

JESUS CAME TO THEM AGAIN

One week later, on the first day of the week, they were gathered again. The doors were locked as usual, but Jesus came and stood in their midst. Oh, how Jesus loves to come to us to make our weak faith stronger!

Thomas was there and Jesus spoke to him, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:26-27).

Thomas bowed and worshipped. "My Lord and my God!" he whispered. Jesus received his worship and told His followers, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen Me and yet have believed" (John 21:29).

THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME UPON THEM

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on the apostles just as Jesus said (Luke 24:49). What the Bible says is true. It is a very careful record of what Jesus and the apostles did and taught.

When the Holy Spirit came upon him, Peter spoke boldly and said, "God raised Him (Jesus) from the dead...because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him."

Then Peter used David's words to tell of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:24-28; 13:35). David knew that God's promise went beyond life on this earth. His faith in God brought a great hope and joy to his heart. David wrote, "I have set the Lord always before me, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because You will not abandon me to the grave..." (Psa 16:10).

Peter tells us that David was not speaking only of himself, for he died, was buried and his body decayed. But he would be resurrected with a new body. David was also speaking of Christ, the firstfruits of all men and women of faith. A glorious resurrection of the body is the hope of every Christian (1 Cor 15). Any faith that does not have the resurrection of Jesus Christ as its hope and foundation is a false and empty faith. It is useless!

Paul wrote, "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:42-43).

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Christ and His Church



by
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TO THE READER...

We can read the Bible all our lives, and still know very little about God. He is so great and wonderful. His word to us is so perfect and full. Read your Bible first, then study these notes. Bible verses are taken from the New International Version. They are shown as (7:6), chapter 7 verse 6. When verses are given from other translations, they are shown as:

KJV - King James Version NASB - New American Standard
TLB - The Living Bible NLT - New Living Translation.

JESUS, SON OF MAN

A storm came up on the Sea of Galilee. The wind blew hard and the waves were high. The tiny boat with the disciples in it filled with water and the men thought they would drown.

Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat. They woke Him and shouted, "Lord, save us! We are going to drown!" (Matt 8:25). Jesus got up and spoke to the waves. And there was calm.

The disciples were amazed and asked, "What kind of a man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him."

Jesus Christ had authority to command the wind and the waves. He was the Son of God and He was the son of man. Thousands of books have been written to try and explain Jesus Christ, the God-man, but they all fall short. Only the Bible can truly teach us about Jesus Christ, who He was and what He did.

JESUS IS GOD

Jesus has all the authority and power and majesty of God, but He laid His glory aside and came to earth. He was born in Bethlehem a helpless baby. "He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness..." (Phil 2:7).

Jesus was God the Son, equal with God the Father, but He came to earth as a man. He was not born a King! He came as a servant, to serve mankind and die for sinners.

When we call Him 'deity,' we mean He was God. He was God but He took on Himself human flesh, so that He could be one of us. He had a divine nature and a human nature.

Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" - one in person and one in purpose (John 10:30). The Pharisees knew what He meant; they took up stones to stone Him. They stoned anyone who said they were God. Again Jesus said, "I am not alone. I stand with the Father who sent Me" (John 8:16).

SON OF MAN YET FULLY GOD

Jesus spoke of Himself as "Son of Man" yet He was fully God. He also called Himself "Son of God" (John 10:36).

God is a trinity - three person yet One. This truth is taught in many ways all through the Bible. He has revealed Himself as three distinct Persons - God the

THE WOMEN SAW JESUS FIRST

Mary Mag'-da-lene came to the same tomb very early in the morning. Other women came, too, maybe in small groups. They found the soldiers gone and the tomb open.

The stone that closed the tomb was rolled back and an angel sat on it (Matthew 28:2-6).

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid. He (Jesus) has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him'"

Almost 1,000 years before Christ died, David wrote these words; "You will not abandon Me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay" (Psalm 16:10).

Mary came running back to the disciples and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb..." (John 20:2).

John and Peter ran to the tomb. John got there first, but he did not go in. Peter went in. He saw the strips of linen that had been wrapped around Jesus' body lying there and the cloth that had been around His head. Then John went into the tomb; "he saw and believed" (John 20:8).

The strips of linen had not been untied or thrown around. They lay in the tomb just as they had been wound around Jesus' body. Jesus' changed 'body' had come out of the tightly wrapped cloth without moving it. This could not have happened if someone had come and taken His body.

Peter and John went home, but Mary went back to the tomb crying. She saw angels who asked, "Woman, why are you crying?" She told them, "They have taken my Lord away and I don't know where they have put Him."

Then she turned and saw a man who asked, "Woman...who is it you are looking for?" She thought it was the gardener. Then Jesus spoke her name, "Mary!" (John 20:16).

Mary knew it was her Master. That same voice had freed her from many demons! (Luke 8:2) She answered at once, "Rabboni!" which means 'Master' or 'Lord' in Aramaic.

"Do not hold on to Me," Jesus told her, "for I have not yet returned to the Father" (John 20:17). She would see Him again; she need not cling to Him now.

AFTER JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD

After Jesus rose from the dead He showed Himself to His disciples. Those who had followed Him were afraid and met in an upper room behind locked doors. It was the first day of the week, the day He had risen from the dead, and they had gathered to worship their Lord and Master.

Jesus came into the room and spoke to them. He said, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). After this He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were full of joy when they saw their Lord.

Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with them. When the others told him, "We have seen the Lord," he did not believe them.

Thomas said, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands...and put my hand in His side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25).

as it is set forth in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the only saving gospel (Gal 1:9).

Paul warned the Christians in Corinth, "By this gospel you are saved, of you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain" (1 Cor 15:2).

"FATHER, GLORIFY YOUR SON"

Just before Jesus was crucified, He looked up to heaven and prayed, "Father, the time has come...Glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began" (John 17:1,5). In heaven, Jesus had all glory and power. But he laid these aside to become man. Jesus was one of us and one with us.

Again Jesus prayed, "Now My heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify Your name!" (John 12:27-28).

Then the Father's voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it (My name), and will glorify it again."

In His human nature Jesus did not want to die for the sins of the world. He had a body like ours and felt pain and rejection like we do. But He was willing to carry out the Father's plan. In the garden of Gethsemane He prayed, "My Father...may Your will be done" (Matt 26:42).

JESUS CHRIST WAS RESURRECTED

A Russian schoolboy went with his classmates to Lenin's tomb. Afterwards friends asked him, "What did you see there?"

He answered, "I saw him lying there. He was all dressed up, but he did not move or do anything."

Jesus Christ is alive! On the third day He rose again from the dead and He is alive forever more. He declared, "I am the living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever. And I have the keys of death and hades" (Rev 1:18).

"After His (Jesus') suffering, He showed Himself to these men (the apostles) and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

DID THE DISCIPLES STEAL HIS BODY?

Those who refuse to believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ say that His disciples came and stole the body. The chief priests and leaders of the Jews feared this might happen, so they went to Pilate and asked him to secure the tomb where Jesus' body lay. They said, "We remember that while He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise His disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people He has been raised from the dead..." (Matt 27:63-64). But let us remember:

1. The disciples were not bold enough to plan such a thing. They were behind locked doors when Jesus came to them.
2. Roman soldiers made sure Jesus was dead (John 19:33-34). And Pilate set a guard at the tomb. The soldiers would be killed if they slept at the posts or let anyone steal the body of Jesus.

Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). These three are equal and live in complete harmony. Jesus told His disciples, "I am returning to My Father and your Father" (John 20:17). The Father had sent Him and the Father would receive Him home again.

He told His disciples, "If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love" (John 15:10).

John baptized Jesus in the Jordan river. At that time, John saw heaven opened and the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on Jesus. And the voice of the Father came from heaven saying, "This is My Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased" (Matt 3:16-17).

JESUS HAD ALL THE AUTHORITY OF GOD

Just before Jesus went back to Heaven, He gave final orders to His disciples. Matthew wrote down what Jesus said to them in Galilee. Jesus told them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-19). He did not say, "baptizing them in the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Paul also spoke a blessing in the three names of the trinity: He wrote to the Corinthian Christians, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

God's name is always singular, because God is One God (Deut 6:4).

JESUS WAS BEFORE ALL THINGS

In heaven, Jesus had all deity, majesty and power (John 17:5), but He left His throne to become a man. He was God become flesh.

John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word..." The Word in John chapter 1 is Jesus Christ. The Word was One Person with God, "the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Word is separate from God, yet equal with God.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega..." Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, Omega is the last. He was before all things and created them.

Paul wrote, "He (Christ) is before all things, and in Him all things hold together..." (Col 1:17). And when this world passes away He will remain. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb 13:8).

JESUS SPOKE THE CREATION INTO BEING

Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18). He spoke and the earth and sea formed out of nothing. John said, "Through Him (the Word) all things were made" (John 1:3). So Jesus created all things (Col 1:16). "All things were created by Him and for Him." And He holds all things together by the word of His power (Col 1:16-17).

The Living Word does not change (Heb 13:8). What He said to His followers then is still true for us today.

Paul wrote, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved – " (Acts 16:31). Jesus said, "Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15).

JESUS SHOWED US THE FATHER

God was pleased to show Himself to us as three – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit - yet One person (Matt 28:19). Jesus came to earth and revealed God to us. He brought God's love and truth to the world. Jesus Christ, 'the Word,' expressed who God is and what God is like (Heb 1:1-2).

Philip, a disciples of Jesus, did not understand this. He said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8-9).

Jesus answered him, "Don't you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father."

JESUS IS THE LIVING WORD

The apostle John wrote of Jesus' deity. Perhaps John knew Jesus better than the others for Jesus was his cousin. He may have loved more deeply and understood his Saviour's work better. He picked out a few special events in Jesus' life and wrote about them. Some say John's record covered only 20 days out of the three and a half years that Jesus taught.

John wrote, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Jesus Christ is eternal and He is seated on His throne in heaven now (Heb 1:3). He hears our prayers and gives gifts to men. He said to His followers, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life...he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:18). The greatest gift of all is eternal life!

We must seek to know Jesus because He is the 'Living Word'. He came and died to bring us everlasting life. God's life is not like our life. God's life is eternal life which goes on forever (John 8:51).

THE ANGRY PHARISEES

His words about never seeing death made the chief priests and teachers, called Pharisees, angry. They answered Jesus, "Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are" (John 8:48-59)?

Jesus told them, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day," The Jews answered, "You are not...fifty years old, and you (say) You have seen (our father) Abraham!"

Then Jesus answered them with some amazing words. He said, "Before Abraham was born, I AM." Jesus did not say, 'I was,' or 'I will be,' but 'I AM.' Jesus is always! He is past, present and future. He is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8).

"I AM" was the name God used when He spoke to Moses. He told Moses to go and lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. They had been slaves in Egypt 430 years, but they were God's people and He wanted to set them free.

Moses did not want to go. He did not think the Hebrew leaders would listen to him or believe that God would set them free. God said to Moses, Tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you' (Ex 3:14).

'I AM' in Hebrew is translated 'Yahweh' and means 'the God who always was and always will be.' He is the self-existing God.

JESUS CHRIST IS HEAD OF HIS CHURCH

Jesus Christ is the Head and foundation of His Church (Eph 1:22; 4:15; 1 Cor 3:10-11).

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus gave His followers the Great Commission. He told them to go out and build on this foundation by preaching and teaching God's word.

The great missionary, Paul, did not want to build on any other man's work, but go to places where no one else had taken the gospel message. "It has always been my ambition," he told the Christians in Rome, "to preach the gospel where Christ was not known..." (Rom 15:20).

God granted Paul his wish and he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout Asia.

THE GATES OF HELL

Jesus said, "The gates of hell will not overcome My Church." The gates of hell speak of Satan's authority. Jesus broke Satan's power when He died on the cross. When Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" the gates of hell shook.

Christ's power and authority are far greater than Satan's (Col 2:15). Jesus Christ's words of truth are beating down the gates of hell and rescuing lost men from Satan's grasp.

Jesus Christ and His gospel go into Satan's stronghold and bring out His captives. Christ sets them free. This is what the preaching of the gospel is doing today.

Paul used words from the Old Testament Scriptures: "When He (Jesus) ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts to men" (Ephesians 4:8).

Death was Satan's weapon to put fear into men's hearts, but Jesus Christ destroyed death.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep (in death), but we will all be changed. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye. For the trumpet will sound, the dead (bodies) will be raised and we will be changed – mortal to immortal. Then the saying will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (! Cor 15:55).

Jesus conquered death for all who trust Him. The risen Christ said to the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (Hell)" (Rev 1:18).

JESUS, OUR GOD AND SAVIOUR

Paul called Jesus Christ, "our great God and Saviour" (Titus 2:13). While on earth, Jesus received the worship of men and women, but He did not ask for their worship.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman to worship the Father with the love of her heart. He said, "True worshippers worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

It is with his spirit that a man worships God. This is in keeping with God's nature, for God is Spirit (John 4:24). We must worship with an understanding of God's truth

Jesus did not say, "Peter, you will be head of My Church!" If He had said that, He might have started a fight among the disciples. There was enough jealousy among them to do this!

They had become very angry with James and John when the mother of these two disciples asked for one of them to sit on the right and left side of the Master when He returned to take His throne in heaven (Matthew 20:20-24).

Church history bears out the fact that Peter did not enjoy the highest position in the early churches. Paul named James first and not Peter as one of the "three pillars" of the early Church (Galatians 2:9).

A SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

The Twelve disciples could not grasp the fact that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual Kingdom – the Christian Church! The True Church is a community of redeemed spirits! (Heb 12:23-24).

In those days, men from the party of the Pharisees told the new Christians, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This caused divisions in the churches, because Gentiles were getting saved but not being circumcised (Acts 15:1-2). Peter had sided with the legalists.

Paul rebuked Peter for being partial. If Peter did indeed understand the worldwide nature of the Christian Church, he was not ready to receive it (Gal 2:1).

Men went from the church in Antioch to Jerusalem to ask the elders what to do about keeping the law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas, together with some others, went with them.

In Jerusalem, the church leaders welcomed Paul and Barnabas. James was a leader of the church there and Peter was there. Peter spoke of the gospel going out to all men. Gentiles from every nation heard the gospel from his lips at Pentecost. Peter saw them being saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, and none of them were circumcised.

James led in writing the letter of reply that went out to the churches asking them to be careful and avoid all the things that caused believers to stumble (Acts 15:23-29).

WRONG TEACHING

Some believe their church or religious group can get them into the Kingdom of Heaven. Not so! Only Jesus Christ and faith in Him can get a person into heaven. He is the door! (John 15:7).

No system of religion can get a man into Heaven. No guru, or creed, or good works, or system of rules can save a man from his sin.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

So Paul asks, "How can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?" (Rom 10:14 NLT).

Speaking of Yahweh Paul said, "He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25).

When Jesus told the Pharisees, "Before Abraham was born, I AM!" He took the sacred name of God. He told them, 'I am equal with Yahweh.' They knew what He meant: When He said this, they picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus hid Himself from them.

JESUS WORKED THE MIRACLES OF GOD

At another time Jesus told His disciples, "My Father is always at His work...and I, too, am working" (John 5:17-18).

Because of this, the Jews tried to kill Him. Not only was He breaking their Sabbath rules, "but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

Another New Testament writer described Jesus as "the radiance of (God's) glory and the exact representation of His nature..." (Heb 1:3). This means that Jesus Christ was exactly the same as God the Father.

JESUS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH

The disciples were sitting listening to Jesus as He taught. He was teaching in Caesarea Philippi in the north of Palestine. Jesus asked them: "Who do people say the Son of Man is" (Matt 16:15)?

His question caught them by surprise. One disciple answered, "Some say John the Baptist." Another said, "People say You are Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets" come back to earth.

"But what about you?" Jesus asked the disciples. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered: "You are the Christ," the Messiah or Anointed One, "the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15-16).

Jesus answered Peter, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in Heaven."

Peter confessed Christ as the Lord of his life. He spoke what he believed in his heart. God, the Father in heaven, had shown Peter who Jesus was - the Christ, the Anointed of God, spoken about by the prophets. Peter believed with all his heart that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. And the other disciples agreed with Peter. He spoke for them all.

Jesus told him, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church..." (Matt 16:18).

Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the person the prophets spoke about and wrote about. Those who read the Old Testament were waiting for His coming. He told the Pharisees, "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:46).

ON THIS ROCK

Jesus told Peter (Peter means a stone), "On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

When He began to preach in Galilee, Jesus said, "The time is come. The Kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15). Now Jesus told them that He had been building God's Kingdom. And He called God's Kingdom "My Church."

God's Kingdom and the Church of Jesus Christ are the same.

We can see Jesus turning from Peter to the others and affirming that on Peter's words of faith - on this rock of truth - He would build His Church. And hell, itself, would not overcome the ones who confessed Him as their Saviour and Lord.

Satan can never destroy Christ's Church or God's Kingdom. He may try hard, persecuting Christians and murdering those who stand faithful to their Lord! But Satan is a loser at every turn.

Christians suffer and die for Christ, but the Church of Jesus Christ marches on!

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

When Jesus asked His disciples this question, He was coming near to the end of His work. He had been open and free in speaking to the people. Some had spoken angry words against Him. And the chief priests and elders planned to kill Him (Mark 12:7).

From this point on, Jesus pointed His finger at these Pharisees. They were the leaders who taught the people to hate. They thought only of themselves. They made a big show of being religious, but their hearts were empty and cold and full of murder. They could not bear to think of the Jewish people turning to Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees..." (Matthew 16:6). He spoke of their wrong teaching. It was like yeast. When a little of it was put into the 'bread' of teaching, it spread through the whole loaf and made it bad.

I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

Jesus talked about "His Church." The word means a people called-out by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the message of the Kingdom was preached, people heard the call of God on their lives. They left their old ways and followed Christ, and they were "added to the Church" (Acts 2:47).

No man can build God's Church. Only Jesus could say, "I will build My Church..." because He was, even then, building it. And it is He who continues to build the Church.

No man can add a person to the true Church of Jesus Christ and no man can put a person out of it. Christ alone builds His Church. He is the master builder (Hebrews 3:3).

Some say this was too early in history for Jesus to speak of a world-wide Church. That His words "My Church" could only mean a sect or chosen few that He had gathered around Him. Or that Jesus spoke of His own disciples, or the people of Israel. Jesus knew what He was talking about. He spoke of a spiritual Kingdom, in the world and in heaven. His Kingdom is made up of men and women of all races who let Christ rule in their hearts. By believing on Him, they are born again into His Kingdom. This is the only way into 'the Christian Church' (Revelation 5:9).

Christ's Kingdom is God's Kingdom. The Kingdom is the Christian Church in the

world, and the "spirits of righteous men made perfect" who have already gone on to heaven (Heb 12:23).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There is no before and no after in the Kingdom of God. And there are no stages in its development.

The Kingdom of God always was and will always be. The Kingdom is present now, yet at the same time, it is eternal in the heavens. Like God, the Kingdom was and is and always will be.

Sometimes Jesus spoke about "the Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:15). At other times He called His Church "the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt 16:19). They are the same, whether in heaven or on earth.

The words "Kingdom of Heaven" have a double meaning. The words are like a sign over a doorway that has two sides to it. One side speaks of a Kingdom ruled over by a King. Jesus is King over His Kingdom. The King is all-powerful and awesome in His holiness. David wrote, "The Lord has established His throne in the heaven, and His Kingdom rules over all...God reigns over the nations" (Ps 103:19).

The other side of the sign tells of the citizens who love the King and live in the Kingdom. Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi, "Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The citizens of the Kingdom love the King with all their hearts, all their minds and all their strength and enjoy some of the wonderful benefits of His Kingdom now - in this life - long before they reach Heaven (Deut 6:5).

They enjoy these privileges and benefits not because of anything they do, but because they have received Jesus Christ in their hearts. Jesus Christ brought God's message of grace to them. They received it by faith and now they bask in the light of God's face and in His abounding love toward them.

They have believed Christ's message and the Holy Spirit has sealed them into a new relationship with the King (Eph 1:13).

PETER WAS NOT THE ROCK

David found refuge in the Rock, Christ. He sang, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my Deliverer..." (Psalm 18:2).

The Rock in Bible language is Jesus Christ. He was the Rock that went with the people of Israel through the desert. He was with them every step of the way, as Paul recognized (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus said, "On this Rock I will build My Church..." He did not say He was building His Church on weak and wavering Peter who denied Him three times. And the Christian Church did not begin with Peter. It was established in eternity past (Ephesians 1:4).

Jesus would build His Church on His own rock-like faithfulness and purity as the Son of God. Paul wrote, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11).

God has been building His Church for thousands of years and He is not finished yet. Christ will complete this Kingdom-building work when He comes again to gather His people. No more 'living stones' will be added to the Church after that (1 Peter 2:5).