled with despair. However, for the True Jesus Church, the century milestone is neither about the brevity of life nor about the inevitability of death. In her early years, there were skeptics who did not think this small church, established in China, would last beyond fifty years. However, the church has now enjoyed one hundred years of spirituality and grace—a century of God’s spiritual grace encapsulated in His redemptive plan.

As heirs to this blessed heritage, there are important aspects to these one hundred years of grace that we must always cherish.



“ One hundred years does not suggest ageing or decline. Human beings may age, but God does not age. The church has a bright future. ”

AMAZING GRACE: CHOSEN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

[J]ust as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. (Eph 1:4)

[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. (2 Tim 1:9)

[I]n hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began. (Tit 1:2)

The first aspect that we must treasure is the amazing grace of our election by God. Nothing existed before the foundation of the world. But God already knew us and had already chosen us in Christ. His redemption plan began even before the foundation of the world; His grace was given to us even before the beginning of the world. He promised us eternal life even before life began.

THE TRUE CHURCH IS ESTABLISHED: ABIDING IN CHRIST SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

[T]hat in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. (Eph 1:10)

The second aspect is that the entire execution of God's plan occurs in Christ.

What is the significance of this to us, as individuals? We have been chosen in Christ. Then after we are baptized into Christ, we must remain in Christ. To this end, the Bible urges us to marry in the Lord. Finally, those who die in Christ are blessed. In other words, God's entire redemption began with Christ and, if we remain in Christ, we will eventually return to Christ.

As a church, what does this process of redemption mean?

The Truth Shall Prevail

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. (Mt 13:24)

In this parable of the kingdom of heaven, the man who sowed good seed represents Jesus, who came to plant His word in the hearts of man. However, while the people were unaware or not vigilant (Mt 13:25), Satan sowed tares—a weed that looks similar to wheat—and went on his way. The grain sprouted and produced a crop (Mt 13:26), a reference to the establishment of the apostolic church after Jesus Christ's ascension. The apostles knew that there were tares, and that they had to be pulled out. But the Lord Jesus, their Master, had told them not to, for they might also uproot the wheat (Mt 13:29). So the tares had to remain till the time of harvest, at the end of the age.

This parable is not directed at individuals, but applies to the

church as a whole. In terms of God's redemptive plan, the sprouting of seed and crop production was the apostolic era. The apostolic era started off perfect. After the first downpour of the Holy Spirit, three thousand people were baptized, and another five thousand shortly after. The New Testament writings had not yet been completed and canonized, alongside the Old Testament, into the Bible we know today. So the believers listened to the teachings and the doctrines of the apostles (Acts 2:42). The latter had been directly taught by the Lord Jesus for three years, and thus conveyed His teachings to the believers. This in itself was a miracle. Even without modern recording devices, they were able to teach accurately by holding on to Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit would bring to remembrance all that He had spoken to them (Jn 14:26).

As the apostolic church grew, the apostles had to grapple with the challenge of tares. For example, the apostle Paul established the church in Galatia during his first missionary trip. But by the time of his second missionary trip, the Galatian church was already full of tares:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel. (Gal 1:6)

Paul was extremely puzzled by how quickly the Galatians were turning away. We often think the apostolic church was a glorious church, but that is only half the truth. The apostolic church certainly began with perfection, but when they began their missionary work, tares were also sown along with the good

seed, and the tares could not be uprooted. Paul was well aware of this; he was very blunt about these false teachers (see Gal 6:12–13).

What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness? (1 Cor 4:21)

The same thing happened in the church at Corinth. The Corinthians were not little children, but Paul sternly demanded, “Do you want me to come with a rod of discipline or with a heart of love?”

Such a tone of rebuke would not be well received in the modern church. However, if we read all the epistles, we would find very few which are free of rebuke. In all these epistolary books, we may find pleasant greetings at the beginning and warm farewells at the end, but there are also many words of rebuke in between.

In general, it is believed that the apostolic age did not last more than a hundred years. Rodney Stark, a professor of Sociology and Comparative Religion, estimated that by the end of the first century, the total Christian population was 7,530.³ How can this be possible when the apostolic church—in the early years of her establishment—had baptized thousands? Even if the members of the apostolic church did not preach, their offspring alone would have swelled their numbers beyond ten thousand. So, it can only be that, although many people believed, many also left.

Do Not Be Discouraged by Desertion

The last years of Paul’s life were a sad time for him. He was probably in

tears when he wrote the following:

At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. (2 Tim 4:16)

The letters to Timothy and Titus reveal how many individuals deserted Paul. He could not hold them back. Everyone in Asia left him. This was how the apostolic church declined. We may think this an inglorious end to a church that had begun so perfectly. But this was God’s plan, and beyond human control. His thoughts are higher than ours (Isa 55:8–9). We can only accept things as they are, according to God’s plan. The apostles were well aware of this. They could not uproot the tares; the apostolic church was eventually overwhelmed by these tares. Yet, Professor Stark estimated that beyond 300 C.E., the Christian population had reached thirty million. This is closely related to what Jesus said in Matthew 13:31–32.

The apostolic church declined, the apostolic age ended, and the true church was revived in the last days; these three different stages are outlined in the Scriptures.

i. People will be hard of hearing (Isa 6:9–10)

The prophet Isaiah foretold the state of the late apostolic church. The Lord Jesus made a similar prophecy by citing the passage from Isaiah chapter 6. At the end of the apostolic age, Paul stated the same truth (Acts 28:26–27)—the hearts of the people had grown dull and their ears were hard of hearing. Paul repeated this warning to Timothy (2 Tim 4:3–4).

ii. There will be confusion (Mt 13)

Among the series of parables spoken by Jesus in Matthew chapter

13, six started with the phrase: “The kingdom of heaven is like...” These six parables pertain to the kingdom of heaven. Of these six, the first three prophesied the development and degeneration of the apostolic church, the infiltration of heresies and the ultimate downfall of the apostolic church. The present state of the True Jesus Church is captured by the sixth parable—the parable of the dragnet (Mt 13:47–50).

iii. It is the time of harvest (Rev 14:14–20)

The Book of Revelation describes the True Jesus Church today. We are at the time of harvest. A century ago, the True Jesus Church was established in Beijing, China. In the beginning, the church grew towards increasing perfection. However, in the last ten to fifteen years, there appears to have been a lot of confusion and chaos in the church. Yet, when we carefully consider the statistics, the church has actually expanded the fastest in the past fifteen years. Almost every year, we hear of the gospel reaching a new country. Today, we have churches in more than sixty countries. In the first fifteen years of the church, she certainly did not grow this fast. Importantly, throughout this expansion, the church has never wavered from her articles of faith. With better exposition of her beliefs, the truth of the True Jesus Church remains pure.

From Jesus’ description and explanation of the parable of the tares, the “tares” do not refer to individual believers. Right after Jesus scattered the good seeds, at the beginning of the apostolic era, when no one took notice, the devil sowed tares among the wheat, which appeared when “the grain

³ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.

had sprouted and produced a crop.” The apostles realized that there were tares and wanted to destroy them but, according to Jesus’ salvation plan, these tares were to remain until “the harvest [at] the end of the age” (Mt 13:39).

In short, the tares sown by the devil in Jesus’ parable do not refer to specific individuals, because none of the “sons” of the wicked one from the apostolic era are still alive. However, the tares the apostles warned against still exist, and we have to wait until the end of the age for the Lord Jesus to send His angels to pull them out. Therefore, the tares refer collectively to heresies and sons of the wicked one.

From Revelation chapter 14, we see that the time of the harvest is during the time of the True Jesus Church. Overall, the 144,000 people in verses 1 to 5 refer to the ark of the last days, the True Jesus Church; the six angels thereafter refer to the process of harvesting.

In this end time, the True Jesus Church will preach the complete gospel to the ends of the earth, as witnesses to all nations; then the Lord Jesus will come again. By that time, the gospel will be thoroughly pure. According to Revelation, in the process of church growth, there will be much confusion and chaos. In Revelation 16:13, we read of three mouths: the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. This reminds us of the power of the internet and mass media. But the chaos cannot, and will not, hinder the development of the true church. From Revelation chapter 14, as soon as Jesus thrusts in the sickle, the harvest will be complete. Therefore, the century that the True Jesus Church has come through was a

century of spirituality and grace. Based on Revelation, we believe that we will receive the coming of the Lord Jesus.

CONCLUSION: A CENTURY OF BLESSING

Our church has reached her first centennial milestone. The one hundred years of the True Jesus Church is different from the pessimistic “one hundred years later” concept of the Chinese. “One hundred years” does not suggest ageing or decline. Human beings may age, but God does not age. The church has a bright future. In fact, I am very touched and encouraged to observe that some of our youths have surpassed our former generations in knowledge and zeal.

God’s grace will continue, and the gospel will continue to be preached. When we look back, we may be surprised at how this church was able to expand. But we must not be complacent. We have members in some countries where we have been unable to establish churches, because we do not have enough

workers. Some denominations have to invest many resources to send missionary teams to expand their churches. But for us, such as in Uganda, there are people waiting for us. In fact, they have already put up a signboard proclaiming “True Jesus Church,” before the church has even sent workers there. We are different. God is at work.

Individually, we are indescribably blessed. Our membership in the church is not pure chance. We were purposefully chosen before the foundation of the world. If we do not cherish this blessing and leave the church on a whim, we will not be able to return.

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:15)

In the world, we are taught to take charge of our destiny, to work hard, and put in every effort for success. We are told to have a world-changing dream, and then exert every sinew to make that dream come true. But when it comes to salvation, the Bible tells us that we were chosen by God before the foundation of the world. If our name is found in the Book of Life, it is not because we have written it in ourselves. The grace of salvation is truly grace; it is not given to us because of something we have done. But having received this divine and amazing grace, we must ensure our names remain in the Book of Life. Otherwise, we will be cast into the lake of fire. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the church, will be perfected. Do not be distracted by the minority who has been cast aside because of pride and sin. Let us treasure our status and boldly preach the truth.



True Jesus Church in Edinburgh, UK.

Where is the House that You Will Build Me?

Vincent Yeung
Cambridge, UK

A newly engaged couple discuss where they will live after they are married. The bride-to-be asks her fiancé, “What sort of house are you going to buy me?” This is not an unusual question. But what if the bride-to-be is wealthy and already has everything she could want or need? This changes the context of the question completely; the house is no longer a necessity but serves as a token of love.

When God posed this question to His chosen people, there was a similar implication:

*“Heaven is My throne,
And earth is My footstool.
Where is the house that you will build Me?
And where is the place of My rest?”*
(Isa 66:1)

God has everything in His possession; what more can we offer Him?

In recent years, the True Jesus Church has seen many places of worship spring up across the globe, as more congregations have acquired buildings for their worship and evangelism needs. Many see a newly built church as a

sign of growth and an expression of the members’ devotion and commitment. However, the splendor of a church building does not directly correlate to the spirituality of its occupants. What matters to God are the hearts of the believers:

*“For all those things My hand has made,
And all those things exist,”
Says the LORD.
“But on this one will I look:
On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit,
And who trembles at My word.”*
(Isa 66:2)



True Jesus Church in Taungzalat, Kalay, Myanmar.

When God's nation prospers and the borders of His land expand, He is glorified (Isa 26:15). But is this purely a numbers game, represented by an increase in believers and churches, or is there more to it? Ultimately, in what ways should the church grow to bring glory to God?

AN UNREALIZED PROMISE: THE GLORY OF THE LATTER TEMPLE SHALL BE GREATER

When the exiled Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, they endured much hardship and had meager resources with which to rebuild the temple. On its completion, God asked those who had survived the destruction in 586 B.C.E. to compare the new temple with Solomon's temple. His question was rhetorical because the second temple obviously paled in comparison to the original (Hag 2:3). But it set the scene for a prophecy: the glory of the latter temple would be greater than the former. This was the promise of the Almighty God who would fill the temple with glory (Hag 2:5-8).

As we know, the physical temple was eventually destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E., without God's prophecy coming to pass. Instead, this prophecy was to be fulfilled spiritually in the coming of the church (1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:20-22). But how would the latter temple be greater than the first, and to which epoch of church history does the prophecy refer?

As mentioned above, Isaiah 66:1-2 shows that our hearts matter more to God than physical buildings. The people of God cannot find glory by their own means; God is their glory, just as He is glorified through His people (Isa 60:19, 21). They are the work of His hands, created in Christ

Jesus for good works (Eph 2:8-10). When Jesus accomplished His work of salvation on earth, He was glorified and God was glorified in Him (Jn 13:31; 17:4). In the same vein, those who belong to Jesus bring glory to Him through their actions (Jn 17:10; 2 Thess 1:11-12). If we live a Christ-like life by demonstrating good works and godly nature, we showcase the glory of God. We are glorified in Him, and He in us.

Does the glory of the latter temple refer to the apostolic church? Without a doubt, the apostolic church started with a bang when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost (Acts 2). As Jesus had prophesied, the kingdom of God was established with power (Mk 9:1). However, the church gradually became institutionalized and deviated from the truth as heresies crept in. The Holy Spirit eventually departed and no longer dwelled with the secularized church. Nevertheless, God's will cannot be thwarted.

The prophets Isaiah and Micah spoke of how the mountain of God's house would be established and exalted above the hills (Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-3). These prophecies point to the glory of the future church, to which all true believers will stream. This is realized in the True Jesus Church, which was established by the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit in the time of the latter

rain, and is the restored apostolic church.

However, by no stretch of the imagination could we describe the present church as having surpassed the glory of the apostolic church. During a recent spiritual convocation, a preacher cited the example of an exemplary church where brethren and truth-seekers gathered for a week to study the truth from morning to midnight. He also testified of a third-generation True Jesus Church member who rejuvenated his faith by joining a missionary trip to Africa. Witnessing God's work firsthand inspired this brother to truly believe in God for the first time. We view these two examples as rare occurrences today, but such experiences were commonplace in the apostolic time.

A cursory look at the early apostolic church, the model church, reveals what the glory of God looks like (Acts 2:40-47). The members were steadfast in the apostles' doctrine; they continued daily with one accord and had everything in common so that no one lacked anything; they feared God and possessed gladness and simplicity of heart. As a result, God blessed them with wonders and signs, adding to their numbers daily.

Many in the West, including True Jesus Church members, have never

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experienced events like those mentioned in the Book of Acts. To them, God is remote, only to be discovered in the distant past or in a far-off land. In the prophet Jeremiah's time, he had to convince his countrymen that God was not just the God of Israel, but also the all-powerful God of the universe (Jer 23:23). Today, it is the reverse: we need to persuade our members that God is not just the ruler of the heavens far away, but is also nearby and personal. We can experience Him right here and now without the need to go abroad. So what is stopping us from knowing God intimately and being inspired to glorify Him through our actions?

A LACK OF URGENCY

The disciples truly believed that the second coming of Jesus would occur in their lifetime. Before Jesus' ascension to heaven, they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The imminence of God's kingdom was never far from the apostles' minds. Jesus preached that the kingdom of God was at hand and that some of the apostles would witness its arrival (Mk 1:15; 9:1). Paul wrote, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Rom 13:12a), and even encouraged those who had wives to be "as though they had none" because time was short (1 Cor 7:29). Luke notes, before sharing the parable of the minas, that his contemporaries thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately (Lk 19:11). In hindsight, we know that their thinking was incorrect. But today, the pendulum has swung the other way.

A branch of eschatology known as "realized eschatology" holds that the New Testament passages

“If we live a Christ-like life by demonstrating good works and godly nature, we showcase the glory of God. We are glorified in Him, and He in us.”

discussing the last days do not refer to the future, but to the rebirth of the world, instituted by Jesus' ministry, and His lasting legacy. This line of thinking is attractive to liberal Christians who focus only on the love and goodness of God while disregarding His judgment. Such a view is contradictory to the Bible and the beliefs of the true church. However, some True Jesus Church believers behave as though they agree with this type of theology, going about their lives as though Jesus' second coming will never happen. For them, now is the time to be rooted in the world. God can wait; the church can wait; spiritual cultivation can wait; and Christ's second coming can wait. Such believers feel no sense of urgency whatsoever.

What about ourselves? We often prioritize our life and work, and allocate any remaining time and energy to church. When our personal schedule clashes with the church timetable, it is usually our service to God that suffers. How many times have we skipped church services or rushed off early because of private or work engagements? Church projects are delayed and deadlines missed. Yet, we defend our actions by stating that we are mostly volunteers, after all. Surely, such delays are inevitable.

This complacency is not new. When the exiles returned to Jerusalem, they busied themselves with building their own homes and livelihoods, while God's house lay

in ruins (Hag 1:4). Paul reminded the members to set their minds on things above (Col 3:2), knowing that those with families would always put the latter before God (1 Cor 7:33). John likewise exhorted believers, "Do not love the world" (1 Jn 2:15). We need to reset our life's direction and reignite our zeal for the coming kingdom. Paul's heavenly hope enabled him to experience the power of renewal (2 Cor 4:16). The early church was *devoted* to God's teaching and fellowship (Acts 2:42, 46). Luke used the term προσκαρτερέω (*proskartereo*), which is translated as "devote, continuing, steadfast, persevere and be constantly diligent." If we reawaken this desire to draw near to God (Jas 4:8), then God will manifest Himself to us, just as He did in the apostolic church.

A LACK OF LOVE: SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Jesus prophesied that the love of many would grow cold in the last days because of deception, betrayal, hate and the increase of lawlessness (Mt 24:4–12). Today, we constantly hear news of terrorist attacks, scams, social injustice, and allegations of misinformation. We simply do not know what or whom to trust. Individuals take a defensive stance to safeguard their own interests, as well as to protect themselves and their families from harm. In the last two decades, society has been trending towards self-centeredness. Reality television and social media sway the public towards narcissism

and exhibitionism, rewarding the individual's pride and vanity. Paul called these people of the end time "lovers of themselves" and "lovers of money" (2 Tim 3:2).

Though such extreme behavior is rare in the church, an insidious sense of apathy towards the needs of others and the common good of the community can creep into the congregation. This is one of the greatest dangers in the end time—the growing apathy and disinterest towards our brethren. Some members are only interested in their own matters, doing the bare minimum for the church and leaving the "heavy lifting" to the ministers and church board members.

Self-centeredness is the complete opposite to Jesus' nature. He took the form of a bondservant, the likeness of man, humbling Himself and becoming obedient to the point of death (Phil 2:7–9). He became poor so that we could become rich (2 Cor 8:9). We should emulate this self-sacrifice. We need to progress from being unlike Christ to "Christ-lite," and, eventually, to Christ-like. Paul exhorted the Ephesian members to transition from learning the theoretical aspects of being like Christ to actually becoming like Him, by putting on the new man in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:20–24). True righteousness is not accomplished through word alone, but also action. And even when we carry out acts of righteousness and love, we do not do it to gain admiration (1 Jn 3:18; Rom 12:9). God is love; hence, we should abide in His love (1 Jn 4:16). We imitate His love by loving our brethren and serving the church, both of which require self-sacrifice (1 Jn 4:20–21). While doing such acts, we do not expect repayment; rather,



True Jesus Church in Adam Road, Singapore.

we love and serve because Jesus did the same. If we manifest His love to others, then He is glorified (Mk 10:45; 1 Pet 4:8–11).

The early apostolic church was blessed by God. He increased their number daily and gave them signs and wonders because they knew how to love, share and give (Acts 2:44–45). Today, we encounter many obstacles to our growth, but often, we set up our own roadblocks. We have insufficient manpower, insufficient funds for church buildings, and insufficient numbers of volunteers dedicating themselves to full-time ministry. These result from self-centeredness, because we care for ourselves and our families more than we do for the body of Christ. We need to learn from the early church's spirit of offering,

trusting that the Lord will provide and will multiply the seeds we sow and the fruits of our righteousness (2 Cor 9:10).

A LACK OF PURITY

The half-hearted efforts of God's people did not produce a magnificent second temple (Hag 2:3). But God did not associate their failure with a lack of material resources; after all, gold and silver belong to Him. The disappointing outcome was a product of their uncleanness (Hag 2:13). As a result, fifty measures became twenty, and twenty became ten (Hag 2:16). Their effort was ineffective because they did not turn to God and set their heart on Him (Hag 2:17–18).

We can clearly see how God responded to Israel's uncleanness

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and half-heartedness. During those times, the Israelites suffered much loss. When the people turned from God, Moses warned them not to fight the Amalekites and the Canaanites because God was not with them. They did not listen and suffered defeat (Num 14:43, 45). Later, they would again be defeated by the men of Ai because of the sin of one person, Achan (Josh 7:5, 11–13).

When a church is not progressing, her members should reflect on why that might be. The church could be lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, like the church in Laodicea. God described the Laodiceans as poor, blind and naked (Rev 3:16–17): poor because they were spiritually impoverished; blind because they could not see their faults (Rev 3:18); and naked because they lacked good deeds and righteousness (Rev 16:15; 19:8). The prosperity of a church does not depend on her material wealth and the grandeur of the building, but on her spiritual vitality. A spiritually vibrant church is able to project her faith within her four walls and beyond, serving

as an example for others to follow (1 Thess 1:8). The three greatest Christian attributes are faith, love, and hope (1 Cor 13:13); and these intangible attributes are manifested in the form of work, labor, and patience (1 Thess 1:3).

The author of Hebrews exhorts the believers to regain their spiritual vitality and “strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb 12:12–13). The way to do this is to pursue holiness (Heb 12:14). God is holy, so He expects His people to be holy (1 Pet 1:15–17); but when His children are stiff-necked and corrupt, He will not dwell with them, lest He consume them (Ex 33:3–5; 32:7–9). To become holy, we need to control our minds and be obedient (1 Pet 1:13–14). He who sanctifies himself will be considered a “vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim 2:20–21). A sanctified church will be blessed with God’s abidance and power, which bring forth fruits of righteousness, to the glory and praise of God (Phil 1:11).

HOW CAN WE BECOME A GLORIOUS CHURCH?

When we reflect on our spiritual state and that of the church, it can seem a long way off from the glorious latter temple that God foresaw. We want to dedicate our life to God, but we are easily distracted. We want to believe, but our faith is insufficient. We want to love, but we only love those who love us (Mt 5:46). We proclaim that we uphold the truth, but we tread the same path as the Jews, who prided themselves on knowing the Law but failed to instruct themselves in it (Rom 2:20–24). Love, hope, faith and purity are the key building blocks of our belief. But the greatest danger for believers today is not practicing what they preach, and know, to be the truth. Belief is tainted with disbelief (Mk 9:24), actions are inhibited by procrastination, and our desire to draw near to God is hindered by our love of this world (Mt 13:22).

We need to overcome this inertia by not just knowing or doing God’s will, but by transforming and renewing our minds (Rom 12:2). Knowing the truth is important, but we focus more on knowledge at the expense of action. Doing good is important, but we do it inconsistently, sometimes reluctantly. This attitude can only get us so far.

The Bible prophesied that in God’s holy mountain, the church, there would be no pain. The wolf, bear, lion and leopard will become harmless—not because they are tamed, but because they are transformed (Isa 11:6–10). In the same vein, Paul exhorts the believers to be renewed in spirit, to put off the old man and put on the new man created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:22–24). But



True Jesus Church youths manning an evangelism stall in Newcastle, UK.

where do we get the motivation to transform? We are motivated by God's love.

Paul was deeply touched by God's love, as he viewed Christ's death from a personal perspective: "[Christ] loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Again, he writes:

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

(2 Cor 5:14–15)

Paul's love for God is demonstrated by his "earnest desire" and "groan[ing]" to be with Christ (Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:2; Rom 8:23). We need to have this same desire in order to be transformed by the love of Christ.

Can we experience the same love that transformed Paul? Absolutely! God has given us His Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who transformed Paul. By this Spirit, the love of God has been poured out in our hearts (Rom 5:5). We simply need to open our hearts and allow God's love to be poured in and to overflow. The Holy Spirit has not only allowed us to imbibe God's love, but His transforming power has also set us free from sin (Rom 8:1–2). The word of God can sanctify us, but we need God's power to carry out the word and to obey the truth by which our souls are purified (Jn 17:17; 1 Pet 1:22). With this transformation, God's law is imprinted on our hearts and minds (Jer 31:33). With our fleshly heart sensitive to God's love, we will be saved from defilement (Ezek 36:26–27, 29). If we fulfill His goodness and the work of faith with power (2 Thess 1:11–12), practicing brotherly love with

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purity and sincerity, then Jesus will be glorified in us, and us in Him.

CONCLUSION

When the first temple was completed, God made His presence felt by filling the temple with His glory (1 Kgs 8:11). In the apostolic church, God's glory was manifested inwardly in the unity of the believers, their fellowship, gladness, simplicity of heart, and their steadfast adherence to the apostles' teachings. Outwardly, God's glory was manifested in selfless sacrifice, signs and miracles, praises to God, and the steady increase of believers (Acts 2:40–47).

When many accept the grace of the gospel, their thanksgiving abounds to the glory of God (2 Cor 4:15). If we wish to see Haggai's prophecy realized, then we need to have the same conviction as Paul, who, quoting Psalm 116:10, writes: "I believed and therefore I spoke" (2 Cor 4:13). The early church flourished not because the members were eloquent or well-versed in the Scriptures, but because they played their part in propagating the gospel. Ordinary believers took the initiative to spread the word without waiting for instruction. They took up the ministry to preach to the Greeks and the hand of God was with them, bringing many to believe (Acts 11:19–21). Their devotion, obedience, liberal sharing and selfless service did not go unnoticed, so God was

glorified in all things (Acts 2:46; 2 Cor 9:13; 1 Pet 4:11).

Jesus promised His believers that they would go on to do greater works than He has done (Jn 14:12). The prophecy of the Bible is not a futile hope; the glory of the latter temple will surely surpass that of the first temple, but only when we revive the zeal for God's coming. We should "groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting" for it, with perseverance (Rom 8:23, 25). With this renewed focus and transformed mind and heart, we shall willingly dedicate our life to God (Rom 12:1–2). If we can lead this holy and selfless life, steadfast in the teaching of the Bible, God will manifest His glory in our life and in the church.

Our Story

INTRODUCTION

Praise the Lord Jesus Christ that we have been born within the century of the True Jesus Church's establishment in 1917. This is, indeed, God's grace and mercy. Not only that, it is God's grace that we can read the Scriptures to see the next phase of God's plan for His church.

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH: A RUINED CITY

When the Bible mentions Zion, Jerusalem or the city, it often refers, in a spiritual sense, to the church. God repeatedly prophesied that He would establish His church (His kingdom) on earth through the downpour of the Holy Spirit, which

“When the Bible mentions Zion, Jerusalem or the city, it often refers, in a spiritual sense, to the church. God repeatedly prophesied that He would establish His church (His kingdom) on earth through the downpour of the Holy Spirit.”

occurred for the first time during Pentecost, as recorded in Acts.

However, before the apostolic church was established, Jesus explained how He, the Savior, had come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, which foreshadowed His coming and sacrifice. Thus, He revealed to us His divinity and the direction of the church. Previously, salvation was granted only to the

Jews; however, through the grace of Jesus' death, it is now open to all. After the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, that God would “pour out [His] Spirit on all flesh....That whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:28–32), the gospel converted Jews and Gentiles alike. Despite the early confusion and challenges that this created (e.g., debates over the need



for circumcision and the extension of salvation grace to the Gentiles), the Holy Spirit guided the apostolic church to understand fully Amos' prophecy:

*"On that day I will raise up
The tabernacle of David, which has
fallen down,
And repair its damages;
I will raise up its ruins,
And rebuild it as in the days of old;
That they may possess the remnant
of Edom,
And all the Gentiles who are called by
My name,"
Says the LORD who does this thing.*
(Amos 9:11–12)

It is also God's plan to save the Gentiles. When the entire church believed and accepted God's inclusion of the Gentiles, the gospel prospered even further: "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (Acts 19:20).

Yet, God had already foreseen that the apostolic church would become unfaithful (Isa 1:21). Paul's numerous warnings to guard against false teachings indicate that the church suffered serious spiritual attacks. Heresies infiltrated believers' hearts through "persuasive words" based on "philosophy and empty deceit," causing believers to be hooked by worldly concepts rather than the teachings of Christ (Col 2:4, 8). The church deteriorated further when some began to teach so-called doctrines based on "fables and endless genealogies" (1 Tim 1:3–4). Leaders and ordinary members resisted the truth. The situation became so bad that Jude fought for the truth to save members from godless deceivers, who served only themselves (Jude 12–13). Before Paul died, believers had left the church in droves and, instead of Jesus' truth



being preached and practiced, false humility and corruption reigned.

RESTORING THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH: A FAITHFUL CITY

Despite the decline of the apostolic church, God's foreknowledge and enduring mercy give us, True Jesus Church members in the end time, hope and strength. The Scriptures prophesied not only the establishment of the apostolic church, but also the true church today:

*I will restore your judges as at the first,
And your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city
of righteousness, the faithful city.*
(Isa 1:26)

*It shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord shall set His hand
again the second time. (Isa 11:11a)*

These verses outline the restoration of the apostolic church as a faithful city, and align with the scriptural pattern of prophecies regarding the former and latter rain—the downpour of the Holy Spirit in

two time-periods. How would this restoration come about? According to Isaiah, God will reveal the unfaithful, the unrepentant, and those who create divisions in the church (Isa 1:24–31). He will then send true disciples to strengthen vulnerable and weak members: God's work is not just in the cleansing but also the strengthening of His church. Micah prophesies that many will hear God's words, but some will refuse to listen and will continue in their own ways or worship gods of their own making.

However, God's foreknowledge brings comfort: there will be those whose faith, while initially weak, is genuine and will be strengthened by allowing God to rule in their lives, "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:4–5). Zechariah prophesies that, in the latter days, the weak will become strong:

*[O]ne who is feeble among them in
that day shall be like David, and the
house of David shall be like God, like
the Angel of the LORD before them.*
(Zech 12:8)

“How would this restoration come about? According to Isaiah, God will reveal the unfaithful, the unrepentant, and those who create divisions in the church (Isa 1:24–31). He will then send true disciples to strengthen vulnerable and weak members: God’s work is not just in the cleansing but also the strengthening of His church.”

Today, we have the privilege of seeing this wonderful prophecy being fulfilled, as we continue to build up the church.

THE STORY CONTINUES WITH US

From the Scriptures, we have seen the story of God’s church, our own story, unfold. The following passages eloquently sum up what remains for us to do.

First, we must draw closer to God:

[L]et us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed

with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. (Heb 10:22–23)

Second, as we work together to build up the church, we must encourage each other:

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:24–25)

Third, as believers in the end time, we must also prepare ourselves to

continue the story of God’s church:

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mk 16:15)

Finally, we must revive the spirit of the apostolic church in our hearts, according to the mercy of Jesus Christ:

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (Col 1:27–29)

We ask the Lord to pour His Spirit on us in the time of the latter rain, so that “according to the power that works in us...[God may be glorified] in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20a–21).



In Search of the True Church

The Christian world comprises diverse denominations that have emerged or evolved because of historical, political and doctrinal developments. Whilst modern ecumenical movements may seek to bring these groups together in a bid for commonality, it remains undeniable that some of the differences are fundamental. Indeed, the diversity of belief among the denominations is at odds with the biblical concept of the church.

The Bible's stance is that the church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:23; Col 1:18) and that there is but "one body" (Eph 4:4). This concept is reinforced in Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members

of that body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ....But now indeed there are many members, yet one body" (1 Cor 12:12, 20). The question is, can different Christian denominations be reckoned as members of the same body?

In expanding on the teaching of the one body, Paul highlighted its link to "one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father" (Eph 4:4-6a). It leads us to reflect that, while different denominations may claim to uphold one hope, one Lord, one God and Father, it is debatable whether they have the same Spirit and baptism. These churches have differing views about receiving the

Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, on baptism, some advocate immersion, while others endorse alternative modes; some perform infant baptism, while others oppose the practice. The diverse characteristics of various denominations mean that they do not uphold a common faith. In light of this, it is incorrect to conclude that all denominations are members of the same body. Against this backdrop, it is important for us to understand the attributes of the church from a biblical perspective, in order to determine the true church of God.

The church established in the apostolic era is clearly the model we



should use as a benchmark as we navigate the plethora of Christian groups that exist today. After all, the apostolic church was established as one integrated organization with a common set of beliefs, even though she gradually branched out geographically. In contrast, the denominations we see today have emerged as a result of complex social, political and religious developments over the course of history.

ESTABLISHED AND SENT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The apostolic church was established when the Holy Spirit was poured down on the day of Pentecost, according to the plan and promise of the Lord. Heeding Jesus' instruction, the apostles and early believers, about 120 in total, were gathered with one accord in Jerusalem, waiting for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). After the Holy Spirit was poured down (Acts 2:1–4), Peter stood up to testify for the Lord. Three thousand were converted, and the apostolic church was established. Thereafter, the believers gathered regularly for worship and preached the gospel actively, resulting in the Lord adding souls to the church daily (Acts 2:38–47).

This entire sequence of events, from the resurrection of Christ, His appearance and instructions to His disciples, to the downpour of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, reinforces the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in the commission of the church.

After Jesus' resurrection, He appeared to His disciples and gave them a series of instructions. One

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of them was the great commission to go into the entire world to preach the gospel and to baptize (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15–16). But interestingly, instead of hastening their despatch into the world, He instructed them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to first wait for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). He added that when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they would “be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Since the commission to preach the gospel was undeniably urgent, why did the Lord hold them back until the downpour of the Holy Spirit?

“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”

(Rom 10:13–15)

This passage states that only those who are sent shall preach. And this is the reason why the Lord held the disciples back. They had to receive the Holy Spirit in order to be “sent.” Likewise, only the church with the Holy Spirit is “sent” to preach the gospel.

BAPTISM: A PREREQUISITE FOR SALVATION

1. The Remission of Sin

When Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15), He followed with the teaching, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:16a). From these words we understand that, after believing in Christ, we have to receive baptism to be saved. Peter explained why on the day of Pentecost. When the people, cut to the heart by Peter’s message, asked what they should do, he responded, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). These verses highlight that baptism is for the remission of sins, and is necessary for salvation.

2. The Blood of Christ

Baptism is a clear instruction from Christ, which we need to fulfill for the remission of sins. But how do we reconcile this with the understanding that it is ultimately the blood of Christ that has the power to wash sins away (1 Jn 1:7)?

This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And

it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. (1 Jn 5:6–8)

The gospels tell us that John the Baptist came only by “water,” meaning that the baptism he performed did not have the efficacy of blood. In contrast, Jesus came by “water and blood.” Not only did He institute baptism and command His disciples to administer it, He also shed His blood for remission of sins. Without this sacrifice, the remission of sin cannot happen. But with it, baptism is the avenue by which one’s sins are cleansed by His blood.

This is supported by Paul’s explanation to the Romans that through baptism one dies with Christ, and is buried and raised with Him (Rom 6:3–4). In the process,

the old man is crucified with Him, so that the body of sin may be done away with (Rom 6:6–7).

But how can the blood of Jesus be in the water during baptism? The passage above states the three entities on earth that bear witness: “the Spirit, water, and the blood.” While a human minister on earth physically administers water baptism, the Holy Spirit is at work to enable the blood of Jesus to be present in the water. For this reason, water baptism is effective for the remission of sins. Hence, Paul says, it is “by one Spirit [that] we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13a).

The next question is, what role has the church in all of this?

THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH

1. The Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven

“[A]nd on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will

give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Mt 16:18b–19)

The keys of heaven have been given to the church and, with them, the authority to bind or loosen on earth, triggering corresponding results in heaven. Hence, the church plays a key role in facilitating our entry into the kingdom of heaven through the removal of sins. This is further reinforced in the message of Jesus, when He appeared to His disciples after His resurrection:

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (Jn 20:21–23)

This aligns the authority of the church “to bind” with that of



retaining one's sins, and "to loose" with the forgiveness of sins. This authority is given through the Holy Spirit. When the church administers water baptism, the church releases or loosens the recipient from sin. Likewise, when the church decides against administering baptism, or exercises church discipline through the ex-communication of erring believers, the church binds or retains the sins of believers (Mt 18:15–18).

In short, we can see that having the abidance of the Holy Spirit is an indispensable attribute of the true church. This is the reason that Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit before setting forth to preach and baptize. It is only through the Holy Spirit that the church has the authority to carry out this commission in His name. Without the Holy Spirit, the administration of baptism is not effective for the forgiveness of sins.

2. The Holy Spirit and the Truth

Another indispensable attribute of the church is the complete truth that leads to salvation. As Paul says, the church is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), which means that the role of the church is to uphold the truth.

The importance of upholding or continuing in the truth was a constant theme in Paul's epistles to the church and her leaders. He warned the Galatians on the severity of deviating from the gospel that was first delivered to them by the apostles (Gal 1:6–9). He reminded the Ephesians that the church had been "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:20). He added that the church was to be

mature "in the unity of the faith... to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...[where they are no longer] children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:13–14). He exhorted the Philippians to "[hold] fast the word of life" (Phil 2:16). He told the Colossians, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit... according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). And he reflected to the Thessalonians on how God had "[chosen them] for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thess 2:13).

As we recognize the complete truth as an indispensable attribute in the church, we should further appreciate the significant role of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus assured His disciples that He would not leave them as orphans after His departure, He revealed that they would be given another Helper—the Holy Spirit—who is also the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance the words spoken by the Lord Jesus (Jn 14:16–18, 24). Jesus further reiterated, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16:12–13a).

From these passages, we know that the Holy Spirit plays a key role in helping us understand the complete truth as taught by Jesus. This is illustrated by how it was only after His resurrection that the disciples remembered and understood what Jesus really meant about the temple being raised in three days (Jn 2:19–22). Subsequently, when John wrote his first epistle and discussed the discernment of spirits, one practice he advocated was to test if the spirit is of truth or of error. To do so, one has to compare the teachings being espoused with the teachings of the apostles (1 Jn 4:1–6). This aligns with Paul's warning that one should not believe any other gospel besides that which was originally delivered, not even if Paul himself or an angel from heaven should happen to be the bearer of the message (Gal 1:6–9).

Paul also pointed out that when he and the apostles preached, they did so "not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4). He further mentioned that the content of his preaching was the "wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages...which none of the rulers of this age knew" (1 Cor 2:7–8a). He explained why he was able to expound God's message:

“Having the abidance of the Holy Spirit is an indispensable attribute of the true church. This is the reason that Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit before setting forth to preach and baptize. It is only through the Holy Spirit that the church has the authority to carry out this commission in His name.”



God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except by the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (1 Cor 2:10–13)

Given the intention of the Lord that “the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church” (Eph 3:10a), and the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the mysteries of God, teaching and guiding us into all truth, we can further appreciate why it is so important for the church to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand the complete truth relating to salvation.

The existence of so many different denominations, which embrace and

preach a diverse range of doctrines and practices, begs the question of whether they are all aligned with the original teachings of Jesus and the apostolic church. The Bible is clear that the truth must not be changed through time: there should be nothing added, subtracted or altered. The truth is “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3b). This links to Paul’s encouragement to Timothy: “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim 4:16).

3. The Holy Spirit and Signs, Wonders and Miracles

As the true church of God sets forth to preach the gospel and fulfill her ministry on earth, God is “bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will” (Heb 2:4). This was indeed the case in the early church, as evidenced by the words of Mark: “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with

them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs” (Mk 16: 20).

While the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in signs, wonders and miracles is another key attribute of the true church, we must also be discerning. Not all manifestations in the world are necessarily of the Holy Spirit, and neither do they necessarily point to the true church. As Jesus Himself warned:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven....Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ ” (Mt 7:21–23)

Signs, wonders and miracles are not the main focus in God’s ministry. Rather, they go hand in hand with the gospel that is taught by the church; their purpose is to “confirm the word” and to “bear witness” of the genuine gospel. For one to determine the true church, one has to discern the evidence of both.

In summary, we must preach the truth first and then signs will follow; it is not the other way round. For this reason, a common Christian practice of leveraging “miracle rallies” as the main appeal of Christianity is clearly misaligned with the Bible. While the true church will be the conduit through which the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in signs, wonders and miracles, we must also understand that these will only happen according to God’s will and mercy; they cannot be dictated by

man through miracle rallies. And while we should certainly believe in miracles, we must be watchful and remember the Lord's prophecy that, in the last days, "false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Mt 24:24).

THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

From a biblical perspective, we can conclude that the true church must have three key attributes:

1. The true church must be established by and have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as in the case of the apostolic church.
2. The true church must embrace and preach the complete truth concerning salvation, as preached by Jesus Christ and the apostles.
3. The true church will have accompanying signs, wonders and miracles to confirm the word of God.

As we apply these criteria to the Christian world today and examine the beliefs and the practices of various denominations, there are obvious gaps when compared to the apostolic church. This is particularly evident in the different beliefs surrounding the Holy Spirit. For example, while most Christian groups advocate that one receives the Holy Spirit at the point of accepting Christ, the True Jesus Church upholds the original teaching of the apostolic church. While accepting Christ is the first step in one's journey of faith, the Bible clearly records that receiving the Holy Spirit is a completely separate matter. This is shown in the Bible's accounts of how the Samaritan believers received the

“We must also recognize that only the True Jesus Church is sent by the Holy Spirit to preach the complete gospel of salvation in these last days. This belief does not stem from arrogance, but from a thankful heart that God has restored the true church for humankind through His grace and love.”

Holy Spirit (Acts 8:5–17), and likewise the Ephesians (Acts 19:1–6). In both cases, they had accepted Christ, and the Samaritans had even been baptized, but the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to them; receiving the Spirit was a subsequent event. Also, in the True Jesus Church, as in the apostolic church, the belief is that receiving the Holy Spirit is evidenced by speaking in tongues (Acts 2:1–4; 10:44–48; 19:1–6).

Another difference between the True Jesus Church and other Christian denominations concerns the remission of sins. While most Christians argue that it occurs automatically upon one's acceptance of Christ, and that baptism is merely an outward expression of the faith within, the True Jesus Church disagrees. The Bible is clear that baptism is crucial for salvation (Mk 16:16; 1 Pet 3:21), for it is through baptism that our sins are washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:3–8).

Besides the beliefs relating to the Holy Spirit and baptism, there are other areas in which the True Jesus Church aligns with the apostolic church and the Bible. As we reflect upon these attributes, we ought to have the strengthened conviction that the True Jesus Church is indeed the revival of the apostolic church and the only true church of the end time. We must also recognize

that only the True Jesus Church is sent by the Holy Spirit to preach the complete gospel of salvation in these last days. This belief does not stem from arrogance, but from a thankful heart that God has restored the true church for humankind through His grace and love.

Importantly, as members of the True Jesus Church, this conviction should motivate and remind us to shoulder our responsibility to continue the commission of the apostolic church—to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. After all, “how shall they preach unless they are sent” (Rom 10:15a)?

The Heritage of the True Church: A Message to the Youths

Based on a sermon by
Timothy Yeung
Vancouver, Canada

Having received so much grace from God, the youths of the True Jesus Church must now ask themselves what they ought to give in return. Today, the youths are heirs to the fruits of a century of God's grace and their predecessors' perseverance. Prior generations of youths have done and given so much over the past century; yet, what is certain is the pivotal importance of youths in the century to come. What awaits them?

FOUNDATION

Before looking at what True Jesus Church youths can do for the church in this new era, we ought to remind ourselves of our foundation. Truth is the most important heritage God

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has given His true church. We must ask ourselves, are we well rooted in the truth?

The significance of being securely rooted in the truth of the gospel is well known. What happens to those with an insecure foundation? Take church work: many well-intentioned youths enter zealously into the ministry, hoping to practice their faith. Yet, as in any community service activity, doing church work involves collaborating with

others. Therefore, the possibility of conflicts and disagreements often arise. The more some youths serve, the more challenges they face and the more dissatisfied they may become. This is the crucial point. If, at this moment, youths can learn to separate the social problems of service from the value of their faith and its practice, they will be safe. But if interpersonal challenges convince them that church work is not worth doing, or worse, that



this faith is not worth believing in, then they come dangerously close to losing their spiritual life.

This is why a firm foundation in the truth is critical. First, we must be deeply rooted in our faith and know why we serve—to express our love and gratitude for God, and to share His love with others. Next, we need to understand the immutability of our faith. However we may be dissatisfied with people, God does not dissatisfy, and He can help. Knowing and believing this will minimize the risk that disagreements and strife will lead us to give up our faith.

The same applies to secular trends beyond the church. Having experienced their thrills, youths may be eager to adopt similar features in their spiritual lives and in church. They may question why the church does not incorporate secular methods in doing church work. They may ask why the church does not adopt approaches used by other Christian denominations for gospel outreach. However, if we understand that the power of the gospel is spiritual and God-led, it will be apparent that dressing up the truth to make it more palatable is a senseless thing to do. What matters most is the sincerity of our gospel, not how pleasing it is.

Paul reminds us of the value of remaining steadfast in our faith amid the turbulence of worldly ways, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Eph 4:14).

Children are particularly vulnerable in the two senses given above. First,

they are governed by their passions. Second, they are especially influenced by their environment. A mature Christian does not allow his frustrations with fellow brothers and sisters to defeat his faith, and will not permit his conviction in the truth to be thrown into confusion by the secular forces around him. As the youths of the True Jesus Church prepare to take over the reins, they should bear these marks of maturity in mind.

PERSECUTIONS

True Jesus Church youths must be prepared for persecution of a variety more intense than ever seen before, as darkly prophesied in Revelation:

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. (Rev 12:3–4)

This is a menacing picture that is already forming before our eyes. The tenor of public discourse today is increasingly one of religious intolerance. This only heightens in pitch as we continue to make our stand against those forces that strive

to draw souls away from God. What is more menacing is the threat from within, as the devil works to confuse the truth and deceive the believers of the true church. We cannot pray that this will not happen, for the Bible has warned us that it will. We can only pray that we will not be of the one-third who will fall from the skies. In order to be safe, knowing and upholding the truth is vital. As the apostle Paul exhorts:

[S]peaking the truth in love, may [we] grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
(Eph 4:15–16)

As members of the true church, the inevitability of an increasingly challenging Christian life forces us to confront some basic questions: Do we truly know what we believe in? And if we do, are we willing to stand up for these beliefs?

UNITY OF FAITH

Lastly, the youths must persist in the unity of their faith and commission. As Paul declares:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope

“A mature Christian does not allow his frustrations with fellow brothers and sisters to defeat his faith, and will not permit his conviction in the truth to be thrown into confusion by the secular forces around him. As the youths of the True Jesus Church prepare to take over the reins, they should bear these marks of maturity in mind.”

of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph 4:4)

Just as the fractures between the world and God's church are inevitable, so the Bible warns us of impending divisions within the church. God has promised to carry His church through to the last days. By God's grace, the True Jesus Church has made it through a tumultuous century with one accord. Even before our basic beliefs were officially itemized during the first two World Delegates' Conference (WDC), the True Jesus Church has never wavered in the truth she received from the beginning.¹ This momentous achievement is the fruit of a complete unity—a group of believers in one God, united by the mission to preserve and promote the only gospel that saves.

We are now heirs to a rich tradition of sincere, single-minded

conviction and loving, selfless faith. Any youth who grows up in the religious education system of the church, receives the sacraments, and worships beside his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, will undoubtedly experience the power of God's grace and love upon His church. This heritage of truth is ours to possess and ours to protect.

CONCLUSION

*Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever,
For they are the rejoicing of my heart. (Ps 119:111)*

Our heritage from the Lord is the testimony and law that He has given us. This heritage keeps us going, with hearts full of joy. No matter what, we must keep God's word in our hearts. Let us not be anxious

over our career, marriage, or daily cares. Our spiritual inheritance is God's word in our hearts, so we rely on His guidance.

As we usher the True Jesus Church into the next era, and we make our plans for church growth and personal development, let us always remember that one Man died so that many would take up His truth and pass it on to the generations to come. It is now in your hands—what will you do?

“No matter what, we must keep God's word in our hearts. Let us not be anxious over our career, marriage, or daily cares. Our spiritual inheritance is God's word in our hearts, so we rely on His guidance.”

¹ Six proposals were passed at the first WDC in 1967, regarding the one true God, water baptism, footwashing, Holy Communion, Holy Spirit and Sabbath. Proposals on the true church, the Holy Bible, salvation and the Lord's second coming were passed at the second WDC in 1975.



Revive^{the} True Church (Part 2)

Editor's note: In part 1 of this article series, we learned how, as the revived apostolic church, the True Jesus Church should follow in the same spirit of faithfulness towards God's word, His Holy Spirit and our commission. In this final instalment, the author shares three more areas in which we should emulate the early apostolic church, as we strive towards perfection.

What does it mean to be God's true church? Certain things come to mind: to have the truth that saves, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the commission to preach the true gospel. While we may bear all these hallmarks, is it possible that

“Is it possible that after a century on earth, the True Jesus Church today has retained the form but not the soul of God's true church?”

after a century on earth, the True Jesus Church today has retained the form but not the soul of God's true church?

It is clear to many of us in the True Jesus Church that we belong to something special. God's guidance and concern for His church are evident in the way we have pulled through decades of challenges to establish ourselves across the world. Coupled with the biblical promise that God will preserve His

true church, the True Jesus Church seems secure. Unfortunately, some have been lulled into believing that they need not serve God and His church, for the True Jesus Church will always thrive regardless.

These individuals are not entirely wrong. There was a time when Mordecai reminded Esther that even if she did not lend her help to God's people, “relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place. ...Yet who knows whether you



Members walking to a baptism in Newcastle, 1976. Do we still have the same zeal and spirit of revival today?

have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Est 4:14). We are all in Esther's position today. There is no question that the True Jesus Church will prosper. What remains to be seen is whether we will be counted among those who helped her prosper. This is a question only you can answer for yourself.

If we are willing, then there is much work to be done. What should we work on?

THE GOD-FEARING CHURCH

Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

At a wedding banquet I once attended, several True Jesus Church youths went on stage to present some songs for the newlyweds. Soon after, the wedding emcee said in his speech, "We would like to thank the True Jesus Church youths for putting on a performance for us."

An elderly sister sitting at a table with me and several deacons looked at us, appalled, and asked incredulously, "Can we use the name of the True Jesus Church like this?" After having reassured her that this was no severe misuse of the church's name, my fellow ministers and I marveled at this sister's God-fearing faith. So reverent was she that a passing remark most of us would have ignored brought out in her a fierce protectiveness over the sanctity of God's affairs. This sister embodies one of the defining features of the apostolic church that we would do well to emulate: a God-fearing faith.

“We cannot truly worship and love God, whether in public or in solitude, if we do not first recognize the importance of being honest with Him. Honesty means addressing any negative emotions and thoughts we might be harboring inside us, asking God to pardon and give us the strength to overcome these evils.”

In the verse above, it is clear that "walking in the fear of the Lord" is one of the main reasons why the church population "multiplied." Why is it so important to fear the Lord?

Firstly, God wants us to fear Him because He wants us to truly love Him. When we come to church to worship, or when we pray alone at home, we intuitively adopt the mannerisms of reverence. Outwardly, we are all pictures of piety—standing solemnly as we sing hymns or nodding attentively as we listen to sermons—no one doubts our worship. But all too often, our hearts are filled with impurities of all stripes: greed, jealousy, spite, anger...the list continues. We cannot truly worship and love God, whether in public or in solitude, if we do not first recognize the importance of being honest with Him. Honesty means addressing any negative emotions and thoughts we might be harboring inside us, asking God to pardon and give us the strength to overcome these evils so that we may worship Him with greater sincerity. The importance of this is clear in the well-known story of Ananias and Sapphira, whom God punished for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–10). When we deceive ourselves in this way, hoping to go through the motions of worship or do the minimum, we doubt God's ability to see through our facades; we do not

show adequate fear, or love, of the Lord.

God wants us to fear Him, but not because He needs to be reminded of His power. Instead, God wants us to be honest with Him because He wants to form loving relationships with His chosen people. The meteoric success of the early church, as well as the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira, teaches us just how important it is to fear God, and to love Him in faith and truth.

A COURAGEOUS FAITH

"[T]hey will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mk 16:18)

The faith of the early apostolic church was very special by today's standards.

The Acts of the Apostles records the fascinating story of Tabitha, a disciple of Jesus who had passed away. Instead of immediately arranging her burial, the believers turned to the apostle Peter, so that he might bring a dear friend back to life through God's grace. As expected, Peter came at their request and, after a prayer, God raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36–42).

We may read such biblical accounts of miracles and marvel



at our forefathers' faith and power. Even as we encourage one another to emulate them, these encouragements remain in the realm of the hypothetical. We never literally believe in, or promote, having the faith to perform miracles. The story above is short and simple, but it says so much about what true faith is. The God of Peter is the God of the True Jesus Church today; the Holy Spirit is one and the same; our truth is one and the same. What has changed between then and now is how courageous we are in our faith. There is a difference between having a faith that is aware of miracles as a possibility, and a faith that knows a miracle is but a sincere prayer away. Our forebears in the early apostolic church knew that they needed only to ask, and they would see God's active presence in their lives.

Today, what holds us back from being a church filled with power is a lack of courage. We fear the dreaded uncertainty of possible failure. The embarrassment of a failed public healing is too overwhelming, too

ruinous for our credibility as Spirit-filled Christians. So we comfort ourselves with the unspoken, underlying belief that past miracles were exceptional cases involving exceptional men. We tell ourselves that the ordinary believer has no ability and, therefore, no obligation to have such a courageous, powerful faith.

Another common obstruction to true faith is telling ourselves that we are in no position to force our will upon God. Although this is true, it does not mean we cannot have hope in our faith. It is not humility that prevents us from bringing our entreaties to our heavenly Father, and expecting Him to act for us according to His will; rather, it is our lack of courage.

This is a larger problem than we

might perceive it to be. We live in an age of solutions. Advances in medicine and technology have improved our lives immeasurably. The role of prayer, and to some extent, of God, is reserved for those problems whose solutions we cannot find in the pharmacy or the app store. We may, for instance, pray for the general blessings of a safe and secure future. We may even pray for healing when medicine does not work. But most of us would likely depend more on the pill and the syrup than on a fifteen-minute prayer. "God helps those who help themselves," we say. When we justify our lack of faith with seemingly innocent, even biblical, reasons, we allow cowardice to creep into other parts of our Christian lives. A faith unwilling to proclaim a beloved brother or sister healed is also a faith afraid of proclaiming the gospel to the world. Like the apostles and believers in the early church, we ought to develop a more courageous faith, that by the grace of God, we may be proof of His kingdom on earth.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (Acts 2:44–45)

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of

“ Our forebears in the early apostolic church knew that they needed only to ask, and they would see God's active presence in their lives. ”

the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:34–35)

Of the three areas in need of revival, following the economic example of the early apostolic church might appear to be the most drastic. The truth is, this example of the early church is more necessary than we think. It is difficult to imagine successfully convincing a twenty-first-century congregation to sell all their possessions and to pool the proceeds for everyone to share. I do not believe, however, that the early apostolic church was setting communitarianism as an ideal model in the economic sense. As difficult as forming such a self-sacrificial economic community may seem, forming a self-sacrificial spiritual community is much harder, but also much more important.

By selling all they had and sharing in the proceeds, the early Christians were not simply giving up money, privacy or financial security and freedom. They were giving up something much more significant: their old ways of living. The early believer, having sold everything he had and offering it to God, was offering himself to be part of a spiritual community with fellow followers of Jesus. By relinquishing their possessions and their wealth, they were renouncing what remained of their ties to the world; though individually they had nothing left, together, as a church, they lacked nothing. It is easy to see how the early apostolic church had established God's kingdom on earth.

Reviving this sacrificial spirit would demand the most from us.

“ We need only put aside our worldly concerns to devote ourselves fully to each service we attend, and sincerely care for the wellbeing—spiritual, emotional, physical, material or otherwise—of our brethren. ”

Today, we are not asked to sell our possessions and share them with the people we call brothers and sisters. Instead, we keep what we have earned and offer tithes to God, retaining a comfortable measure of personal freedom and security. What is worrying, however, is how these possessions have come to reflect an investment in, and a bond to, the world outside the church, of which we are unwilling to let go. Yet, when our eternal life could be lost, we ought to reassess our priorities. As Jesus succinctly said: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24b).

The first step to coming together as a community, to establish a heaven on earth, is to cultivate the habit of attending church services and being fully present during our worship. I have fond memories of when I was a youth, spending time in fellowship with brothers and sisters who have grown up with me and are still worshipping God by my side today. Even outside of service times, we would gather in church to study the Bible and spend time together. As we drew closer in fellowship with one another, we relinquished our ties to the world and strengthened our bond with God. Today, we do not need to be carefree youths, with spare time for impromptu Bible studies, in order to embody the same spirit of wholehearted worship and self-sacrifice. We need only put aside our worldly concerns to devote ourselves fully to each

service we attend, and sincerely care for the wellbeing—spiritual, emotional, physical, material or otherwise—of our brethren. Then, we will truly be united as the body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

As a church, on the whole, there are many areas of service that can be improved. What is paramount amid all this talk of growth and revival is an honest examination of our individual, personal faith. By having a better understanding of where we stand before God, what we lack, and what we have done to please him, we can better strengthen those who fight the same spiritual battles by our side. Only then can we be more like the early church of old, and establish our heaven on earth.

Complete the Construction of the True Church (Part 2)

Editor's note: The first article in this series, published in Manna 84, discussed how to build the church on the solid foundation of truth, to ensure that she will overcome any storms that may come. In this concluding article, the author outlines the central role of the church in God's salvation plan, and the need to attain perfection through the cleansing of God's word and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Where does the concept of the true church and false churches come from? Is it from the Bible, or is it mere fabrication? If we care about our salvation, we need to carefully study this matter to identify the biblical truths of God's church and how to enter it. Only then can we

“Jesus said that those who believe in the gospel and are baptized will be saved; but those who disbelieve will be condemned. In other words, repentance and belief go hand in hand with water baptism.”

avoid being misled.

And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.” (Mt 24:4–5)

Here Jesus warns that there will be many false christs. It follows that the churches they establish will be false, and if we put our faith in them, we will forfeit our salvation. Hence,

it is critical we remain vigilant, to distinguish between false churches and the one true church belonging to Jesus.

RELEVANCE OF THE CHURCH

Within Christendom, people hold different views about the relevance of the church. Some argue that the church plays a vital role, and that we should anchor our faith therein; others say that we should place our



faith in God alone. What does Jesus say?

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Mt 16:18–19)

Jesus makes three key points: firstly, He will personally build His church; secondly, He will build it on “this rock”; and thirdly, He will grant this church the authority to bind and to loosen. We can use these three principles to determine whether we have found the church belonging to the Lord.

“I will build My church”

God established His church to proclaim the gospel message:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”
(Mk 1:14–15)

Jesus’ proclamation forms the crux of the gospel. The purpose of His ministry was not to heal illnesses or deliver souls from demon possession. These were miracles He performed out of compassion, to confer physical peace and wellbeing; but physical healing was not the message Jesus preached. So what is the key gospel message? It is that the kingdom of God is at hand. This kingdom refers to the church of God. We have to enter the church of God and, in order to enter, we have to repent and believe in the gospel. This is the gospel message

“ This authority to “loose on earth” is the power of the church to perform water baptism. When the church conducts baptism, men’s sins are washed away, and they enter salvation and freedom from the bond of sin. ”

that Christians should still be preaching.

Today, there are many who proclaim a variation of the gospel, saying that we need only believe in the Lord to enter the kingdom of God. They cite Paul’s teaching: that we should confess with our lips and believe in our heart to be saved (Rom 10:10). They argue that it is not necessary to undergo baptism. But did Jesus not teach us how we should demonstrate our repentance and belief?

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”
(Mk 16:15–16)

While instructing His disciples to preach the gospel, Jesus said that those who believe in the gospel and are baptized will be saved; but those who disbelieve will be condemned. In other words, repentance and belief go hand in hand with water baptism. The effect of the latter is to wash away sins (Acts 22:16), so that we can enter into God’s kingdom and be saved.

So now we arrive at a very important point: since baptism is critical for the forgiveness of sins and entry to the kingdom of God, who should perform the baptism? Once Jesus had accomplished His work of salvation on earth, He needed to pass on His gospel ministry and,

more importantly, the work of forgiving sins. So He commanded His disciples:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.
(Mt 28:18–20)

It is clear from Jesus’ words that He established His church for a distinct purpose—to not only preach the gospel, but also to baptize and save those who believe. Therefore, the church established by the Lord is the only one qualified to perform baptism.

In this present time, many churches preach and implement the word of God partially and selectively. Yet the Bible is clear that the full gospel entails the following:

- Baptism should be performed in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).
- Foot washing should be performed to enable believers to have a part with the Lord (Jn 13:8).
- Holy Communion should be undertaken to enable believers to partake of Jesus’ flesh and blood, so that they may receive eternal life (Mt 26:26–29; Jn 6:53–58).

- The workers of God should lay hands on the believers, praying for them so that they may receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:6).
- The church should observe the Sabbath on Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as this is one of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:8–11; Mk 2:27; Mt 5:19; 19:17).

These five teachings are those of the Lord Jesus and His apostles, and are hallmarks of God's church. They have been carefully documented in the Bible for those who care to study its word objectively.

"I will build My church on this rock"

The Lord Jesus established His church to proclaim and implement His teachings. If we heed the word of our Lord, and preach the word according to His teaching, then we will truly belong to the church established by the Lord. But if we do not completely carry out the word of the Lord, then we do not belong to the church of the Lord.

Why are we so sure and confident of this? Jesus said, "And on this rock, I will build My church"—the "rock" being Himself. How is the church established on Jesus? Does it only require a community of believers to proclaim their faith in Jesus? On the surface, this sounds logical, but what does Jesus say?

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded

on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great." (Lk 6:46–49)

Many believe in Jesus and call Him "Lord," but does it mean they are all established upon the rock? Jesus says no. If we believe in Him, we ought to obey His words completely, which Jesus likens to building our house upon the rock. But if we only selectively obey His words, this is like building on the sand. On the day of judgement, our house will collapse. The Lord will ask, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and not do the things I command?" To be the true church established by God, the church must preach the complete gospel proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles.

"Keys to the kingdom of heaven"

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mt 16:18–19)

The Lord Jesus has given the keys

of the heavenly kingdom to the church, which means the church has the authority to open the doors to the heavenly kingdom. Those who believe in the complete gospel, as preached by the true church, will be able to enter the kingdom of heaven and escape the clutches of Hades.

What are the keys to the kingdom of heaven?

On one level, it is the word of God, entrusted to the apostles. This word has the authority to open the gates of heaven. The apostles passed this word of God, the complete truth, to the saints, and they, in turn, have passed it to subsequent generations. This word carries the power to save, but it also brings judgment, closing the door of heaven. Therefore, the church preaching this complete truth has been given the power and authority to judge, so that those who believe can enter the kingdom of heaven, and those who go against the truth will be denied entry.

On another level, the keys to the kingdom of heaven refers to water baptism. Jesus explains, saying, "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

“A glorious church is one that is without blemish or wrinkle. To be without blemish means being untainted by the outside world. To be without wrinkle means not losing strength and vigour. As time progresses, the church may grow old and weary, so we need to rely on the Holy Spirit to renew our strength and use God's word to cleanse us.”

This authority to “loose on earth” is the power of the church to perform water baptism. When the church conducts baptism, men’s sins are washed away, and they enter salvation and freedom from the bond of sin. The church also has the authority to “bind on earth,” meaning that she has the mandate to pass judgment, such as removing a person from office or carrying out excommunication.

We need to realize that the church will not pass judgment on a whim; her duty is to judge according to God’s word. The criteria she uses is whether a person has transgressed the word of God. This being the case, the church has both the responsibility and authority to pass judgment. No distinction is made between a regular believer, a worker or an ordained minister—everyone is treated in an equal manner. In this way, the church affirms what is right and wrong according to God’s standard in the Bible, and the congregation knows the boundaries of appropriate behavior.

Is the church or the Lord Jesus overly strict? We know that the Lord died for us and established the church through His blood to bring salvation to humankind. From this, we understand the great love of Jesus. He established the church on the rock, which is Himself, and has given her His authority to pass judgment, so that those who believe can be saved, and those who go against the truth shall be condemned. It follows, then, that if we believe in Jesus, we should also respect His church.

HOLY AND UNBLEMISHED

Aside from preaching and safeguarding the gospel of salvation, the believers must also strive to be



adorned and prepared to meet the Lord Jesus.

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. (Rev 19:7)

We rejoice because we are betrothed to the Lord, and we know that one day He will come to receive us. So have we prepared ourselves, and are we suitably adorned?

Indeed, as we encourage or correct one another, as the need arises, are we not preparing the church for the Lord’s second coming?

[T]hat He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:26–27)

The Bible speaks of cleansing the church by the word of God, so that she can be holy and glorious. By Paul’s definition, a glorious church is one that is without blemish or wrinkle. To be without

blemish means being untainted by the outside world. To be without wrinkle means not losing strength and vigour. As time progresses, the church may grow old and weary, so we need to rely on the Holy Spirit to renew our strength and use God’s word to cleanse us. We should heed Paul’s message to be renewed in our spirit day by day (2 Cor 4:16), for this principle applies not only to our physical bodies, but also to the church as a whole.

The true church has long been established, but her construction is an ongoing process. As members, we need to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, so that we can remove our blemishes and wrinkles. In doing so, we can uphold our faith to the end, and present ourselves to the Lord as a glorious church—a beautifully adorned bride.

Parables of the Heavenly Kingdom (Part 1): Salvation for All

KC Tsai
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Editor's note: In Matthew 13, Jesus used parables to define the kingdom of God, explaining the rules for entering this kingdom and painting a picture of life inside and outside the kingdom. This is the first in a series of articles on these parables.

“All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’”
(Mt 13:34–35)

This verse is the key to the parables recorded in Matthew chapter 13.

“The Lord Jesus used parables to utter (i.e., speak out) ‘things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’ According to Jesus, these things kept secret are ‘the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.’”

Quoting the psalm of Asaph (Ps 78:2), Matthew notes that the Lord Jesus used parables to utter (i.e., speak out) “things kept secret from the foundation of the world.” According to Jesus, these things kept secret are “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 13:11). In other words, the parables in Matthew 13 collectively reveal mysteries concerning the heavenly kingdom—the church. As this

series of articles will discuss, these parables speak of the establishment and development of the church on earth, the challenges she will face, and judgment in the end time—how the righteous shall live and the wicked shall suffer eternal punishment.

MYSTERIES

The “things [plural] kept secret from the foundation of the world”



are part of the over-arching mystery (singular) that belonged to the Creator. That mystery is of Christ (Col 2:2). When the time was right, this mystery was revealed to the saints—after Jesus ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit was poured down (Col 1:26; Acts 1:4, 9; 2:1–4). The Holy Spirit not only established the church on earth, He also gave revelations to the apostles and the New Testament prophets so that they could understand the mystery that had been hidden in God from the beginning of the ages (Eph 3:3–4).

This mystery was that, in Christ Jesus, the Gentiles would become fellow heirs with the Jewish believers, of the same body, and partakers of God's promise in Christ through the gospel (Eph 3:5–6). This mystery of Christ is the church: through the church, all people shall receive the gospel of salvation; through the church, the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (all created beings of the spiritual realm) will know the manifold wisdom of God, and receive the revelation of the mystery that was hidden in God (Eph 3:8–11).

The Book of Colossians reiterates the universality of the gospel. Paul says that for the sake of Christ's body, the church, he would rejoice in sufferings and minister, according to the stewardship of God, to fulfill the word of God—to fulfill "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints" (Col 1:24–26). For the sake of the church, Paul preached the love of God, initially the sole possession of the Old Testament elect (Deut 7:6–11), to the Gentiles (Col 1:27).

“ This mystery was that, in Christ Jesus, the Gentiles would become fellow heirs with the Jewish believers, of the same body, and partakers of God's promise in Christ through the gospel. ”

In short, through the parables recorded in Matthew 13, the Lord Jesus expounded the mystery of Christ hidden since the beginning of the ages—namely, the church, and her journey from beginning to end.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

While Matthew and Luke refer to “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 13:11; Lk 8:10), Mark refers to “the mystery [singular] of the kingdom of God” (Mk 4:11). But what and where is the kingdom of God?

Heart of Man

When the Pharisees asked the Lord Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you [ESV: in the midst of you¹]” (Lk 17:20–21). What the Lord meant was that He had already brought the kingdom of God into their midst. But they were still full of curiosity and doubts, and did not have the faith to accept it.

The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom in which the Lord Jesus reigns (Jn 18:36–37). It can thus refer to the hearts of believers. If one enthrones Christ Jesus as the Lord within one's heart, then this heart is

the kingdom that the Lord Jesus has called out from the world (Jn 17:16–21). Such believers may be in the world, but they are not of the world; they are of His saved true church.

Of the parables in Matthew 13, only two were explained by Jesus: the parables of the sower and the tares. The parable of the sower highlights the reality that people respond differently to the same word sown into their hearts. The parable of the tares focuses on the origin of the church, the situations she will encounter, and how she will have to endure trials till the end of the world.

When expounding these two parables, the Lord Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (cf. Mt 13:9, Mk 4:9, Lk 8:8). He uttered this phrase once before explaining the parable of the sower, and a second time after explaining the parable of the tares. This phrase is significant for two reasons. First, “He who has ears” reveals the target audience of these parables: all humans have ears, so these two parables are relevant to everyone, throughout all time. They explicitly state that if anyone wishes to receive the grace of salvation and enter into eternal life, he must change his thoughts and behavior in accordance with the teachings of these parables. Not only does he need to listen to the words, and put these words into practice (Mt 13:23),

1 The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.



he must endure to the end (Mt 13:43).

Second, “let him hear” signifies that the Lord Jesus wants us to constantly examine ourselves to see whether we are receiving the teachings of heaven with a sincere and truthful heart (Lk 8:15). It also tells us that we should endure and bear fruit. At the same time, we must also examine whether our present state of faith makes us wheat or tare. We must constantly rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to cleanse and purify ourselves through the word of the Lord in order to remain (or become) wheat.

The Church

In totality, this set of parables provides a complete picture of how the kingdom of heaven was established on earth. It outlines the origin of the church, as well as her development over the history of humankind, from sowing, to growing, to degradation, to revival, and to future salvation.

TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE

The disciples came and said to [Jesus], “Why do you speak to them

in parables?” He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” (Mt 13:10–11)

Through the parables, the Lord Jesus divided the people around Him into two categories: those who understood and those who did not. This was an important division, because Jesus said:

“For whoever has, to him more will be given and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in

parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled.” (Mt 13:12–14a)

It is not that the Lord typecasts people as those who understand and those who never will. A good shepherd knows His sheep (Jn 10:14), and, in turn, His sheep will know and follow His voice (Jn 10:27). Some may not understand initially, but can grow to understand by being willing to search humbly. What is most important is a person’s heart when he receives God’s word. As long as one is willing to open his heart, and “has the heart” to seek and follow the Lord, he will become “he who has,” and will understand the mysteries spoken by the Lord.

Before His arrest, the Lord Jesus prayed for the disciples. He said:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” (Jn 17:20–21)

Those who understood in Jesus’ time (“these,” in the above verse) were the disciples, and “those who

“ Some may not understand initially, but can grow to understand by being willing to search with a humble heart. What is most important is a person’s heart when he receives God’s word. As long as one is willing to open his heart, and “has the heart” to seek and follow the Lord, he will become “he who has,” and will understand the mysteries spoken by the Lord. ”

will believe in [the Lord] through their word” refer to those who will subsequently believe based on the teachings of the disciples. They will become one in the truth and one in the Lord, making up the true church in the spirit.

The Lord Jesus said, “[A]ssuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Mt 13:17). Indeed, those prophets and righteous men who lived during the Old Testament era feared and served God all their life. But they did not see God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16) or nailed on the tree to redeem sinners from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13). They did not see Jesus Christ—God incarnate—redeem men through His blood (Eph 1:7), or the church that was established on earth as a result. Through the church, He bestowed salvation grace, to overcome the authority of the gates of Hades (Mt 16:18). All these were mysteries hidden in God, which is why the ancient saints neither saw nor heard what was witnessed by the disciples.

THE SIGN OF JONAH

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.” But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Mt 12:38–40)

Just before Jesus spoke of the parables, the scribes and Pharisees asked Him to give them a sign. The

“ The sign of Jonah—Jesus’ death and resurrection—reminds us not to take these blessings for granted. Instead, we should persevere in our faith and strive to freely share the grace that we have freely received. ”

sign that Jesus would give them was the sign of Jonah, who spent three days in the belly of the great fish—signifying that the Lord Jesus Himself would die for the sins of the world, be buried, and resurrect on the third day. This is the only sign that the Lord would give to an “evil and adulterous generation” because He was willing to save sinners. Without this sign, humankind would be without hope. Later the same day, Jesus spoke these parables to illustrate the mysteries of the kingdom of God, revealing the effects of that sign. Through His church, bought by His blood (Acts 20:28), He brings humankind from the world of darkness into the glorious kingdom.

The Lord once told Paul “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18). All who believe in Jesus, and are washed and sanctified (1 Cor 6:11), will receive the everlasting inheritance. Cleansed, they become God’s blameless children in this crooked and perverse generation, shining as lights in the world.

CONCLUSION

Jesus’ parables in Matthew 13 highlight several important blessings that we, His believers, receive. First, we are indeed greatly blessed because we now know

the great mystery that had been hidden since creation, and was not even known by the ancient saints. Second, this mystery pertains to the universality of the grace of salvation, which our Lord Jesus accomplished through His death; it is freely offered to us. We, as Gentiles—the wild olive shoots—can now be grafted onto and made part of God’s household through His grace and our faith (Rom 11:17). Third, the Lord does not discriminate against us if we do not initially understand His word. If we seek and thirst for Him with a sincere heart, we will find Him. Finally, the sign of Jonah—Jesus’ death and resurrection—reminds us not to take these blessings for granted. Instead, we should persevere in our faith and strive to freely share the grace that we have freely received.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The year 2017 was the centenary of the True Jesus Church. In 1917, through the downpour of the Holy Spirit, God established the True Jesus Church in China. Very quickly, the gospel was preached throughout China, as well as to Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and other countries. Today, though the growth and development of our churches vary from country to country, we are thankful that the True Jesus Church is now planted in more than sixty-five countries across six continents. We firmly believe that despite the obstructions and difficulties we face, God will guide us through the stormy waters and give us victory at the end.

“ Although we know it is God’s will for the True Jesus Church to be victorious, it is our duty to self-reflect and consider how we should proceed as a church beyond our centenary. ”

THE NEXT STEPS

Although we know it is God’s will for the True Jesus Church to be victorious, it is our duty to self-reflect and consider how we should proceed as a church beyond our centenary. Which direction should we move towards? Which way is the right way? How do we breakthrough all these challenges in our path? How do we renew ourselves and rejuvenate our faith? Here are five

things we should do that will serve us well in our journey as a church, until we reach our destination.

Keep to the Old Ways

Some members may think that the church should change with the times. They observe that other churches are always teaching new messages and revising their stances on topical issues in order to stay relevant, whereas we in the True



Jesus Church seem stuck in our old ways. In this age, it is indeed not a bad thing to be creative and innovative. In various fields, such as industry and education, society is pushing for new and better ways of thinking and doing things. In a church setting, we could adopt this approach by delivering sermons in a more engaging way, ensuring the message is relevant to members living in this modern age. But this mindset of innovation should only go so far. Let us examine what God said through the prophet Jeremiah:

*Thus says the LORD:
 “Stand in the ways and see,
 And ask for the old paths, where the
 good way is,
 And walk in it;
 Then you will find rest for your souls.
 But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’
 Also, I set watchmen over you, saying,
 ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’
 But they said, ‘We will not listen.’
 Therefore hear, you nations,
 And know, O congregation, what is
 among them.
 Hear, O earth!
 Behold, I will certainly bring
 calamity on this people—
 The fruit of their thoughts,
 Because they have not heeded My
 words
 Nor My law, but rejected it.”*
 (Jer 6:16–19)

Though people nowadays desire novelty and new ideas, God instructs His people to ask for the old paths, where the good way is. How do we know that the old path is truly the good way? Because our predecessors and the saints walked it before us and emerged victorious. Abraham is a prime example; he and his descendants believed in God’s word and walked in the tried and tested paths, according to God’s commands. In the end, God

fulfilled His promise to Abraham, bringing his descendants out of Egypt and into Canaan as a great nation. God’s promises have never, and will never, change. If we follow in the footsteps of the saints, we will see these promises unfold as they did in times past. The question is, can we hold fast to the old paths?

In today’s context, to what do the old paths refer? They refer to the truth that was once and for all committed to the saints by the Lord Jesus; the truth comprises His teachings and the ways of the apostles that have been clearly recorded in the Bible.

As the world changes, so will our approach and methods within church work. For example, the church has made leaps and bounds using the internet ministry for evangelism and pastoral purposes. However, those who seek novel concepts and new biblical interpretations may have already started upon a new path; on closer examination of their beliefs, they may have already strayed far away from the one true God. Even after one hundred years, we must keep to the old paths that our predecessors walked.

Learn from the Acts of the Apostles

How do we know in which direction the church should proceed? We must use the Acts of the Apostles, also known as the Acts of the Church, as our compass. The focus of Acts

is not on the apostles’ endeavors; rather, from the first chapter to the last, the book focuses on the establishment and development of the church.

“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:1–3)

Luke begins the Book of Acts by recounting how, for forty days, the Lord Jesus appeared to His disciples and spoke about the kingdom of God. He ends his account with Paul “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

At this point, Paul was under house arrest in Rome, with a soldier for protection. Yet, miraculously, he was allowed to receive guests in his rented house, and thus continue the work of preaching. Roman law permitted such an arrangement, so Paul’s opponents could not hinder him from spreading the gospel. Through these amazing circumstances, the church in Rome was established.

“ God’s promises have never, and will never, change. If we follow in the footsteps of the saints, we will see these promises unfold as they did in times past. The question is, can we hold fast to the old paths? ”



Though the worker of God was bound in chains, the word of God could never be bound; this is the conclusion that the Acts of the Apostles imprints on our minds. An entire book concerning the church of God was written so that we in this current generation can understand how the church was formed, and how she progressed despite tribulation. The church was challenged by heresies creeping in, members turning apostate, and persecution from all sides. But reading this history, one lesson is clear for the church today: we need not worry; the Holy Spirit Himself will comfort us and help us to flourish. All we must do is rely wholeheartedly on His guidance.

Hold Fast to Pure Teachings

There is an important question we should consider. Can the church today continue to hold fast to the pure teachings and the truth originally preached? The stance of the True Jesus Church has always been that we must be completely aligned with the Bible; we should seek to follow the blueprint of the

early apostolic church—the image of the ideal church—as presented in the Book of Acts.

Today, some may argue that times have changed and the apostolic church is an outdated model. Indeed, methods of church administration will necessarily adapt to changing times, but the founding principles of the apostolic church remain timeless. The truth preached by the apostles cannot be altered by changing societal attitudes. After all, the apostles did not invent this truth, so it is not a product of their era. The apostles' message is the faith that was once for all committed to them by the Lord Jesus; it is the unchanging truth that remains relevant throughout the ages. The instruction of Jesus in Matthew 28:20, “[teach] them to observe all things which I have commanded you—and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age,” was not just directed to the disciples of that time, but also to all future believers.

If we are indeed believers of Christ and of the true church, then we

should follow the instructions of the Lord Jesus as the apostles did. We should emulate the apostles, who sacrificed their all for the word of God and contended earnestly for the faith. When opposed by the rulers and elders of Israel, they boldly declared: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19b–20). In addition, they were very faithful in teaching the word of God, devoting themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). Finally, they were willing to suffer for His ministry. Enduring physical violence, imprisonment, and the threat of death, they did not waver in their faith and held fast to Jesus' teachings.

Today, in which direction should the church proceed? All we must do is follow in the direction set by the Acts of the Apostles.

Be Led by the Holy Spirit

The Acts of the Apostles is also known as the Acts of the Holy Spirit because it records how the Holy Spirit personally led the church. In Acts 2, we read how the Holy Spirit pricked the hearts of the Jews listening to Peter's message, resulting in the baptism of about three thousand people. In Acts 3, because the Holy Spirit worked through Peter and John to heal a lame beggar, more than five thousand came to believe. This was how the church in Jerusalem was established.

Some wonder how the apostolic church could have flourished with just twelve apostles and seven deacons. Even by the standards of the time, they were not a very

talented bunch; yet, because they were faithful to God, the Holy Spirit worked mightily through them. Though the ability to speak is necessary, the presence of the Holy Spirit is even more essential if the workers are to touch the hearts of listeners.

Before the events recorded in Acts 10, the Jews had been unable to accept that Gentiles could become the children of Abraham and receive God's inheritance. The apostles understood, theoretically, that they were Abraham's children not through circumcision but through belief in Jesus and baptism. But they did not have the courage to confirm their belief through action and bring the message to the Gentiles.

However, in Acts 10, the Holy Spirit led a breakthrough by inspiring Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile. Peter himself was still doubtful, but as he preached to Cornelius and his family, he was reassured when God bestowed the Holy Spirit upon the Gentile listeners.

Later, when Peter was criticized for having gone to Cornelius' house, he testified that these Gentiles had received the same gift that they had at the beginning; they spoke in tongues. There was no way Peter could prevent them from being baptized. If it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit, how could there have been such a breakthrough? How could Peter have persuaded

the stubborn Jews to open the door for the Gentiles?

Today, many doors are difficult to open. One of the toughest doors to open is the hearts of men. Some open their hearts and then shut them again. They repent, then return to sin. They believe and then they leave. Though these are hard doors to pry open, we can only do our best to preach the gospel, and the Holy Spirit will lead us in our efforts.

Acts 15 records an incident of another nature—one concerning the truth. Some Jewish believers still insisted on circumcising Gentile believers, causing a divide in the apostolic church. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this problem was given a final resolution (Acts 15:28–29).

The church today will likewise be required to handle tricky questions and dilemmas when it comes to practicing the truth. When such situations occur, we must learn from the example of the incident in Acts 15 and wholly rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Treat Prayer as a Service

Last but not least, in order for us to progress after our centenary, let us not be ambivalent towards prayer. Some of us may be ill or elderly and unable to do much church work, but at the very least, we can pray. Then there are those who do much church work, but do not consider

prayers to be a form of service. Paul emphasized the importance of supporting the workers through prayer, noting to the Corinthians:

[You also helped] together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

(2 Cor 1:11)

How can we help the church and aid the church workers? Apart from offering our services and strength, we must also offer our prayers. When we pray with all our heart, it represents our total reliance on God's guidance in the development of the church. Prayer can be accomplished by any believer and is a service we must not neglect.

CONCLUSION

God has led us thus far over the past century, and will continue to do so in the next if we play our part well. While having faith that God will cause His church to flourish, we must continue to walk in the old paths of the saints and rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. More importantly, we should pray that God preserves our own faith, so that we, as individuals, will not waver in our beliefs and can lead future generations to hold fast to the truth. The Holy Spirit will assuredly complete His work of perfecting the true church.

“ Apart from offering our services and strength, we must also offer our prayers. When we pray with all our heart, it represents our total reliance on God's guidance in the development of the church. ”

A Letter to Our Youths:

Nathaniel Chin
Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia

The Next Twenty Years

Greetings of peace to our youths.

Have you ever considered your role as a youth in the True Jesus Church?

In the eyes of God, youths occupy a particularly important position. From the Bible, we can see how God continually selected, delivered, and employed youths as important vessels for His work. When seventy-five-year-old Abram was called by God to depart from Haran, he was accompanied by a youthful Lot (Gen 12:4). From Joseph and Daniel and his friends in the Old Testament, to Timothy and Titus in the New Testament, the young servants raised by God became blessings

to others in their respective generations.

So what role do youths play in the True Jesus Church, now that we have passed our centennial? In this end time, Satan will not accept failure without a fight; he will do all he can to disrupt God's plan of salvation for man. And he will have the vulnerable youths in his sights. He will take advantage of their naïve, stubborn and curious natures to inflict great destruction, tempting them with wealth, fame, status and sex (Rom 1:24; 2 Pet 2:10–18). Some youths will depart from safety and step blindly into the “danger zone,” where prowling lions seek to bring them into the bondage of sin (2 Pet

2:19). If such youths fail to turn back, they will eventually defile their holy status and lose their blessings (Heb 12:16–17). Judgement is the ultimate consequence (Heb 10:26–27). Sadly, countless youths have fallen into this horrendous state. If we have another twenty years, how should we, as shepherds, help the youths escape these snares to enter into the everlasting life of God?

RECOGNIZE CRISES FACED BY YOUTHS

The twenty-first century is an age of ever-increasing knowledge (Dan 12:4), materialism (Gal 5:17), evil and sin (Rom 1:21–24). Men deceive and try to outwit one another, abandoning virtues like honesty



and kindness (Rom 1:28–29). Living in such a society, some youths become so indifferent toward their life of faith that they cannot discern when they are heading for danger, even when they have already fallen into captivity (Rom 3:11–12). Seeing this happen to certain youths is greatly distressing.

Unfortunately, youths who are trapped on this downward spiral get into the habit of not attending services (Heb 10:25). They alienate themselves from the church, eventually departing from God and losing the ability to discern. They are no longer able to differentiate between right and wrong, good and bad, just like one who is unable to discern the face of the sky and the earth (Lk 12:54–56). At the same time, false teachers who have crept in unnoticed (Gal 2:4; Jude 4) have replaced sound doctrine with human philosophy, and even substituted biblical truth for erroneous teachings. Youths who are distanced from God are unable to identify these false teachers. To such youths, trusting in God can seem like an act of superstition. They put their faith in science rather than the true God. Some have even acknowledged the devil as their father (1 Jn 4:2–3), embarking on a self-righteousness path that eventually leads to destruction.

Furthermore, because young people tend to be more affected by strong emotions, they can be misled by their feelings. This is something they must be vigilant to guard against. Youth is a golden stage of life, but it is also a dangerous time. Their immature minds, coupled with a lack of life experience, can cause some youths to drift with the tide (Heb 2:1) and fall into temptation. This can lead to the

inability to discern the wickedness in man's heart, to distinguish between the wolf and the shepherd (Isa 11:6), and to identify the false teachers, who Peter calls "natural brute beasts" (2 Pet 2:12). In this unpredictable world, some youths act without considering the consequences and dangers ahead. But those with such an easygoing attitude may eventually find themselves in a hopeless situation, where it is too late for regrets, and there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (Heb 10:26).

Today, there are also youths who think they are knowledgeable and have no need for guidance. In the end, they will fall into the power of darkness, blinded by the god of this age (2 Cor 4:4). They become disorientated and unable to find the right path. Yet, because they do not want to feel the shame of correction, they continue to stumble about in the valley of darkness (Job 12:25). They charge ahead on paths that they think are bright and hopeful, but end up becoming even more lost.

Youths in this end time face unprecedented temptations and danger. Because Satan knows his end is drawing near (Rev 12:12), he is wildly pouncing on this weak, ill-equipped flock. By employing deception and the lure of wealth, beauty and glory—i.e., the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:16)—Satan sets up

many hidden traps that are difficult to guard against (Ps 18:5). These traps include fornication, homosexuality, computer games, ubiquitous advertising, prostitution, gang violence, gambling, alcoholism, and drug abuse. Youths who fall into these snares find it hard to free themselves (Prov 1:17). The sad conclusion to this is not only loss and shame in this life, but also rejection at the heavenly gate.

If youths caught up in such snares continue on the same path, what good would another twenty years do them? How do we, as shepherds, feel when we see individuals in such a wretched state?

LISTEN TO THE BIBLE'S WARNINGS

Nowadays, society promotes the idea that poverty is shameful, while wealth represents the pinnacle of success and virtue. But Jesus said, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26). Jesus also said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Lk 12:15). Alas, some youths fail to use the words of Jesus as a compass in their life. Instead, they live their lives according to worldly values, and become caught in harmful desires. Such youths find it hard to resist the allure of riches.

“Youths are in their golden stage of life, but it is also a dangerous time. Their immature minds, coupled with a lack of life experience, can cause some youths to drift with the tide and fall into temptation easily.”

The rich young ruler who once talked with Jesus had kept the law since he was young. He had wealth, status and honor, but all these could not fill the emptiness in his heart. That was why he sought after eternal life (Mk 10:17–22). When he was instructed by Jesus to sell all he had to give to the poor, and to follow Him, the young man's countenance changed and he departed sorrowfully. His reaction was enough to show that he was someone who had reached the gate of the heavenly kingdom; yet he allowed eternal life to slip away, and turned towards the palace of death. Why did he do this? Because he could not let go of his riches. How pitiable indeed! For us, the blessing of twenty more years is neither a platform nor an opportunity to gain the whole world.

READ MORE, REFLECT MORE, PRAY MORE

If given another twenty years of life, youths ought to make use of their time to read more Christian publications, especially those published by the church. A habit of Bible reading must be cultivated. Moreover, youths must live by the teachings of the Bible and put them into practice (Jas 1:25). Only with more Bible reading will we be able to understand the heart of God; only with more reflection will we be able to internalize the words of God; only with more prayers will we be able to fulfill the work of God. We should heed the apostle Paul's message to Timothy: "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Tim 4:15). With the limited time they have, youths ought to put in more effort in matters concerning the salvation of souls. Youth is like the infinite sky and uncharted

territory. In this stage of life, youths should aim to reach as much sky and conquer as much territory as they can. They must reach their pinnacle—by becoming soldiers of Christ—and put in another twenty years to proclaim the gospel of the heavenly kingdom to the ends of the earth!

OBEY, OBEY AND OBEY

We often sing the hymn *Trust and Obey*, with the lyrics: *Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*¹ There is truly only one way to be happy in life: to obey God!

It is indeed true that the Bible has set the most difficult benchmark for us—obedience. I earnestly hope that all youths will accept this benchmark. The greater our ideals, the more people will ridicule us for setting such high standards. If we fail to live up to worldly ideals, nothing severe will happen and our life will go on. However, if we fall short of God's ideals by not submitting to Him, that would be the greatest mistake of our lives (Gen 32:9–13)!

SOME FINAL WORDS

As time passes, the difficulties faced by this generation of youths

become more and more evident. For this reason, the heavenly Father groans and weeps for them, while the Holy Spirit toils for their souls. Should we not also be concerned for them?

In the next twenty years, today's youths will become central to the development of the gospel work. They are the ones who can best understand the requirements of the work ahead of them. We must work alongside and pray earnestly for the youths. In the meantime, they must learn to rely on the Lord to bring Satan into bondage and free their hearts from his sway, so that they can return to Jesus. This is how we should nurture our successors in faith to ensure that the work and the blessings continue. If we can work together in this way, heaven and earth will rejoice when we receive the second coming of Jesus. And if we are given another twenty years, it would not be a day too many!

“Youth is like the infinite sky and uncharted territory. In this stage of life, youths should aim to reach as much sky and conquer as much territory as they can. They must reach their pinnacle—by becoming soldiers of Christ—and put in another twenty years to proclaim the gospel of the heavenly kingdom to the ends of the earth!”

¹ By John H Sammis (1846–1919).

Following God's Calling

Editor's note: The Scriptures tell us that the true church will eventually reach perfection and be glorified by God. But as we strive to reach this goal, we need workers to dedicate themselves to serve in the ministry. In fact, since this process of perfection is God's work, God Himself will raise up workers. Many are called, but few are chosen. Who are the chosen ones? Those who boldly accept God's calling. In the following testimonies, three writers share their personal journeys towards full-time ministry, how God called them and continues to guide and walk with them, every step of the way.

Derren Liang
Irvine, California, USA

Choices: My Family's and Mine

Our lives are defined by the choices we make. For me, the greatest decision I have made in my life was to dedicate myself to be a full-time minister. However, the roots of this choice were not planted by me: I did not choose this faith. As a second-generation believer, I received my faith from my parents. The choices they made changed their lives (and those of their children) eternally.

MY FATHER'S CHOICE TO BELIEVE

In 1951, while my father and his brother were on a shopping trip in Taipei, they came across a sign that read "True Jesus Church." My father, a Presbyterian at the time, was very indignant. He thought to himself, *Why do they call themselves "true," suggesting other churches are not?* So he marched into the



“The God we worship is the source of living water. If we do what is pleasing in His eyes, we need not worry, for God will sustain us”

True Jesus Church to demand an explanation. During that session, a minister explained the doctrines of the church to my father, who realized that they all made sense. He could see that their basic beliefs were from the Bible. After the discussion, as my father was leaving, the minister told him that he could pray and receive the Holy Spirit.

My father took the invitation to pray for the Holy Spirit to heart. He fervently prayed at home, and was overjoyed when he received the Holy Spirit. Not only did he understand the truth, he was able to experience the precious Holy Spirit. Eventually, he brought his five siblings and their families to be baptized into the True Jesus Church.

MY RELATIVES' CHOICE TO BELIEVE: DISTURBANCE FROM THE DEVIL

Thirsting for the truth, my extended family willingly converted to the True Jesus Church. However, as new believers, they neither fully understood the Bible nor had full discernment when it came to spiritual matters. After praying for the Holy Spirit, they seemed to have received Him. However, they soon felt that something was amiss, although they were unsure what. The spirit they had received could predict certain things. These relatives were vegetable farmers who sold their produce at the market. The spirit in them could prophesy which kind of vegetables would sell well the next day, and

which would not. If my relatives heeded the spirit's forecast and took those vegetables to market, everything would be sold quickly. If they ignored the spirit's prediction, their vegetables would be left unsold, even up until noon.

Later on, these relatives became more fervent. They started to fast and pray, even skipping work to do so, saying that the Lord Jesus would come soon. At one point, a few of them saw an aeroplane flying backwards in the sky. They were puzzled but, in their inexperience, did not understand what was going on. They just knew that a powerful spirit was involved. Besides making predictions, this spirit could also reveal what wrongs had been committed by other people. It was so accurate that others started to fear them.

The church came to know of these happenings when workers made a routine visit for newly baptized families. Through prayer, these workers discerned that the spirit was an evil one. When the workers helped my relatives realize this, the spirit fled. By God's grace, when my relatives knelt down to pray again, they truly received the Holy Spirit and were filled with joy.

“My father often encouraged us to serve the Lord throughout our lives. Do not put off service until you are advanced in age; give God your best while you are still young.”

Lesson of Faith 1: Test Every Spirit

My relatives' experience shows that we cannot believe every spirit (1 Jn 4:1). Even after believing in Jesus Christ, it is possible to receive a spirit that is not from God. We must thus be vigilant and build up our ability to discern.

MY FATHER'S CHOICE TO ENTER THE MINISTRY

My father was a teacher, but after his baptism, he aspired to serve the Lord. One night, he dreamed of a train that was destined for heaven. He opened his suitcase to look for his ticket, but he found that there were just too many things packed inside. By the time he found his boarding pass, the train had left. The message was clear: he was tied down by many secular tasks, and if he continued to be bound by these, he would find it difficult to enter heaven. Hence, he decided to enroll in the church's theological seminary, and was accepted into the first cohort of full-time theological training program students.

After my father joined the ministry, my mother had to raise the family on her own. Although we were poor, my mother loved to offer to God. On one occasion, the local church requested contributions to help fund the construction of a church building. My mother promised to donate a sum that was equal to half of my father's living expenses. When my father returned home and heard what my mother had done, he

was upset. He said to my mother, “I have offered myself to serve the Lord full time. Why do you create another burden for yourself?” What an irony—the evangelist objecting to his wife making an offering to God!

When my father returned to the church he was pastoring, his body started to itch. He tried applying topical creams, and even prayed for healing, but to no avail. He reflected on his behavior: *Is this happening to me because I opposed my wife’s offering?* He then prayed to God, “If I am suffering for my wrongdoing, I repent.” After this prayer, the itch disappeared. Amazingly, the amount of money he had spent on the medicine was the same amount that my mother had intended to offer! It was a timely reminder that the ability to offer is indeed grace from God.

Notwithstanding my father’s repentance, we still had a problem: where would we find the money that my mother had pledged to the church building fund? My father decided we should raise piglets. Miraculously, the pigs thrived and, within six months, we had sold them and offered the pledged amount to church.

Lesson of Faith 2: God’s Grace is Sufficient

The God we worship is the source of living water. If we do what is pleasing in His eyes, we need not worry, for God will sustain us. For instance, in the countryside where we lived, there was only a line dividing my family’s fields from those belonging to our non-believing neighbors. We sowed the same seeds and used the same water to irrigate our fields. However, there was a noticeable difference between our

crops and those of our neighbors. Even the non-believers could see how much more fertile our fields were compared to their own. They did not understand how this could happen, but we knew that it was the blessing of God.

My father often encouraged us to serve the Lord throughout our lives. Do not put off service until you are advanced in age; give God your best while you are still young.

MY MOTHER’S CHOICES IN SPIRITUAL NURTURE AND DIVINE SERVICE

Lesson of Faith 3: Pray Unceasingly

Besides her spirit of offering, my mother was also a sterling exemplar in prayer. She loved to pray, waking up at 5 a.m. to pray until 7 a.m.; and she would always have a long prayer before bed, even if she was exhausted. When filled with the Holy Spirit, she would sing spiritual songs; at times, she was so joyful that she would wake us up to pray with her. In our prayers, we always felt God guiding our family. Though our lives were simple, joy filled our days.

My father passed away after serving the Lord for ten years. At forty-

six years of age, my mother had to shoulder the burden of feeding and caring for the whole family. Yet, she did not allow this to affect her life of prayer. Despite her intense sorrow at my father’s demise, she was able to rely on God. Whenever she sang spiritual songs in prayer, her sorrows were lifted. The Holy Spirit comforted her.

My mother’s prayerfulness had wide and long-lasting impact. My parents had five children; all five of us married in the Lord and are preserved in the Lord to this day. Apart from God’s grace, I have always felt that the most important factor was my mother’s unceasing prayers.

Lesson of Faith 4: Serve with Diligence

Another of my mother’s virtues was her diligence. She got up early, slept late, and worked tirelessly throughout the day. She also applied this attitude to serving the Lord, particularly in her determination to complete every task she undertook. This is an enduring example to her children. When my mother was given the opportunity to live in the church to serve God, she was thankful to be able to fulfill

Materially Poor, Spiritually Rich

My life as a child was a stark contrast to life today. Up until I left elementary school, I had never worn shoes. Unlike the youth of today, who grow up in front of screens and are sheltered from nature, we climbed trees, chased birds, caught fish in the canal, and swam in rural ponds. Prayer was a source of great joy to us. Despite our poverty, we led fulfilling lives. Most importantly, we drew nearer to God and enjoyed His presence in our lives.

her desire to serve. She would ensure that every floor was thoroughly cleaned, and every blanket was properly washed and odor-free. Her belief was, *Not only must I finish the work of God, but I must do it properly. I answer not to man, but to God.*

MY CHOICES

Staying in Church and Experiencing God's Guidance

When I was in high school, my brothers enlisted in the army and my mother moved to the city. Left to live alone, I decided to move into the church. The three years I lived in church changed my life. I had no family living nearby, so after school I would head straight back to church and spend between thirty minutes to an hour in prayer. I was often filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy. Indeed, that was one of the most joyful periods of my life.

In my second year of high school, my prayers became particularly earnest. "Lord, I do not have my parents here to guide me. Oh Lord, please guide me!" was my constant

“The thought of serving God still moved me to tears. I shared my uncertainty with a preacher, who advised me to watch and wait. If God were the source of this thought, it would surely happen.”

supplication. On one occasion, while I was deep in prayer, a thought was carved deeply on my heart: *God wants me to serve Him.* After that prayer, every time I thought about serving the Lord, I would be moved to tears. This could happen when I was at school, when I was riding my bicycle, or when I was lying down to sleep. Even though I was still in high school, God had let me know what He wanted me to do. This thought, imprinted on my heart, would eventually lead me to enter the full-time ministry.

From University to Ministry

In my third year of university, another thought was planted in my mind during prayer. It was that God wanted to lead me to America and

use me there. I was puzzled why such a thought would pop into my mind. I wondered whether I had imagined it, or whether it was truly God's will. I pondered on this for a long time, but I had no answer. Yet, the thought of serving God still moved me to tears. I shared my uncertainty with a preacher, who advised me to watch and wait. If God were the source of this thought, it would surely happen. So I decided to let things fall into place naturally.

After university, I enlisted in the army. For six months, I attended an infantry academy as part of the basic infantry training that all university graduates were required to undergo. After this, I was posted to the paratroopers unit. Soon after, I realized that I was not suited to this role. Paratrooper cadets were selected specifically for their physical strength and stamina. They were expected to run with machine guns—something I found difficult to do. On one occasion, while crawling on the ground during an exercise, I told God that I really could not handle this. If I could not live up to the physical demands of training, how would I be able to lead a platoon of thirty men? As I prayed, the moving of the Spirit within my heart told me God had heard my prayer.

Not long after, I was chosen, as a civil engineering and construction graduate, to oversee the building of



army barracks for the paratroopers. This meant that I had regular working hours, and no longer needed to undertake such extreme physical training. The barracks were not built in the end. But, indeed, we can cast all our cares—no matter how big or small—on our Lord who truly cares for us.

As the end of my army service drew near, I had no idea what my next step should be. On a train home from the army camp, I thought about my choices. Some of my classmates had entered the workforce, some had continued their studies, and others had moved overseas. What should I do? As I reflected, the Holy Spirit moved me to tears. The person sitting next to me kept staring at me in puzzlement. His confusion was a counterpoint to my clarity and certainty—I had to serve the Lord. Therefore, I joined the theological seminary in Taichung and entered the ministry.

Coming to America

In 1981, at the World Delegates' Conference held in Taiwan, the United States General Assembly submitted a proposal: to help church workers go to the United States (US) to learn English. When I saw that proposal, I knew that my time had come and that God had opened the way. However, I did not put myself forward to the International Assembly (IA), as I wanted to see how God would guide. Indeed, the IA passed the proposal, and decided they would send two candidates to

the US. Elder John Yang informed me that I was one of the chosen ministers. Thus, the idea of serving the Lord in the US was indeed from the Lord. Truly, if we seek the Lord, He will reveal His will for us.

I started preparing to go to the US. First, I applied for a theological program at a seminary run by another Christian denomination, with the purpose of improving my English. As part of the application, I had to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Despite not having taken a test since university and having only a short timeframe to study for it, I attained the score required by the school. This was yet another one of God's mighty works.

The next problem soon popped up. I did not realize that, back then, the Taiwan government only granted Taiwanese students permission to travel to America if they were accepted into certain universities; Taiwanese were restricted from leaving the country for religious purposes. What was I to do? I suddenly remembered that I had also applied for other university research programs. One of these universities had accepted my application and had sent me an admission letter. Better yet, this university was on the Taiwanese government's approved list of universities. Therefore, I used this letter to obtain a passport from the Taiwanese government, before applying for a US visa.

CONCLUSION: RIGHT CHOICES BRING ABUNDANT BLESSING

In retrospect, I can clearly see how God has guided my every step. I came to the US with little, but with God's guidance, I have everything I need today. My three daughters were able to complete their tertiary educations without taking any loans, which seems impossible on a preacher's salary. By God's grace and miraculous ways, it was indeed possible. He provided for all our needs. Many believers who came to the US empty-handed have had the same experience of God's providence.

My mother used to say, "If you do not have something to do each day, then what is the point of your life?" This motivated her to serve the Lord every single day, giving her life value and meaning. This is why I have always thought the best way to live my life is to serve God. Even though we may lead simple lives with few possessions, we can be filled with peace and joy.

I often ask myself, *If I were to live my life again, would I make the same decisions?* Indeed, I am certain that, if the Lord were to move me, I would take the same path. Like others, I have experienced the pain of seeing co-workers depart from the truth, but this is a useful reminder to all of us who serve, to be vigilant and watchful. Only then can we complete this path of service, and be able to give a joyful account to the Lord when we see Him on the last day.

May all glory and praise be unto His holy name! Amen.

“If I were to live my life again, would I make the same decisions? Indeed, I am certain that, if the Lord were to move me, I would take the same path.”

Samuel Kuo
Flushing, New York, USA

We Are God's Workmanship

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10)

Every creation has a purpose. Take a look at the things around you—the roof over your head, the clothes on your body, even the typeface of this text—they have been made for specific purposes.

Our existence is no exception. Jesus Christ created and called us for His purpose. As Paul wrote in Ephesians, we were created in Him for good works—works that have been prepared long beforehand for us to accomplish. Fulfilling these works means we are living out our Creator's purpose for us—the epitome of a successful life.

MY FIRST CALLING

The first half of 2004 was my final semester at university. Throughout that school year, I had prayed over what I should do after graduation. I was interning at Motorola at the time, and they had offered me a full-time position. Therefore, I prayed to see if it was God's will for me to take this job, or to do something else. All this while, I pondered over my calling in life. What was my life's purpose?

During spring break that year, I met with my resident preacher, Preacher Derren Liang, to discuss some local church matters. I took this opportunity to seek his advice on my future. During my university

years, I had become more involved in the church's literary and internet ministry, so serving in this area was also a possibility.

Preacher Liang advised me to consider applying for the full-time theological training program, explaining that a sound theological foundation was necessary for writing edifying works. Before I left, he added, "Right now, we really lack English-speaking preachers." This statement stayed with me, as I had always thought that my birth in the United States, with English being my strongest language, was no accident.

After that session, as I drove home, tears welled up in my eyes. I wondered, *Is God calling me to be a preacher?* However, I quieted those thoughts, rationalizing that if God

wanted to call me, He would make it very clear.

A few days later, our campus fellowship group visited members in Philadelphia and Washington, DC. That Friday evening, we lodged at the church in Philadelphia. As I was assigned interpretation duties for Sabbath services the following day, I stayed up late to read the Bible and pray in the church hall.

My prayer started liked any other. Soon, as I shifted my focus to pray about my future, I reflected on my recent conversation with Preacher Liang. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit moved me with great intensity. It was like nothing I had experienced before, or since. It reached the point where I could no longer pray in tongues because I was weeping so much.

In my spirit, I knew that Jesus was telling me, "Serve me as a preacher."

However, my immediate reaction was, "No, it can't be me, it can't be me!" I felt unworthy, and did not think my personality or my gifts



Preacher Samuel Kuo and family.

were suited to this ministry. There was a struggle within my heart. After five to ten minutes of internal wrestling, I finally realized that I could not deny God. In my heart, I finally said, “Okay.” At that moment, God’s tremendous love poured into my heart. I could resume praying in tongues, and I concluded my prayer about ten minutes later. As I was walking upstairs to bed, I realized that God had not answered my specific questions about my future. But He had given me a clear direction to work towards.

In the weeks that followed, I came to understand that God was not telling me to apply for theological training immediately. Besides, I was only twenty-one years old, and the minimum age requirement set by the United States General Assembly (USGA) was twenty-three. God was telling me that, while this was the path I would tread, I needed to prepare myself first.

Growing up, I had always attended churches with large congregations, so my faith was bolstered by a stable spiritual environment. But this made me question my motivations for serving God. Was I doing it because of reputation—because it was expected? To impress people? Therefore, I decided to take up graduate studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which was two-and-a-half hours’ drive from the nearest True Jesus Church. As I prayed, God seemed to be telling me that it would be good spiritual training: an opportunity

“As I drove home, tears welled up in my eyes. I wondered, Is God calling me to be a preacher? However, I quieted those thoughts, rationalizing that if God wanted to call me, He would make it very clear.”

for me to examine the substance of my faith and my service.

MY SECOND CALLING

After I moved to Illinois in August 2004, the initial period was fresh and exciting. It was the first time I had lived away from my home state. But after one month, I realized I was not as strong as I had thought. My faith was declining, as were my academic grades. I started to doubt: *Does God really want to use me? If I change, does God’s will change?* Doubts crept into my mind over the next year or so. I was unsure of where I stood in God’s presence.

In January 2006, during the winter break, I attended a church seminar for Africa ministry volunteers. During the first evening prayer, encouraged by the preceding message, I prayed diligently. I told God, “God, I do not know where I stand before You.” I realized how unworthy I was in His presence. I continued, “God, You knew me even before I was in my mother’s womb. All of my ugliness, You know. But if You are willing to use me, I will serve You.”

I was so moved during that prayer that I continued to fast and pray during dinnertime. In prayer, it

seemed like I had entered into a spiritual dimension, where I spoke directly to God. I asked Him many questions, expressing my doubts and worries about full-time service. “What about my introverted personality? What about my lack of eloquence? Will a sister be willing to marry me? What about finances? I have not been able to convert any of my friends—would I be any good as a preacher?”

Yet, to every question I asked, it seemed God simply responded, “Don’t worry about it.” After that prayer, I sensed God’s gracious affirmation. It was a second calling.

MY THIRD CALLING

I graduated with a master’s degree in May 2006. Thank God, I promptly secured a job in Texas. Before starting work, I attended the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS). Within the first two days, Preacher Vuthy Nol-Mantia, who was a theological student and NYTS counsellor at the time, approached me. Knowing that I had graduated and found a job, he was interested in my next steps, since I had previously shared with him my first calling.

Preacher Vuthy asked, “Have you been thinking about marriage?” Without disclosing her name, I told Preacher Vuthy that I had a sister in mind, but did not know if it was God’s time for me to approach her.

“In my heart, I finally said, ‘Okay.’ At that moment, God’s tremendous love poured into my heart.”

He advised me to tell the sister so that, if she accepts the possibility of being a preacher's wife, she could prepare herself. I kept this matter in prayer for the rest of the seminar.

For many years, I had thought Joyce was a good sister. She was also Preacher Liang's daughter, and I was not sure how he would react to his daughter entering a relationship, since she was only twenty-one. At that time, Joyce and I were just friends. We did not really talk much and I had not made an effort to stay in touch while I was at graduate school. I was also very shy around her. I was worried about making things awkward between us if I approached her and the timing turned out to be wrong.

Therefore, I decided to speak with Preacher Liang, who was an instructor at the NYTS. If he said, "No, we cannot accept you," then I would just let it go. If he said, "Wait," then I would wait. To avoid making her feel uncomfortable, Joyce did not even have to know about this conversation. During the chat, I plucked up the courage and confessed, "I like your daughter, and I wondered what your thoughts are about me starting a relationship with her."

Honestly, I thought he would say, "It's too early." Thankfully, he said, "Why don't you sit down with Joyce and talk to her before she goes to Taiwan?" She was going to Taiwan a few weeks later to study Chinese for a year. "We'd be happy to see what God's will is." I was very surprised that he gave me the green light. I immediately called my parents and spoke with them too.

One week later, straight after the NYTS, Joyce and I were attending

“ Things were often unclear. However, God is my Creator, and He graciously revealed His purpose for me—a purpose that I shall continually strive to fulfill. ”

another seminar. I was distracted the whole time. Finally, on the last day, I found an opportunity to have a private conversation with her. After sharing with her about my calling, I asked her if she could pray about two matters: first was my future ministry, and second, whether she would be willing to join me on this journey.

I expected her to ask for a couple of weeks to pray before giving me her answer, as becoming a minister's wife is no small decision. Yet, she gave an immediate response: "My answer is yes."

I was surprised. "Wow, how come you are so certain?"

She told me that two years earlier, in April and May of 2004, she felt that God was repeatedly telling her the same message in her prayers: "You will serve Me all your life. You will be a preacher's wife." So, with me approaching her two years later, it seemed a perfect match. It was something she had been quietly anticipating. I did not realize that God would even call a preacher's wife!

Later that day, I flew to Texas to start my new job. Throughout that entire flight, I was in a state of awe; I felt so humbled. I could not understand why God would do this for someone like me.

To me, it was a third calling. The first two were during my personal prayers with God, but this third

calling was confirmed through a third party. All my lingering doubts dissolved and I completely surrendered to Jesus. I just told God, "You've convinced me. Although I do not know what will happen in the future, I trust You."

After her stint in Taiwan, Joyce returned to the States and completed her master's program. A week after her graduation, we were married. Later that same year, I was accepted into the theological training program. In November 2014, I was ordained as a full-time preacher.

Looking back, I cannot but humbly thank God for His mercy and guidance every step of the way. Things were often unclear. However, God is my Creator, and He graciously revealed His purpose for me—a purpose that I shall continually strive to fulfill.

Society's definition of success typically revolves around fulfilling dreams, self-actualization, attaining wealth, or some variation of these. Unfortunately, we Christians often become engrossed in pursuing this definition of success too. While worldly success is not forbidden, our primary concern should be to fulfill the intents of our Maker. The call to full-time ministry does not happen to everyone, but the principle remains. We are His workmanship, created to accomplish good works.

Are you fulfilling your Creator's purpose?

En-Ping Liu
Tamsui, Taiwan

Feed My Sheep

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep. (Jn 21:17)

As believers in the true church of God, we have been purchased by the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28), and were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). Have you ever wondered why God chose you? The answer is simply that He loves you. If we can see how tirelessly God calls us back when we start to stray, we would never leave His church. For me, this redeeming love has compelled me to present my body as a living sacrifice to God. This is my story.

TURNING AWAY FROM GOD

I grew up as a True Jesus Church member in Tamsui, northern Taiwan. My childhood was carefree, and attending church services was a normal part of my routine—this, to me, was how simple it was to live a faithful life. When I was in senior year of high school, my carefree days were suddenly cut short—my family met with a financial crisis and almost went bankrupt. At the time, my family members began to lose their pure faith in God. We no longer had time for church, and any

money-related discussions would lead to arguments. Experiencing such pressure at home, I prayed to God that I could enroll at a college far away.

God indeed answered my prayer: I ended up at a college in Kaohsiung, in southern Taiwan, about five hour's drive from Tamsui. This provided the perfect excuse for not visiting my family so often. Deep down, I just wanted to escape.

In an attempt to put family troubles behind me, I dedicated most of my time to extra-curricular activities at college. Although I knew that church was important, I only attended when I had spare time; college activities always came first. As I indulged in these worldly

“If we can see how tirelessly God calls us back when we start to stray, we would never leave His church. For me, this redeeming love has compelled me to present my body as a living sacrifice to God”



“God’s mercy was like a rope that kept drawing me back. Time and again, different brethren conveyed the same message to me: God is more important than anything in this world. Whenever my faith was low, their care lifted me up.”

pursuits, my values gradually changed, and I even had a non-believing girlfriend for a time.

By the mercy of God, the members of my church varsity fellowship never gave up on me. They prayed that I would return to the love of God and to church, and endeavoured to keep in touch. On one occasion, I met three of them for dinner. I thought they would scold me for not attending church services, but instead, they just asked about my studies. Even though they did not mention church, I knew deep in my heart that they wanted me to return, and I knew that God had sent them to me. Because of their sincere love, I broke up with my girlfriend and started attending church services again.

God’s mercy was like a rope that kept drawing me back. Time and again, different brethren conveyed the same message to me: God is more important than anything in this world. Whenever my faith was low, their care lifted me up. In the end, God’s love compelled me to devote myself to attending church services and to studying His words.

THE LORD HAS NEED OF YOU

In 2012, during my third year of college, I attended a student spiritual convocation. Listening to the many teachings, I realized it was God’s mercy that I was able to attend the event and study His

words. I was inspired to dedicate the rest of my life to God. A thought formed in my mind: *I want to be a preacher*. In one class, a deacon shared an English hymn with us, and asked if anyone could provide Mandarin interpretation for the class. “Is there anyone who majors in English?” he asked. “The Lord has need of you!”

I was shocked. I was an English student—was the Lord calling me so soon? My fellow students pointed me out to the deacon, so I had no choice but to stand up to interpret. However, I buckled under the pressure—I could not translate a single word. Sitting down, I told myself, *God has need of me, but I am not yet prepared*.

FEED MY SHEEP

Half a year later, I attended the Youth Theological Training Program (YTTP). I was so moved by the words of God that I decided to return over the next two years to complete the three-year-program,

to cultivate myself spiritually. I also began to wake up early to pray before lessons started.

In my third year of YTTP, I was elected to be class leader, much to my surprise. I asked God why He would choose me—how could I lead the whole class when I had once strayed so far in my faith? But the phrase “the Lord has need of you” kept coming to mind. I felt that God wanted to train me so that I could stand firm before Him. Therefore, I prayed earnestly to prepare myself before the event started, but I did not foresee the challenges that I would face.

There was one particular incident during my time as class leader where God exposed my shortcomings and spoke to me. I was informed that some students had been blatantly sleeping during lessons, so during one of my sharing sessions I spoke sternly to the class. As anger rose within me, I rebuked them: “If you don’t want to learn the words of God, just get out of here!” Afterwards, I was upset with myself for speaking so harshly, so I went to the prayer room to pray, repenting before God for scolding His sheep.

To my astonishment, a gentle thought—not quite a voice—came from the depths of my heart. It said, “En-Ping, do you love Me?”

“A gentle thought came from the depths of my heart. It said, “En-Ping, do you love Me?” I knew in my spirit that this was God’s voice, so I shouted from my heart, “Lord, of course I love You! That’s why I’m here!” Then the gentle voice spoke three words: “Feed My sheep.”

I knew in my spirit that this was God's voice, so I shouted from my heart, "Lord, of course I love You! That's why I'm here!"

Then the gentle voice spoke three words: "Feed My sheep."

On hearing this, I started to cry. I finally realized that the action of loving God is to feed His sheep. Once again, the idea of becoming a preacher came into my mind. I knew I was not worthy of taking up His ministry, but I told God, "If You need me, I am willing."

GOD CONFIRMS HIS CALLING

I felt that I had received God's calling to become a preacher, but I could not be completely sure. If it was indeed God's will, I would apply for the theological training program (TTP) as soon as possible. The minimum age for TTP applicants in Taiwan is twenty-five years old, so I had to wait. In the meantime, I asked God to confirm His will to me.

1. My Family Returns

I could have stayed near my college after graduation, but I chose to move back home instead. Since my family had departed from church, I thought it would be difficult for me to become a preacher. Therefore, before I spoke to my family about God or any faith-related matter, I would pray earnestly, sometimes with fasting. I would then share with my family what I had learned at church, and encourage them to have faith in God. I prayed to God: "If it is indeed Your will for me to apply for the theological seminary, please bring my family back to church."

It was a long process but God answered my prayers. At first,



Brother En-Ping Liu and family.

my family refused to take my advice, but as they listened to my encouragements, God gradually changed their hearts. One summer night in 2014, I caught sight of my family praying together. I knew that this was the green light for me to apply for the TTP.

2. His Servant Prays for Me

In September 2014, I was conscripted into military service. At the beginning, I had to attend training for three months straight. But luckily, I could still take weekends off. Many spiritual convocations were happening around that time, so I looked for one taking place nearby. There was a prayer house holding convocation on a day that I was free—I believe that this was God's arrangement for me.

During the services, I listened carefully to the preacher's message. When it was time to pray, I walked to the front for the laying of hands. I earnestly prayed for confirmation that I should become a preacher and for guidance in my preparations. After we finished praying, the

preacher began to introduce the members of the congregation. When he reached me, the preacher said, "I saw this brother praying very hard, so when I laid hands on him, I prayed for him—that he could become a preacher one day."

I was shocked and excited by his words. Afterwards, I eagerly asked how he knew what I was praying for, even though I had never met him before. He just smiled and said, "Thank God, it was the movement of the Spirit. Keep praying! He will lead you."

3. A Message on a Card

By God's grace, in October 2014, I was given an alternative option in the military service. Instead of training at the barracks, I only needed to teach at a school for high school dropouts. Near this school was the small church at Beipu, so I could attend church services and even undertake holy work. My relationship with the church brethren gradually deepened, to the extent that some members treated me like a son.

In September 2015, after a year of military service, it was time for me to leave. Two days before I departed, the church held a farewell gathering for me. This touched me deeply. They gave me an MRT railcard with a message written on the back:

Jesus said to En-Ping, "En-Ping, do you love Me?"

En-Ping said, "Lord, yes, You know I love You."

Jesus said to En-Ping, "Feed My sheep."

These words were based on John 21:17—the same passage that had come to me in prayer during my final year of YTTP. I had not shared that experience, or what I had been praying for, with anyone. I was so moved that God had called me a third time.

4. Blessings in Marriage

Although I had felt God's calling, I was not confident enough to proceed with my application. When I first aspired to become a preacher, I prayed that God would provide me a prayerful spouse who would be willing to be a preacher's wife. Indeed, God granted my prayer and, on November 1, 2015, He blessed me and my wife in holy matrimony.

Before the marriage, I still had my doubts about the way ahead. One sister who was married to a preacher

told me, "God has given you clear evidence of His will: your fiancée's willingness. Not many sisters would want to be a preacher's wife." At that moment, I realized how God had led me through this whole process. Since my wife and I had agreed that I would apply for the TTP when I turned twenty-five the following year, I had no reason to hesitate any longer. By God's grace, I passed the TTP entrance exam in August 2016. God chose me, an unworthy man, to be His full-time servant.

REFLECTIONS

Now, as a TTP student, I still have much to improve. This verse is a source of strength for me whenever my faith is low:

"But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." (Lk 22:32)

I was once a lost son who pursued worldly pleasure, but God called me to return. In my heart, I know that I am undeserving of such amazing grace. God's love has compelled me to dedicate my life to strengthen my brothers and sisters, and to serve God with all my heart, all my mind, and all my soul. May all glory be given to Him. Amen.

“I was once a lost son who pursued worldly pleasure, but God called me to return. In my heart, I know that I am undeserving of such amazing grace. God's love has compelled me to dedicate my life to strengthen my brothers and sisters, and to serve God with all my heart.”

God Protects His Church Throughout the Storm

Robinson Bini
Delta State, Nigeria

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I testify of the past twenty years of God's grace upon the True Jesus Church (TJC) in Nigeria.

The TJC in Nigeria is celebrating her thirty-ninth anniversary this year. Between 1979 and 1992, the church membership grew to approximately ten thousand members. However, a wild storm then swept a vast number of members off the ship, leaving a remnant of only a couple hundred souls. It was as though the glory of God had left His church.

The Lord brought me into the ministry in 1993, while His church was still weathering the storm. Few faithful workers remained; many

had departed and, tempted by material gain, led other members away to form their own churches. Others even sold the church grounds and church property. In short, many members wavered or strayed in their faith.

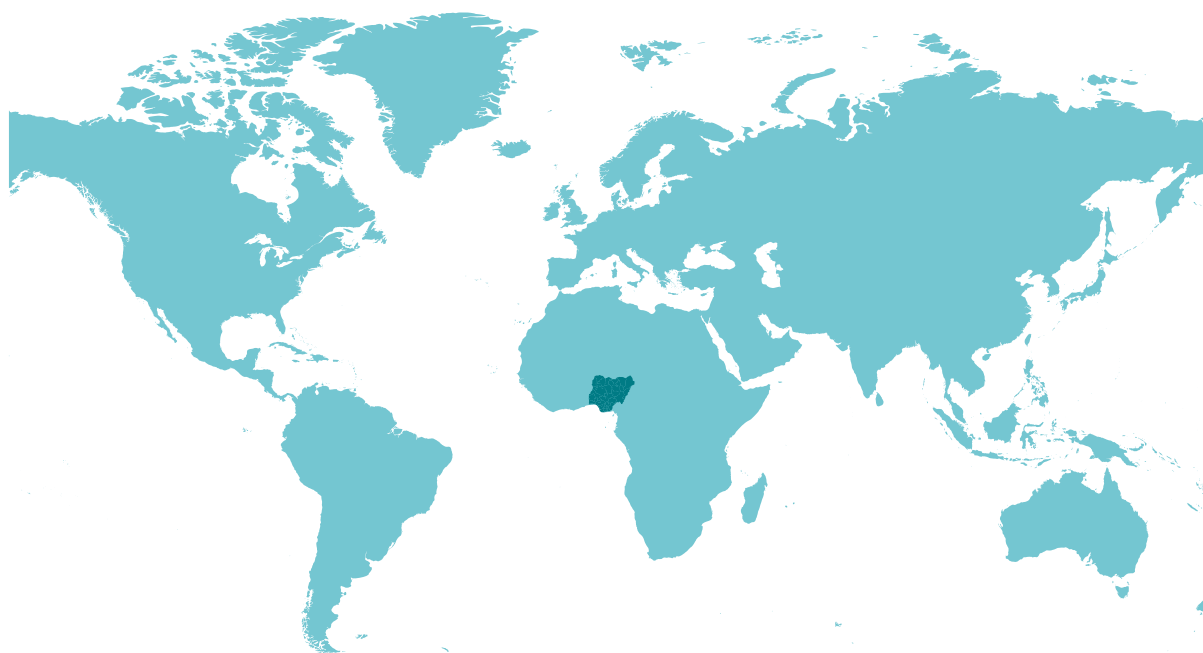
During this time, the church administration was inefficient, perhaps because the members were not adequately trained, spiritually, to hold key offices in the church. After we petitioned the International Assembly (IA) of the TJC in 1995, Preacher HH Ko visited us the following year. However, as far as I am aware, between the period of 1997 and 2002, we received no visits from

overseas church workers to support our spiritual cultivation. We were greatly discouraged, as the hearts of many ministers and workers had been darkened by fear, pride, greed, the lust of the flesh, and so on.

THE LORD PRESERVED HIS CHURCH

The church suffered much loss during this period of spiritual decline. However, our Lord, in His infinite compassion, restored her. Permit me to share my testimony.

In 1993, a year after I finished my secondary school education, I entered the ministry as a part-time worker—the youngest worker at the time. After six months, I became



“The Lord spoke to me in a dream, saying, ‘You have all sinned, particularly the workers, the board members, of the church.’”

a full-time worker. I was moved to embark on a full day of prayer, alone and with no human contact. That night, the Lord spoke to me in a dream, saying, “You have all sinned, particularly the workers, the board members, of the church.” He revealed to me three names.

Thereafter, I spent seven days in fasting prayer, pleading for the restoration of the church in Nigeria. On the eighth night, I had a vision of the heavenly hosts descending, and the phrase “666 now in the West.” God had revealed to me that false prophets were working in the Western world. Hence, with great zeal, I began to evangelize concerning our sins and weaknesses, and rebuked the three board members God had named. One repented, but the other two refused to heed and turned against me, even attempting blackmail.

During this period, God’s grace led me through many trials. The first was a serious illness—a lump was discovered in my stomach. Although an operation was scheduled, the doctor told me that the chances of success were slim. A few hours before the operation, I prayed earnestly within my heart to the Lord. When the doctor came to prepare for the procedure, he found that, miraculously, the lump was gone. The members who had visited me in hospital were doubtful that I would be able to attend church after the operation, so they were shocked and praised God that I was able to worship with them that Sabbath.

Times were hard and I found it difficult to pay for food and rent. But thank God, some church workers, such as the late Deacon AA Chuku and Brother Obadiah Francis, stood by me and supported me financially during those stormy days.

In 1995, we wrote to the IA to recommend that the national church board be dissolved. Preacher Ko came the following year to fulfill our request, which helped to manage the situation.

THE MEMBERS HELD FIRM TO THE FAITH

Initially, the remaining church members were not entirely devoted. However, the Lord preserved us through a program of spiritual cultivation organized by the church. From 1999, we began to hold an annual interstate combined spiritual convocation. This usually took place at the end of the year, and would last for three days. Members from various states would gather in the church at Port Harcourt, Rivers State, and feed on the manna of God’s word day and night. We sought to increase our faith in God and the true church, and learn the importance of earnest and regular prayers.

After my ordination as a minister in 2012, this combined spiritual convocation also served as a ground for baptism. During each convocation, we would witness the power of God bringing love, peace and, most importantly, strengthened faith, as many

members testified. In 2014, we replaced this annual event with twice-yearly seminars at Port Harcourt. From this year, we are planning to hold seminars in both Port Harcourt and Delta State.

Port Harcourt now holds Bible studies every Monday and Saturday, and a fasting prayer each Wednesday. Every summer holiday, we hold a children’s seminar, in which many devoted children, as young as five years old, receive the Holy Spirit. A youth seminar is also held in summer, and has been running for about four years. Youths from across Nigeria gather to learn about the word of God from His servants; to know and understand each other better in the peace and love of God; to learn about their roles and responsibilities in the community of faith; and to study the doctrines of the church, in order to be rooted and established in the truth.

Many students have testified of spiritual experiences during these youth seminars. In 1997, a brother from the church in Delta State witnessed a vision in prayer: an ark was sinking in the waters, but as he prayed, it was gradually lifted up to stand on the sea. In 2016, a sister named Jennifer saw, during prayer, writing on the altar: “Christ will come soon. Baptize those who are due for baptism.”

CURRENT CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Currently, we have about 400 to 450 members in Nigeria. There are five churches: two churches in Port Harcourt, Rivers State (Elimbgu and Aluu), two churches in Akwa Ibom State (Iwukem and Omumunyam), and one in Delta State. We have three prayer houses: two prayer

houses in Rivers State and one in Lagos State, all set up in members' homes.

In previous decades, the church lacked dedicated workers, and the church organization was informal and inadequate. Thank the Lord, the Nigeria Church Board Council (NCBC) has now been established, comprising a chairperson, an IA advisor to the chairperson, a secretary, an assistant secretary, a treasurer and a financial secretary.

Religious Education

Similarly, the religious education (RE) system was not clearly defined in the past, because we lacked RE teachers and teaching materials. But since the Lord has brought many souls into the fold, we saw the need for a better system. Around 2012, the NCBC started giving RE teacher training to some devoted and God-fearing members, especially youths of good reputation. In 2016, the organization was formalized, with classes for toddlers (kindergarten class), children (junior class), teenagers (youth junior class), young adults (youth senior class, 20–35 years), adults (36+ years), and truth-seekers.

Evangelism

Lately, the church in Nigeria has stepped up in her evangelism efforts. The third Sabbath of each month is now devoted for evangelistic services. Thank God, the faithful prayers of the members have empowered our works and made them fruitful. On October 23, 2017, thirty-five truth-seekers were baptized into the fold, and six received the Holy Spirit.

The Upcoming Generation

When the church in Nigeria was re-establishing herself after the storm, the majority of the congregation were young families. God be praised, eighty-five percent of the youths in church today were baptized as infants. Nurtured by the church, they have learned the church doctrines since they were in kindergarten.

The few members who joined the community of faith as youths are currently undergoing RE classes on the basic beliefs and doctrines of the church. Thank God, the majority of these youths accept the truth and are willing to forsake the doctrines of their previous churches.

In November 2016, a youth forum, based mainly in Port Harcourt, was formed to unite the youths and facilitate their participation in holy work. Activities include monthly spiritual revivals, evangelism, and visits to orphanages, prisons and hospitals. This forum is still fresh, so we welcome guidance from the IA on how to actively encourage and involve youths in religious activities beyond routine worship.

POTENTIAL FUTURE CHALLENGES

Financial Capacity

In 2017, the church in Elingbu (Port Harcourt, Rivers State) demolished its church building and remodeled the church compound, at an expense three-times its

former value. The property needs continual maintenance, to minimize the possibility that larger and more costly repairs will be required down the line. Thank the Lord, a few members were able to contribute financially to support the work, since the majority work in low-income jobs. We pray that God will empower more members, especially the youths, to be able to offer more in future.

Manpower

Currently, the TJC has five churches and three prayer houses in Nigeria, with a membership of between 400 and 450. However, there are only one ordained full-time minister, one deacon and one deaconess to pastor all the members across the country.

Nigeria has thirty-six states, and numerous local government areas in each state. Of these, the TJC has reached only four states. Just as it is written: "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Mt 9:37). We pray that the Lord grant us an increase in order to spread the gospel of salvation within our country, and beyond to our neighboring countries.

Most importantly, we pray that God's power, His Holy Spirit, continues to abide with us as we continue in faith. May our Lord be blessed for preserving the church in Nigeria through the stream of time. Amen.

“We pray that God’s Holy Spirit, continues to abide with us as we continue in faith. May our Lord be blessed for preserving the church in Nigeria through the stream of time”

Reflections on Our Church in Nigeria

Michael Chan
Leicester, UK

I first visited the True Jesus Church (TJC) in Nigeria in 2002, together with a fellow worker.

Since the late-1970s, I have heard much about our church in Nigeria from ministers who had served in pioneering work there. Nigeria was the first African country to receive the truth, as preached by the TJC, and the first in which the TJC was established. Many ministers from overseas have testified of the signs and miracles they witnessed in the early days of the church in Nigeria. God had blessed the Nigerian brethren with much grace, and they showed great yearning for the truth.

In the mid-1980s, I had the opportunity to meet several Nigerian workers when they came for training in the United Kingdom (UK). The seminar was held in Edinburgh, UK, at the church now known as Gifford Park. I remember arriving to church early that day, after a long overnight journey. As I was resting in one of the classrooms, the Nigerian workers were having their morning prayers in the church

hall. The sound of the praying was like that of blowing wind; I was amazed—Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit as the sound of blowing wind came to mind (Jn 3:8). That was my first experience of such prayers.

THE PERIOD OF DECLINE

Although the churches in Nigeria had witnessed God's grace, sad news reached us in the 1990s: many unfaithful workers and members had fallen away from the truth. Over a tumultuous period, those without a genuine heart for the truth departed, and influenced others to turn away too. Some even led groups of members away to form their own churches.

My first visit to Nigeria was in 2002, when the church was recovering from her lowest spiritual ebb. Only a handful of churches remained, with a couple hundred members. There was only one full-time worker for the whole country. But thank God, this young worker had grown up in the church, and had a strong faith in the truth. He did not have an

easy life, but he showed no signs of quitting.

My fellow overseas worker and I hired a taxi and visited the churches in the Port Harcourt region. The trip was challenging and we suffered from dehydration and diarrhea, which disheartened us further. We wondered if there was any hope for the churches in Nigeria. Would God continue to care for His church here? Were there any true believers left? But God knows the heart of man, and truly cherishes His church. We visited the church in the home of the aforementioned young worker and, to my surprise, the faith of the members was strong. The way they prayed and listened to the word of God, and their warm reception, reassured us that there was still a faithful remnant in the Nigerian church.

Whenever I think of my time in Nigeria, one incident comes to mind. We went to visit a certain sister, whose father had forced her to leave her husband because of a dispute over the dowry. The father was a non-believer, so he forbade her from going to church, which was far from where they lived. We informed her that we would visit her during this trip. When we arrived at her village, she saw us coming from a distance, and came out of her house. She ran to greet us, like a young girl welcoming her father home. Her affection towards the workers touched me deeply. After we encouraged her to remain strong and not to give up amidst these troubles, she sent us off with many tears.

“Many ministers from overseas have testified of the signs and miracles they witnessed in the early days of the church in Nigeria. God had blessed the Nigerian brethren with much grace, and they showed great yearning for the truth”

WITNESSING GOD'S REVIVAL

Early in 2017, fifteen years after my first visit, I returned to Port Harcourt to conduct a seminar



for the Nigerian and Ghanaian workers. I was not quite sure what to expect this time. When I arrived, a few workers greeted me; among them was the young worker whom I first met fifteen years ago. I noticed a great change in the atmosphere—it was not the same as when I first visited. Although I did not have the opportunity to visit churches in other areas, I was able to have fellowship and discussions with members from across the country, and I felt they were now stronger, more faithful and more zealous, especially in the prayers they offered to God.

Now there are around 400 to 450 members in Nigeria—not only first-generation believers, some of whom I recognized from my first visit, but second- and even third-generation

believers. This shows that faithful members have firmly held on to the truth. Over the last fifteen years, the International Assembly (IA) has been unable to send many workers to pastor the local members, because of difficulties in securing travel visas. Yet, God has trained the members and strengthened them by His grace during their decade in the wilderness. He led and taught them in His own way. The true church is thriving in Nigeria!

A BRIGHT FUTURE

The church in Nigeria is preparing for the future with plans to build new churches, and a training center in Port Harcourt. Although these projects are costly, the Nigerian members have not asked for a single penny of financial assistance from the IA or overseas churches.

On top of this, the local members funded the expenses of the seminar I conducted in 2017. Such financial independence has yet to be seen in other countries on the African continent. Nigerian workers are also sent to pastor the churches in neighboring countries—such as Liberia and Ghana—and assist the work there.

May God continue to bless the churches and all the faithful workers in Nigeria, so that more wonderful and good work may be done for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

“God has trained the members and strengthened them by His grace during their decade in the wilderness. He led and taught them in His own way. The true church is thriving in Nigeria!”

The Power of Zealous Prayers in the African Ministry

Editor's note: As we reflect on how far God has brought us over the past century, we are compelled to look at how far we still have to go. The True Jesus Church is firmly established in many countries across the world, but we must continue to push forward to preach to the ends of the earth. Just as in the early days of the church, the ministers and volunteers undertaking this pioneering work are blessed with God's abiding grace and power in their ministry. Through prayer, the workers are able to preach boldly, labor tirelessly, and rely wholeheartedly on God in all things. And those who hear accept the truth with joy and simplicity of heart. Here, three Africa ministry volunteers share their experiences.

Charmian Chong
London, UK

Date of trip: December 2016

Countries visited: Ghana and Togo

I truly thank God for the opportunity to visit the churches in Ghana and Togo. Our time in Ghana was primarily spent helping with the student spiritual convocation and other pastoral work. In Togo, we also evangelized and participated in visitations. From these experiences, I could truly appreciate the truth that God has given to His church.

I travelled with a sister from my local church and a UK preacher. Most of the time, we were accompanied by

two local brothers (one of whom has now been ordained as a full-time minister) and another preacher.

IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT PRAYER

Without prayer, we would not have been able to carry out any holy work. One of our tasks was to help with the National Student Spiritual Convocation (NSSC). A few weeks before the trip, I was assigned two topics to teach the thirteen-to-seventeen-year-olds across twelve lessons. It usually takes me one to two weeks to prepare just one religious education (RE) lesson, so this assignment was daunting. Thank God, through my prayers, He guided me in my preparations.

Because I typically teach sixteen-



to-seventeen-year-olds in my local church, I tailored my NSSC lessons towards this age group. On the first day, I realized that nearly eighty percent of the students were in their early teens. Understandably, they became extremely restless in that first lesson; my lesson plans were designed for the wrong age group! In the short ten-minute break between lessons, I had to rethink my whole approach. I remember feeling useless and out of my depth—I did not know how to teach my students. How would I get through to them? I had no choice but to pray and completely rely on God.

I truly thank God. He not only helped the students to miraculously settle down, but He also put His words into my heart to share with them. Teachings I had learned long ago, from personal experiences, Bible studies, fellowships and sermons came to mind, as though planted by God. I could no longer fully follow my lesson plans, but I could fully rely on God. It was as though God had been preparing me all along so that I could teach His children. All glory to God, this truly was His mercy.

When we carry out holy work, it is important to prepare. However, there is more to it than just practical preparation. God wants us to lead a life where we are always ready to do the work. God prepares us through our daily communication with Him as we pray, read the Bible, attend worship services and fellowships, and sing hymns, reflecting upon the teachings within them. Jesus promises us:

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things,

“We should have the same enthusiastic heart towards preaching Christ to others. The power and goodness of the truth remain the same no matter where we are.”

and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (Jn 14:26)

We only need to rely on the Holy Spirit, and He will guide us in our service. God will work in and through us in His own way.

THE SPIRIT OF EVANGELISM IN THE LOCAL BRETHREN

The local members' hearts were very simple when it came to preaching the gospel. During one of our long drives, we needed to buy some charcoal on the roadside. One of the brothers took out an evangelistic leaflet and started preaching to the charcoal seller with enthusiasm and conviction. It was evident he truly believed in the doctrines given to the church by God. Because these members really had the heart to preach about Jesus, they took every opportunity to share the gospel of Christ with others.

Many of the people we met were eager to hear what was being shared. We had many in-depth conversations about the biblical doctrines of the church. On hearing such things, members in more developed countries may perceive it to be more difficult to preach at home. Nevertheless, we should have the same enthusiastic heart towards preaching Christ to others. The power and goodness of the truth remain the same no matter where we are.

COMPLETE HEART OF DEVOTION

Thank God, I was able to hear

many testimonies of how different brothers and sisters came to the church. Some members had been faithful believers in other denominations. Some had even previously founded their own churches. One brother, who was the founder of a Sabbath-keeping church, shared how he came to know the true gospel. Having heard that there were missionaries from the True Jesus Church, he was eager to meet them, knowing that we also keep the Sabbath. Unfortunately, he was unable to that time. Later, he had another opportunity to meet some True Jesus Church brethren, who then preached the truth to him. He realized that the doctrines he had been following were incomplete. He knew that the truth was found in the True Jesus Church. Because of this, he left his previous church and was baptized into the true church of God.

There are many other testimonies of how brethren forsook their former beliefs and came to accept the truth entrusted to the True Jesus Church. Making such a decision is not easy. It means acknowledging that the teachings they once found security in were incorrect. It means believing that the gospel preached by the True Jesus Church is true, and that the truth has been given to this church alone.

When Jesus called the disciples, He told them: “Do not be afraid” and, “Follow Me” (Lk 5:10, 27). When the disciples heard this, they forsook all and followed Jesus. This was the



heart of some of the members we met. They completely submitted their hearts to God. By humbly removing their pride, they let go of their prior beliefs, and opened their hearts to allow the truth of God to enter their lives. Whether we have believed in Jesus for many years or have only just started our journey of faith, God wants us to humbly yield our hearts to Him, to allow the truth of God to guide us.

PERSONAL FAITH LESSONS

One of the most important teachings reinforced by my Africa ministry experience is that the True Jesus Church is the true church of God. Witnessing the gospel being preached to both individuals and groups every day, I came to appreciate how simple and pure the gospel is. For longtime believers, it can be easy to take the truth for granted. On this trip, I saw the word of God in action, being used

as a sword to bring others to Christ. The preachers and workers fought against the incorrect teachings of other denominations, rightly dividing the word of truth. Africa is not the only place where we can experience this. We can also experience the power of the word in our daily lives. All we need is faith and the power of the Holy Spirit to boldly use the word of truth!

One brother told me: “The True Jesus Church does not give me anything, except the truth. And that is why I’m still here.” This brother is not very well-off financially. What he sought after was not material

gain, but the truth of God. Praise God, after being baptized for only about eight years, this brother has dedicated himself as a full-time minister for the church in Ghana. He has truly experienced the goodness of the truth in the church of God. This brother is one of many who shared their testimonies of how they simply believed in the truth.

The apostle Paul writes: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16a). My time in Africa allowed me to witness members living out this verse in their lives—forsaking their old ways and coming to the truth, and using the truth as a sword to cast down incorrect beliefs.

Barry Chiang Vancouver, Canada

Date of trip: June 15 to July 16, 2017

Countries visited:

Malawi and Zambia

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify of the grace I received during the Africa missionary trip I joined last year. From June to July 2017, I accompanied Preacher FF Chong and Preacher Tony Kuo to Malawi and Zambia. God taught and inspired me in many ways on this trip, particularly with regards to prayer.

“Africa is not the only place where we can experience this. We can also experience the power of the word in our daily lives. All we need is faith and the power of the Holy Spirit to boldly use the word of truth!”

“This spirit and fervency in prayer transformed the church there. We could see the members’ zeal and thirst for the word of God.”

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

Every day during the trip, we prayed an hour each morning and evening. In Zambia, two local brothers joined us to assist with the holy work. One of them later testified that, through these twice-daily prayers, he finally learned what it means to pray in tongues. During one prayer, fully submitting to God, he told Him, “Lord, I cannot do this on my own. Please take full control.” Then the Holy Spirit filled him and he felt much power and joy, as if there were sweetness in his mouth! Previously, he would only pray for the sake of praying, but now, he finally understood the importance of praying in the Spirit. Even after an hour of prayer, he did not want to stop.

Often, we take praying in tongues for granted. We may not always feel peace and joy in our prayers. It would be unfortunate to receive the Holy Spirit, but fail to experience the promise of “rivers of living water” flowing from our hearts (Jn 7:38–39). We definitely can experience this joy today. We just need to remember the joy of first receiving the Holy Spirit, and yield entirely to God, allowing Him to do His wonders.

FERVENT PRAYERS OF THE BRETHREN

One thing that I witnessed was our African brethren’s fervent spirit of prayer. We visited a certain church to assist with the holy work, and the brothers and sisters there were

devoted to prayer. There is a very distinct difference in the spiritual strength of this church.

We were staying in a brother’s house. On the first morning, he arose at 4 a.m. to pray. Initially, I did not think much of it, as many African brethren wake up in the early hours of the day. But he prayed continuously, and only stopped after an hour. Most of us would not wake up that early to pray, much less pray for that long.

He was not the only member with this zeal, as the whole church was fervent in prayer. During our hour-long morning prayers, some members, including youths, would come into the house to pray with us voluntarily. During our last evening prayer of the trip, many members prayed with us. Even young children joined! I was so touched, as even though they could not stay awake for the entire prayer they were willing to join us to pray. Adults, youths and children alike, all had the heart to pray.

TRANSFORMING POWER OF PRAYER

This spirit and fervency in prayer transformed the church there. We could see the members’ zeal and thirst for the word of God. During lessons, even sisters, who usually had chores to do, would sit and listen. We were astonished by the local workers’ in-depth understanding of the Bible.

Sometimes we underestimate the

transforming power of the Holy Spirit. We pray, but we may not fully believe or allow the Holy Spirit to transform us. We can learn an important lesson from this church. Frequent and sincere prayers are transformative.

Thank God for this missionary trip and the bountiful teachings I received. Taking inspiration from the spirit of our African brothers and sisters, let us strive to be diligent in our prayers. If we do, we will experience God’s transforming power as well. For our God who works in Africa will surely work in our hearts and in each local church.

Aimee Lin
London, UK

Date of trip: September 15 to October 1, 2016

Country visited: Kenya

THE HOLY SPIRIT TRANSFORMS A PERSON’S HEART

We often feel that certain people are so stuck in their ways that it would be difficult for them to change. In these situations, we can only rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to move hearts, so that they can return to the Lord.

During the missionary trip to Kenya in 2016, we visited many churches. One day, we visited a sister in the Siaya area who had not come to church for about six months. When we first prayed—standing up because of limited space—the sister was praying so quietly that we could not hear her voice. After the prayer, the preacher asked her if she had received the Holy Spirit. She answered yes, but the local worker said otherwise. From the moment

we had arrived, this sister was cold and unresponsive. We could see her pride and unwillingness to receive encouragement. However, by the power of the Holy Spirit, her attitude gradually softened as she became more willing to listen.

After the concluding prayer, the sister cried. She confessed that she was not walking according to the will of God, and had repented in prayer. She had asked God to help her and remove the burden in her heart. She then requested we pray again, this time kneeling down. Struggling to find space to kneel, we squeezed close together and prayed again. Thank God that this sister received the Holy Spirit and started to speak in tongues during this prayer.

I was really touched by this miracle. If not by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is nearly impossible for a person to change. In the short space of one hour, this sister transformed from a proud person, far from God, to a humble, repentant soul yearning to draw near to Him.

Date of trip: November 11, 2017 to January 1, 2018
Country visited: Zambia

I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST

One of the most important things I learned in Africa is that I am only able to serve God by His power.

On December 10, 2017, we left Kaoma (western province of Zambia) and travelled to Chamboli, Kitwe for the National Student Spiritual Convocation (NSSC). There was no direct coach, so we had to travel for seven hours to Lusaka before catching another coach to Chamboli. The final eight-hour leg of our journey was interrupted at 9 p.m. We were only forty-five



True Jesus Church in Chiringa, Malawi.

minutes from Chamboli, but it was illegal for the coach to operate after this hour. For the entire day, the five of us had only one packet of biscuits to share between us. There were no toilet facilities on the coach, so we tried not to drink too much water. The coach was packed, but we could not open the window as it was raining outside. Tired, hungry, thirsty, hot, and bothered by mosquitoes, we waited another eight hours before the coach was allowed to move again, at around 5 a.m.

We had travelled for nearly twenty-four hours without much food, water or sleep. Yet, as soon as we arrived, we had to conduct morning prayers and commence our NSSC lessons. I was assigned to teach the under-eighteen class for the entire day. I felt so tired that morning. I wished I could somehow get out of teaching the class. Knowing it was my duty, I struggled internally until the morning prayer session, when I shared Psalm 121 with the students: “I will lift up my eyes

to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Ps 121:1–2). I was encouraged by this passage. Yes, I was tired, but God is my Helper. Yes, I was weak, but God’s strength is made perfect in my weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

After the sharing, we knelt down to pray. The students were so zealous in their prayers and the sound was so powerful. I asked God for help and strength, saying, “Lord, I can’t do this by myself, as I’m so tired. But I know You are almighty; only through Your help will I be able to do this.” Then I felt the Holy Spirit empower me.

Thank God, I was able to deliver three lessons before lunch without feeling tired that day. This experience reminded me that when we serve God, we rely not on our own power or strength, but on that of God. We may face various difficulties and suffering in our service, but we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens [us]” (Phil 4:13).

Utilizing the Internet in

Shawn Chou
San Jose, California, USA

Spreading^{the} Everlasting Gospel

A century ago, God opened the door of salvation of the end time and entrusted His gospel to the early workers of the True Jesus Church (TJC). He guided them by the Holy Spirit, enabling them to propagate the gospel from generation to generation. Despite the many social, environmental, and ideological changes that transpired throughout the past century, the gospel preached by the True Jesus Church has remained intact. Indeed, it is the same unchanging message taught by Jesus and His apostles.

Elder John witnessed this vision:

Then I saw another angel flying

in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

(Rev 14:6–7)

Before our Lord Jesus returns to judge the world, God will send an angel to spread the everlasting gospel once more. This angel refers to the true church, because only she has the everlasting gospel, predetermined by God even before creation. Out of His abundant grace and mercy, God sent us with the

commission to preach this gospel to the world in the last days. The Lord is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9b).

The ways we live, work, and communicate have been transformed by technology since the advent of the twenty-first century. The experience of growing up as a post-millennial, digital native—at a time in which an infinite amount of information is ever at our fingertips—is a world away from the formative years of older generations. The advancement of digital technology has many advantages but one thing that it cannot do is fill the innate



emptiness of man's heart. In fact, it could even hasten the corruption of our hearts—the devil certainly makes use of the internet's reach, with its ubiquity and inherent anonymity to spread immorality, idle distractions, and heresies to draw souls away from God.

However, the internet is, in and of itself, neither good nor bad; it is a neutral platform, where diverse views and voices flourish. Therefore, as the true church, we have an obligation to enter the melee and bring God's message to the masses. When members start using the internet as a tool for evangelism rather than a means of entertainment—much of which is detrimental to our spiritual lives—we will make great progress. If we use the internet positively and wisely, taking full advantage of its speed and spread, we will become like the flying angel preaching the gospel to the whole world.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERNET MINISTRY: INCREASE THE NATION, EXPAND THE BORDERS

As mentioned, the internet is widely accessible and unconstrained by geographical limits. Hence, the gospel can now reach any corner of the earth that has internet access and anyone searching for the truth may discover it. We thank God that the International Assembly (IA) has recognized this potential impact and has worked to strengthen and expand the internet ministry over the past four years. In June 2017—during the centennial year of the True Jesus Church—the IA launched its newly revamped website, tjc.org. With this improved platform, it is easier for each general assembly, coordination center, and local

church to build their own microsite, where they can upload and embed engaging content for evangelism and pastoral purposes. The IA Literary Department will supply all technological information and support so that every general assembly can actively participate in this important holy work.

Since the launch of the new website, we have received queries from around the world regarding our teachings. With churches in sixty countries spread across six continents, we are able to effectively mobilize the local workers whenever we receive a query. For example, when we received an email query from a non-TJC church in Nigeria in October 2017, our local church workers promptly contacted them. In that same week, three truth-seekers from that church joined us for our Sabbath worship. They

willingly knelt to pray with us and studied our ten basic beliefs. We do not know whether these truth-seekers will ultimately accept the truth. But God will be with our workers and grant a fruitful outcome, as long as we are faithful and diligently follow up on the truth-seekers' needs.

HOW CAN WE CONTRIBUTE TO THE INTERNET MINISTRY?

We live in a world where society is becoming more individualistic, where people do not feel the need to seek God, never mind humbling themselves to accept the truth. Hence, the internet ministry must be guided by the Holy Spirit. We need the members' constant prayers to make sure the internet ministry aligns with God's will and has God's abidance. No matter how attractive our digital content may

THE TWIN MISSIONS OF THE INTERNET MINISTRY

Our web content can be split into two categories. The first category aims to achieve our primary goal of spreading the gospel by systematically introducing our ten basic beliefs.

The second category focuses on our pastoral ministry. To help members spiritually nurture themselves in the comfort of their homes and have access to church literature on the go, we set up an electronic library (e-Library) containing digitized copies of church publications. The e-Library is also regularly updated with recordings of sermons, seminars, and testimony sessions from churches worldwide, as well as online theological courses as part of the e-Learning component. Furthermore, the IA is currently developing an online study Bible (bible.tjc.org) as a tool for members preparing Bible studies and sermons.

We have been blessed with digital resources containing a wealth of information. Let us make full use of them so that we may work with God in increasing the nation and expanding the borders of the true church (Isa 26:15).

be, without God's direction, our efforts will be ineffective.

We are also in need of more manpower. In order to attract visitors to our websites in this fast-paced and overcrowded online world, our content requires regular enhancement and updates. For example, in the last few years, we have focused on producing videos in both Chinese and English, covering content such as short expositions on the gospel, basic belief courses for truth-seekers, and testimonies. It is hoped that in the near future,

we will be able to branch out into producing multimedia materials in a wider range of languages to broaden our target audience. In addition, we hope to develop interactive religious education tools that will help bring Bible stories to life for our children.

To accomplish the above, we need gifted workers—translators, web developers, app designers, web content managers, photographers, video and music producers, just to name a few. As we would have to employ some of these workers

on a full-time basis, and purchase the necessary computer software and equipment, funding is also essential.

May God move more brothers and sisters to support the internet and multimedia ministries through offering continuous prayers, faithful service, or even financial contributions. In this way, the internet ministry will become a fundamental part of spreading the everlasting gospel to the ends of the earth.

If you are a True Jesus Church member who is interested in dedicating your gifts or expertise to help the internet ministry in any way, please contact us at ia@tjc.org for more information.

If you are moved to contribute financially towards this ministry, please send your check or wire transfer to the IA office in Taiwan or in the US (bank account details below), specifying that it is a donation to the Internet Ministry Fund.

IA office in Taiwan (Foreign Currency Account):

Bank name: First Commercial Bank Pei Tun Branch

Bank address: No. 696, Sec. 4, Wei Hsin Road, Taichung, Taiwan (ROC)

Bank telephone: +886-4-22366111

CABLE ADD: "FIRSTBANK" TAICHUNG

TELEX: 51172 FIRST TAICHUNG

S.W.I.F.T. ADD: FCBKWTWP 401

Name of account: General Assembly of the True Jesus Church in Taiwan

Account no.: 40540002051

Address: No. 180, Sec. 2, Songjhu Road, Beitun District, Taichung City 40673, Taiwan (ROC)

Tel: +886-4-22436960

Fax: +886-4-22437046

Email: ia@tjc.org.tw

IA office in the United States:

Bank name: Bank of America

Bank address: 9591 Chapman Ave, Garden Grove, California 92841, USA

Bank telephone: +1 (714) 973-8495

Bank routing no.: 121000358 (for paper and electronic) / 026009593 (for wires)

Name of account: International Assembly of the True Jesus Church

Address: 21217 Bloomfield Ave, Lakewood, California 90715, USA

Account no.: 04647-03542

Swift code: BOFAUS3N

Tel: +1 (714) 533-8889

Fax: +1 (562) 402-3190

Email: ia@tjc.org

I Know Whom I Have Believed

In what was probably his last epistle, Paul encouraged Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of him, Paul, a prisoner. He asked Timothy, by the power of God, to join him in his suffering for the gospel (2 Tim 1:8).

But why would the power of God cause Timothy to suffer? How could Timothy be ashamed of witnessing for the Lord? If Paul were imprisoned for the Lord's sake, why would Timothy be ashamed of him? Without understanding Paul's experiences, it is difficult to answer these questions.

Paul wrote 2 Timothy during his

second imprisonment in Rome, shortly before he was martyred. This second imprisonment was very different from the first, where he was under house arrest in Rome. Though he had been confined to a rented house, he could still receive guests and preach the gospel of Christ freely. However, in this second imprisonment, the conditions were not as good. Onesiphorus, a co-worker, searched for him and eventually found him in a dungeon (2 Tim 1:17), where preaching opportunities were sparse.

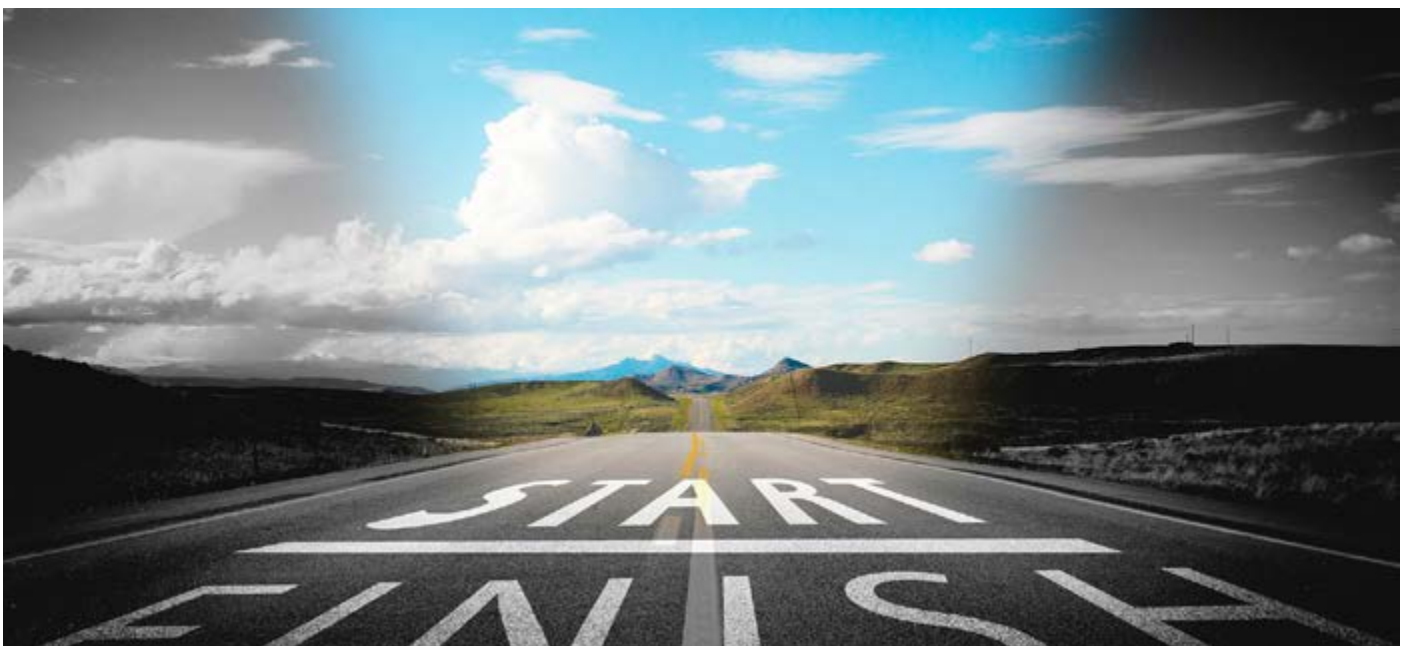
Furthermore, after presenting his first defense in court, Paul anticipated his own death (2 Tim

4:16, 6). Perhaps he knew this epistle would be his final testimony. To Paul, preaching the gospel and bringing as many people as possible to salvation was his life's sacrifice. Knowing his life was ending, he willingly gave it to the servitude of God, like a drink offering, with no regrets (Phil 2:17):

[For the gospel,] I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

(2 Tim 1:11–12)

To appreciate the meaning



behind Paul's words, and why he encouraged Timothy not to fear or be ashamed, we need to understand that, at that time, being identified as a Christian was a life-threatening situation.

In 64 C.E., a devastating fire broke out in Rome; it raged for days and destroyed ten of the fourteen city quarters. Gaius Cornelius Tacitus (56–120 C.E.), a Roman senator and historian who was a child at the time, later wrote:

Therefore, to stop the rumor [that he had set Rome on fire], [Emperor Nero] falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most fearful tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were [generally] hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition—repressed for a time, broke out yet again, not only through Judea—where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, whither all things horrible and disgraceful flow from all quarters, as to a common receptacle, and where they are encouraged. Accordingly first those were arrested who confessed they were Christians; next on their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city, as of “hating the human race.”¹²

Paul's second letter to Timothy was probably written in 66–67 C.E., when Christians were severely persecuted following Nero's smear

campaign. It was very difficult to justify the act of preaching at the time. Witnessing for Jesus and proclaiming one's faith would expose oneself to grave danger. Paul had preached the gospel with fervency and faithfulness, yet the result was imprisonment and impending execution—how could the Almighty God allow this to happen, and how could Paul continue pressing forward? A person of insufficient faith would be overcome by such challenges and give up witnessing for the Lord. This is why Paul encouraged Timothy not to be ashamed of testifying for the gospel, nor of he who was imprisoned. Paul's martyrdom would testify to the world that the gospel he preached was worth the sacrifice of one's life.

FAITH OVERCOMES FEAR

God does not give His loved ones a spirit of fear (2 Tim 1:7). If the purpose of our faith were only so that we can have a smooth and easy life, we would simply give up at the first sign of trouble. As life is always filled with challenges, a person pressing forward without being rooted in the faith or without holding on to the hope of salvation (2 Tim 1:10) will inevitably succumb to a spirit of fear. However, God gives His loved ones a spirit of power, love and self-control. With these qualities, one is empowered to endure hardships beyond what man can endure (Heb 11:35–38) and beyond what the world deems tolerable.

Paul proclaimed: “I know whom I have believed.” Despite the severe persecution of believers, despite heresies disrupting the church's core beliefs (2 Tim 2:16–18), despite many deserting him (2 Tim 1:15;

4:16), and even despite his own impending death, Paul boldly held on to his faith. The church might have appeared to be at the brink of crisis and destruction, yet Paul acknowledged that the God he believed is the only Potentate (1 Tim 6:15), the Absolute Ruler, the Author and Master of the beginning, the process and the end of all things.

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. (2 Tim 1:12b, ESV)³

The Lord had entrusted to Paul the truth of salvation and the ministry to preach to the Gentile world. As Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy, he knew he had completed his race; it was time to bid the world farewell. The ministry handed to him would never die. He harbored no regrets over his life; he had done his utmost to serve his Master and wholeheartedly trusted in Him, the ultimate owner of the ministry. Paul knew that even if the church were diminished in his time, it would not be a failure, because at a pre-determined time, God would rekindle the true church. This true church of the end time would continue the work Paul had left behind, and preach the complete truth of salvation to the ends of the earth.

³ The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

¹ “Nero Persecutes The Christians, 64 A.D.,” *EyeWitness to History*, accessed January 30, 2018, www.eyewitnesshistory.com/christians.htm.

² On July 19–27, 64, Rome was destroyed by a great fire: only four of its fourteen quarters remained intact. The emperor Nero was blamed by the Roman populace, and in turn, he blamed the Christians. The Roman historian Tacitus explains what happened. The translator of *Annals*, 15.44 is not known.

God's Chosen Temple

ACCEPTED BY GOD

Long ago, Solomon built a grand temple dedicated to God. Soon after, God appeared to Solomon with some weighty words:

Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes

will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually."

(2 Chr 7:12–16)

These magisterial words were God's reply to Solomon's prayer in chapter 6, a plea for God to remember His people and to be with them no matter what. Solomon was asking God to dwell with the children of Israel, with the temple as a symbol of this union. In a handful of powerful sentences, God accepted Solomon's invitation.

Imagine what was going through Solomon's mind. All that effort and

sacrifice he had put into building the temple could have easily been for nothing if God had rejected it, as was His prerogative. But God accepted the efforts of His people and the dedication of the temple.

The True Jesus Church is that same spiritual temple today. Over many centuries, thousands of churches have sprung into existence and prominence in every corner of the earth. Yet, of all these churches, arrayed in architectural splendor, historical richness, and financial and social capital, God chose the humble True Jesus Church in which to dwell. We alone have been blessed with the Holy Spirit and the complete truth. This is a



very important reminder of a very important lesson: the church, God's church, is not made by the hands of men, but built and sustained by the grace of God. And so it has been these past hundred years, where God's presence is undeniable in explaining how we have come so far with so little. God has accepted the True Jesus Church, and now dwells with us, and we give thanks.

AN EVERLASTING COVENANT AND IMMEASURABLE GRACE

There is more to be thankful for. God's acceptance of the temple was not lightly done; it was also a promise. The temple was His house, and Israel His people—both of which He would watch over and protect. What did God mean when He said, "My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. ... My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually"? It meant that when the Israelites eventually strayed, when Solomon himself strayed, and when the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, God did not forsake His covenant with His beloved. Even though the entire nation was conquered in punishment, and the symbol of Israel's holy zeal—their grand temple—was brought to ruins, God would always watch over them. He would lead them, and work with His people to restore things to their former glory. Thus the temple was rebuilt and the Israelites brought back to their holy land, and God's covenant with His beloved endured.

“The temple where God dwells is also to be a sanctuary for the weary, for the bereft and bewildered. The young, in their turn, must learn to seek the church as this promised refuge.”

“The church, God's church, is not made by the hands of men, but built and sustained by the grace of God. And so it has been these past hundred years, where God's presence is undeniable in explaining how we have come so far with so little. God has accepted the True Jesus Church, and now dwells with us.”

This is encouraging news for the True Jesus Church: God will always guide and take care of us. God's promises will always be fulfilled. The True Jesus Church, having been accepted by God, will always be God's chosen church. The promise goes further: with Jesus, we know that as long as we are willing to believe, God will give us His salvation grace. God has prepared it all for us. Now, therefore, we have more to be thankful for: God has prepared for us immeasurable grace, and as long as we persist in our faith, He will be with us for all time.

PASSED ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Elder John wrote: "I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father" (2 Jn 4). Just as he rejoiced, grateful for the continuation of the faith across generations, we also have good reason to rejoice today. Today, it requires herculean effort for one generation to pass on its

beliefs to the next, much more so for a belief that requires as much devotion as Christianity. But, as promised, God watches over us. Through His grace, the church community has been effective in creating an environment of love and dedication within which our young can grow in their faith.

Just as the members in apostolic times, we are vulnerable to the temptations and pressures of the world. In the face of such forces, we are often left feeling confused and alone. It is in these times that we must give thanks. For it is when we are brought low that we are truly reminded of the value of our faith. Our defeats are the precious moments in which we rely on God once more, to see for ourselves what His promise—to the great kings and prophets of antiquity—looks like in our own lives.

The church, then, must become a refuge for the young. For the temple where God dwells is also to be a sanctuary for the weary, for the bereft and bewildered. The young, in their turn, must learn to seek the church as this promised refuge. That God works to preserve the gospel in the hearts of His chosen is also His gift to us, and for that we are grateful.



and occasional “thank God.” Our gratitude to God must prompt us to pass on the love, grace and strength we have received. We are so filled with God’s love that we cannot help but share all we have been blessed with—the gospel, a helping hand, a heartfelt prayer, a listening ear. Freely we have received, and freely, gratefully, we give.

THE FRUITS OF THANKSGIVING

As we count our blessings and give thanks, we must also remember those whose names have long been missing from the ledger. There are many who have abandoned their faith in weakness, for whom God’s grace is an unimaginable privilege. We must never forget these members. In the famous parable of the lost sheep, it is striking that the shepherd, at the climactic moment of discovering his missing sheep, “lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing” (Lk 15:5). This is the true love of the shepherd. The shepherd, who leaves all behind in search of the lost one, lovingly holds on to his sheep and is unwilling to ever let go of it again. This is the love that Jesus has for us—all of us. Those who are strong and firm in faith must assist in this hunt for the lost and, like the shepherd, take our fellow brothers and sisters upon our shoulders. We have all been redeemed by the same blood, and it is our duty to gather the straying ones home.

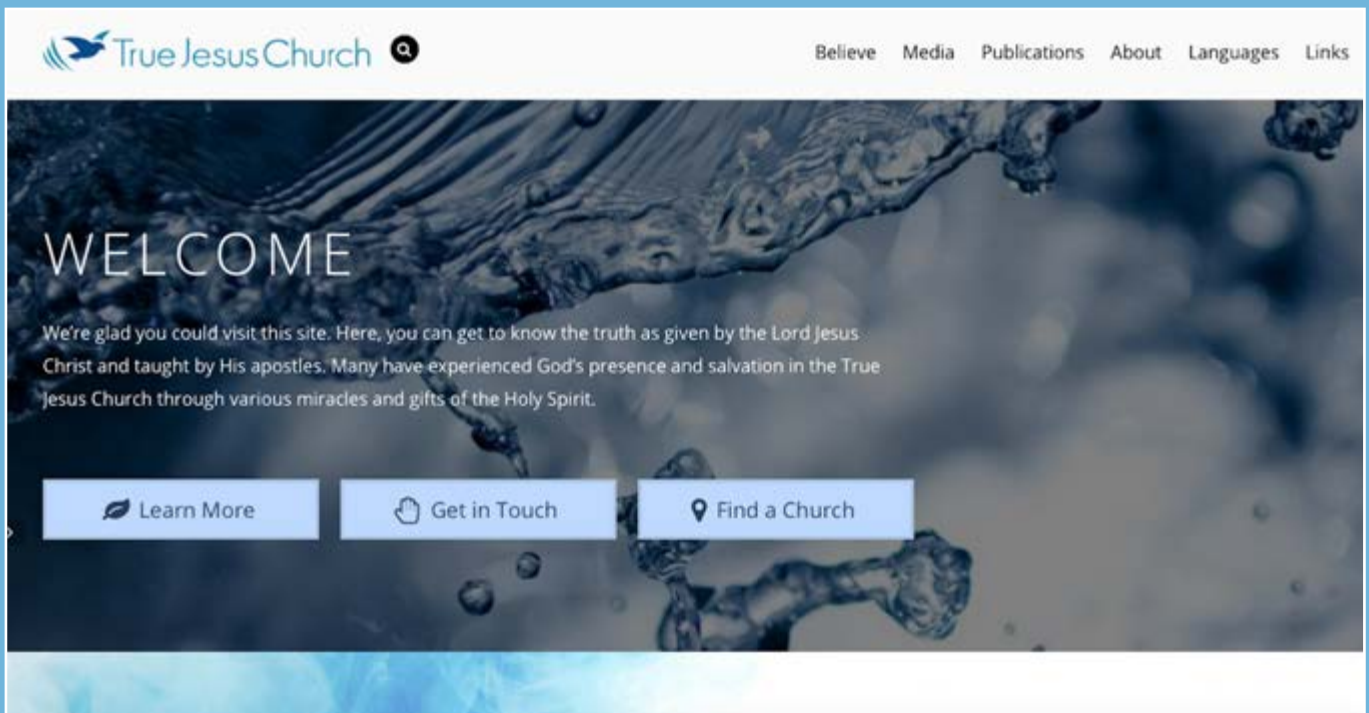
Thanksgiving prompts us to look ahead. We have received so much,

yes, but then what? As Jesus reminds us in the parable of the fig tree, no matter how deeply rooted we are within the vineyard, to refuse to bear fruit is to be contemptuous of God’s grace; and that warrants being cut down and discarded.

Vital to our lives as Christians is the humility to accept God’s reminders. All thanksgiving begins with remembrance—of good things that have happened in our lives. We marvel at the miraculous; we rejoice. Yet greater still is a thanksgiving that is inspired from a deeper level of understanding. That is, when we suffer, when things do not go our way, we remember that God is speaking to us through these experiences. He is asking us to remember our faith and covenant with Him. Praise God for such humbling opportunities to grow and shine for Him.

A century of God’s abidance is a lot to be thankful for indeed. We must, in our prayers and in our mutual encouragements, remember His grace and give God the glory. But it cannot end with a muttered prayer

Explore the True Jesus Church website tjc.org



The new public website of the TJC is a place where truth-seekers can discover if their understanding of the gospel is complete, seek answers to misconceptions about Christian beliefs, grow by studying the Bible, and watch video testimonies by people whose lives have been changed.

Share the gospel today!

Call for Articles

Articles due:

June 29, 2018

Issue #87:

Feed My Lambs, Tend My Sheep

In this fourth and final issue of our centennial series, we will focus on our commission to pastor the flock.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs." (Jn 21:15b)

In John 21:15–17, Jesus' dialogue with Peter reveals the continual care required to preserve the Lord's sheep. We need to feed the lambs, meaning, we must tenderly teach and care for the newly baptized believers until they reach spiritual maturity. But the task does not end there. We must continue to tend and feed the mature sheep—to nurture them with the word of God, so that they do not become complacent in their faith and allow heresies, sorrows and doubts corrupt their belief, even after many years of believing in the truth.

The church is "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:17), so how should we love one another in a multi-ethnic and multicultural church? How can we show compassion for members suffering the psychological stresses of twenty-first century life, and reach out to those facing challenges ranging from depression and substance abuse to LGBTQ issues? How can we help those who are struggling to resist the tides of wider society, or have even become like lost sheep in the world?

Though we have been sanctified from the people of the world, the Lord sends the sun and rain on both evil and good. This means we will all face problems in our lives, even as the blessed and favored children of God. How can we wisely counsel one another through these trials, and be bold to reach out to those in need, whatever those needs may be? And, ultimately, what is our role as human shepherds in leading and nurturing the flock?

General Writing Guidelines

Content

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- The article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.
- Do not plagiarize the work of other writers or institutions, published either in print or online. Any quotations, ideas, or concepts taken from other sources must be properly referenced.

Grammar/Style

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible, in print or online.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email articles as Microsoft Word documents to manna@tjc.org

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or Fax: +1-562-402-3190

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

Manna only accepts submissions written by True Jesus Church members. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

A Christian Living article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives.

Article length: 1500–2000 words.

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives.

Article length: 2500–3000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs.

Article length: 2500–3000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.

Article length: 2000–2500 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.

Article length: 1500–2000 words.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you're writing: how will this edify the reader?

Articles of Faith



Jesus the True God

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.



Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.



Footwashing

The sacrament of footwashing enables one to have a part with the Lord Jesus. It also serves as a constant reminder that one should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and service. Every person who has received water baptism must have his/her feet washed in the name of Jesus Christ. Mutual footwashing may be practiced whenever it is appropriate.



Holy Communion

The Holy Communion is the sacrament to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It enables us to partake of the flesh and blood of our Lord and to be in communion in Him so that we can have eternal life and be raised on the last day. This sacrament shall be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice shall be used.



Salvation

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.



Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living.



Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as a river, sea, or spring. The baptist, who already has received baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face down.



Church

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the "latter rain," is the restored true church of the apostolic time.



Sabbath Day

The Sabbath Day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and salvation, and with the hope of eternal rest in the life to come.



Last Day

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.



CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information on the True Jesus Church, Contact us or visit us on our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

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