

# **PARABLES ABOUT THE CHURCH**

Richard Oostra

## **The Wise and Foolish Builders** (Matthew 7:24-27)

This parable asks the question: “Upon what basis have we built our churches?” Were we even given a mandate to build churches? Jesus said, “I will build my church,” so what has led us into doing this instead of Him?

Jesus encouraged us to build on the rock and not on sand. For the believer, Jesus is the Rock, and to build a church on a creed or other theological conclusions is like building on the sand.

Jesus wants us to meet in His Name (Matthew 18:20), and we have never been given the option to meet under any other name. So why name your church or group after a theologian or the name of a street and cause confusion and division with so many Christian groups?

Jesus said that if we do not meet with Him, we are against Him (Matthew 12:30). It is only when Jesus is lifted up that those theological differences become small and insignificant. Where Jesus is there is love, harmony, and unity, for He has promised that when He is lifted up, He will draw people to Himself (John 12:32).

## **New Cloth on an Old Coat** (Matthew 9:16)

The Christian Church is described in the Bible as the bride of Christ. How this bride is dressed matters to Him. He came to earth to end an old religious system. The Church that Jesus intended us to have was based on a New Covenant. The fact that the veil in the temple was torn indicated that believers were invited into a direct relationship with Him, not through a man-made religious system.

The Old Covenant was based on do's and do not's, on law observance, temple worship, and an earthly priesthood system. Jesus did away with all these. He paid the penalty for sin and made it possible for mankind to become reconciled to God through Him without an earthly system.

We, however, in our human way of thinking, have again restored the Church to a man-made system with fancy buildings, an earthly priesthood, and based on a system of theology. In doing so, we have put new patches on an old garment, patches which will not hold and which have spoiled what Jesus made new.

## **Putting New Wine into Old Wineskins** (Matthew 9:17).

The wine Jesus served at the Last Supper represented the New Covenant in His blood. That service was no longer a remembrance of the Passover event; the wine represented something new, namely, what Christ's Spirit would do for the Church. His Spirit would be given to every Christ follower as a foretaste of things to come. It was through His Spirit that He would equip ministries for the Church.

When it comes to the functioning of Christ's Church, we, however, have subdued the works of the Spirit, works such as looking for anointed men for ministry for each church.

Having placed the Church back into the Old Testament system, the New Wine has lost its effect. Christ's Spirit does not fit into an old system, but His Spirit fits only when the system is new and God-designed. The Church that Jesus wanted us to form was not hundreds of denominations organized by men, but a mystical body formed by His Spirit as believers gathered and were led by Him.

### **The Yeast That Influences the Whole Lump** (Matthew 16:6,12)

In this Scripture, Jesus warned us here of even a small amount of false teachings. Pharisees are people who pose as religious leaders, but who are out to build an empire upon their own system of beliefs.

The apostle Paul warns us that a little yeast of false theology can destroy our biblical system of gathering (I Corinthians 5:6); Jesus, therefore, challenges us to be on our guard for even little errors (Matthew 16:6).

The Church that Jesus had in mind for us was not a continuation of the Old Testament temple and priesthood worship, but was to be formed by people who had found direct contact with God and who had come to meet together in His Name.

That God would be in their midst was what Jesus promised would happen whenever even two or three would gather in His Name (Matthew 18:19-20). Many will claim that the system under which they gather does not matter. Many forget that only when God's work is done in God's way can they expect God's blessing. Yeast of false teaching can cause mal-functioning of that powerful Church Jesus had in mind for us.

### **The Unfaithful Tenants** (Matthew 21:33-44).

The story of the tenants who had taken over their master's vineyard was Christ's most blunt illustration for men to keep their hands off and not seek to improve upon what God intended to do.

In the Old Testament, if the Israelites were to touch the Ark, which represented God's presence with them, they would drop dead. How much more does this apply to us when we have taken over the Church that Jesus intended us as believers to form!

God intended Israel to be a witnessing nation (Exodus 19:6), but the chief priest had turned their religion into a profitable system of men:

*“When the chief priests and Pharisees heard Jesus' parables they knew He was talking about them” (Matthew 16:45).*

Somehow history seems to have repeated itself. Sinful men have taken control of Christ's Church and caused damage that even the Reformers did not realize, or they would have corrected this as well.

The Church that Jesus wanted to have control over and direct has been turned into a religious system made by men. They all have human headquarters and authorities with ecclesiastical appearances to give it all a form of godliness, but the church today has lost the mystical formation and spiritual power that was present in the New Testament Church.

Ironically, in countries where men cannot organize because of persecution is where we still see the most powerful and fastest growing Church. We, in the West, by being no longer under Christ's direct control, have gone into idol worship by forming imitation churches. If we want to see God's Church restored again, we must repent. For this reason, Jesus gave us the above parables as a warning to the Church.

**Note:** Richard Oostra is the author of the book *Church on the Rock(s)* available at [www.RichardOostra.com](http://www.RichardOostra.com)

