

Called to be the Living Church

By Seventy Richard F. Neill

Is Jesus Christ dead or alive? How can we explain the transformation of the believers that took place after Jesus died on the cross? If Jesus was and is dead or if He was not dead on the cross, but became revived after His body was released to Joseph of Arimathea for burial how do we explain what happens next? How did a group of men (the apostles) go from being discouraged and defeated to become the nucleus of a people who would forever change the world? Some miracle had to take place in the disciples and followers of Jesus' life. If it was all a hoax why would they not only testify to the resurrection of Jesus, but each disciple in their own way would give their life as a testimony of a risen Lord and Savior. This cannot be explained away. Something *extraordinary* and powerful had to take place for them to transform and take a stand before the leaders of Israel and the world. Matthew 28:4&5 states this angelic message, *"Fear not ye; for we know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen."*

The quote in the gospel of John suggests to us that the first witness to the resurrection was Mary Magdalene. The disciples, along with others became eye-witnesses to the knowledge that the resurrection was real. We unfairly comment on the disciple known as Thomas. We have called him, "doubting Thomas". We call him a doubter because of a comment of Thomas' that is recorded in the gospel of John 20:25, *"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."* Jesus came to the apostles again, and this time, Thomas was with them. Jesus did not rebuke him. The Lord said to Thomas that he could do what Thomas had said he wanted to do in order to believe – touch the prints and thrust his hand into Jesus' side. What Thomas asked for was not amiss, and the Lord fulfilled Thomas' requests, and when Thomas had done so the Lord invited Thomas to *"be believing."* Being an Apostle, we should have expected this of Thomas. Thomas, too, needed to be an eyewitness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thomas now had the Apostolic testimony of the risen Lord. All of the Apostles' were agreed on this central and necessary understanding and revelation – Jesus is alive!

If we are convicted by the Apostles' testimony that Jesus is alive, we must believe that the church Jesus built must be alive or that church is not His Church. To be His Church it must be a Living Church.

The idea of a Living Church is not a new or radical thought or idea. I share with you these quotes.

Doctrine and Covenants 1:5e, (1831) *"...also those to whom these commandments were given might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity, and out of darkness, **the only true and living church** upon the face of the whole earth, with which I the Lord am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually."*

Apostle Joseph Luff – The Old Jerusalem Gospel, Ch. 11 pg. 125, "A Living Church", (1903) *"Just as God breathed the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul and a channel of physical life to others, so **'Jesus 'breathed upon the organism called His Church',** or spiritual body and on the day of Pentecost the Spirit, the soul of the Church, descended from heaven and entered the earthly habitation prepared, and the **'Church became a living soul',** the eyes, ears, hands, feet – the apostles, prophets, etc., saw, heard, and moved with spiritual insight under this baptism of life."*

Apostle Arthur Oakman – 1954 *“The Church is **more an organism** than it is an organization.”*

Rick Warren – The Purpose Driven Church, Page 16, (1995) *“...since the church is a living organism, it is natural for it to grow if it is healthy. The church is a body, not a business. **It is an organism, not an organization.** It is alive. If a church is not growing it is dying.”*

The Living Church is the Genesis 7:23 Church. What does a church look like that assists in the building of Zion? *“And the Lord called his people, Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there were not poor among them.”*

We find in the Book of Genesis, chapter 7 the account of the coming forth of the city of Enoch in Enoch’s day. Here is a list of steps leading up to the building of the city of Zion.

1. Enoch goes up the mount and was “clothed upon with glory”. (God’s glory) (Gen. 7:3)
2. God’s glory fell upon the people of Enoch. (Gen. 7:21)
3. The people of Enoch became blessed. (Gen. 7:22)
4. The Lord called his people Zion. (Gen. 7:23)
5. Enoch preached righteousness unto the people. (7:24)
6. The city is built which *“was called the city of Holiness, even Zion.”*

Genesis 7:27 states, *“Zion in the process of time was taken up into heaven.”* In Genesis 9:23, Noah is spoken to and we see this promise that is still to come to pass in the last days – *“And the general assembly of the church of the firstborn shall come down out of heaven, and possess the earth.”* Genesis 7:71 tells of a great reunion of the church of the firstborn in heaven, and the faithful of the church living on earth, *“And the Lord said unto Enoch, Then shalt thou and all thy city meet them there {faithful of the church living on the earth}; and we will receive them into our bosom; and they shall see us, and we will fall upon their necks, and they shall fall upon our necks, and we will kiss each other.”* Only a living church – those of the past, present, and future who are faithful – can have this type of experience. We are called to be that Living Church of Jesus Christ.