

A Biblical Vision of the Church

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[0 : 00] This morning we begin a new series. Last week we finished the book of Romans. Going through the book of Romans was a glorious time. I enjoyed it immensely because Romans is a book that speaks very dearly to my heart.

It was through the reading and the studying of the book of Romans that I came to salvation in Christ. I came to the knowledge of Christ's death for me. And I accepted Him as my Lord and Savior while reading through the book of Romans.

After coming to Christ as my Savior, He connected me with something that is so essential and has been so important in my life that I could not imagine my life apart from it.

Not only because I'm a pastor, but because I am a redeemed believer. And that something is the church. Romans 16, Paul begins to speak of the glories of the bride of Christ.

And he speaks of the church universal. And he begins to speak of the church as individuals. We saw that last week for those that were here. If you weren't here this past week, I finally got caught up.

[1 : 05] I believe I uploaded seven messages to the website. Okay? So if some of you are trying to follow that, I know you got a sermon overload. They're not all of me. Brother Caleb, you can hear Brother Caleb.

You can hear Brother Mark. You can hear Brother Jimmy Gray. It was great. I put them all up there. Those that were recorded since I have been out of the loop. But you can go catch that beauty of the church in Romans 16.

When I came to Christ, He immediately connected me to His body as a part of His body, as a new believer in His body. And it has been a life within that body that has completely changed my life lived in this body.

So I want us to take the next few weeks. I would love to tell you how many weeks it will be, but it may take longer than I think, depending upon them. But I want to take the next few weeks to go through this thing called the church.

This morning, I will introduce this series with a biblical vision of the church. The next several weeks following this morning, we will begin to look at what I consider four foundational pillars for the church.

[2 : 12] Four things that are driven, that drive my personal ministry, that have been the driving force of my walk with Christ ever since I came to salvation. Things that I believe that are of utmost importance.

And I say this because if you're not one really to stick around for the entirety of a whole series, I want to encourage you, please stay connected the next few weeks, either through attendance or through listening online to this series.

Because if you want to understand my ministry, my passion, my desire for the body and the bride of Christ called the church, if you want to understand why I make the decisions I make and how I go about those things as a pastor and even as a believer, then you will really get a grasp of them through this series.

We will begin to understand each of our roles inside of his body. This will be a series totally different than any other that I have preached here because this morning I'll have you turn to a number of pages.

I'll have you go into several passages because this is more a topographical sermon series instead of just a passage or a book sermon series. This is kind of out of my comfort zone, if you will.

[3 : 21] I love preaching through books or through major sections of scripture. But every now and then it behooves us to step back and to do what they call kind of a New Testament or a biblical survey of looking at things in general so that we can take them and apply them in specific.

So I'm going to give you the pages and the passages right now and then I'll ask you to stand with me. So if you have something to mark them, it would be pretty easy. I'll be in four passages, two of them found in Matthew and two of them found in the book of Acts.

The first one I want you to mark would be Matthew 16, Matthew 16, verses 13 through 20. The second one will be very familiar to you. That is Matthew 28, verses 16 through 20.

The third one should be just as equally recognizable to you. That's Acts 1, verses 6 and 8. And then also Acts 2, verses 1 through 4.

That's my four passages for this morning. And the way that I would like for us to do it is to read them all in their entirety at one time. And then we will begin to look at them as they apply to this text or to this truth of a biblical vision for the church.

[4 : 28] Not what man thinks the church is, but what God has called the church and the vision God himself through his son, God in the flesh, Jesus cast for the church.

Now I've chosen these passages specifically because Matthew 16 is the very first mentioning of the word ecclesia, which literally means the church. Ecclesia is called out ones.

There is a thing in Bible study called the law of first mention. If you want to know what something means in Scripture, find the very first time it is mentioned in Scripture, and it means that through the rest of Scripture.

So the very first time the church is ever mentioned is Matthew 16. That's why we'll look at it. Matthew 18 would be the second time, but we're not going to do that because that's another message.

The second time the church is mentioned, by the way, is in church discipline. That's Matthew 18. That principle applies to all the truths of life. If you want to know what marriage is, what God's standard for marriage is, look at the very first time marriage is ever mentioned in Scripture.

[5 : 28] That's in the garden, right? In the early pages of Genesis, Genesis 2. And we begin to see God's definition of marriage. Matthew 28 is not just the first mentioning of the church.

It is the first command given to the church. It is what God entails for the church to do. That is the Great Commission. We understand that. Acts 1.8 is kind of the conception of the church.

The church is really being conceived in the womb, if you will. And in Acts 2, verses 1 through 4, is the birth of the church. So this morning, I want you to see, as we begin to look at this biblical vision of a church, these are not my points, but as I read these passages, I want you to have them in mind, why I'm there.

You see the vision of a coming church in Matthew 16. You see the mission of the coming church in Matthew 28. You see the conception of the church in Acts 1. And then you finally see the birth of the church in Acts 2.

And as we see these things, we'll begin to understand, this is what it was supposed to be at the very beginning. So this is what God still wants it to be in today's time. So if you are physically able and desire to do so, I'm going to ask if you'll join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God.

[6 : 43] We will start in Matthew 16. I'm going to start in verse 13, read down to verse 20, and then we'll just turn from there. Matthew 16, starting in verse 13.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist and others Elijah, but still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

He said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. Turn with me to Matthew 28. I'm turning as well. Matthew 28. Starting in verse 16.

[7 : 54] Matthew 28, verses 16 through 20. Here we have after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, this appearance in Matthew 28.

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him. But some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I command you. And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Acts 1, 6 and 8. I know it's a little different this morning, and you're being patient with me as we stand together. Acts 1.

Do you have time? Because I'm turning as well. Acts 1, 6 and 8 says, So when they had come together, they were asking Him, again, this is a post-resurrection appearance, the final post-resurrection experience.

[9 : 06] But when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, Lord, is it at this time, You are restoring the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, even to the remotest part of the earth.

Now just step over to Acts 2, verses 1 through 4. When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit was giving them utterances.

Would you pray with me? Lord, help us to understand your Word today. God, help us not just to understand it in thought and in mind, but Lord, help us to understand it in heart. Lord, may our hearts be set upon you for your glory.

[10 : 17] In Jesus' name, amen. You may be seated. I appreciate your patience and your willingness to kind of step out of the norm with me and look at a number of passages.

Some of you heard me preach when I very first sermons, when I first began to preach. There are just a few in the audience that heard that, and they know that at that time, that was not an abnormal occurrence.

They used to joke and say they had to keep a number of bookmarks when Billy Joe preached because I was jumping all over the place. And thankfully, the Lord has allowed me to kind of step away from that for my own sake and yours because my mind would get a little scattered.

But I wanted us to see this morning, as we narrow this series down, we will begin to narrow in on certain passages, but to introduce it, we really needed to do a short survey. Anytime you take a biblical survey course or you have an opportunity, you can do it sometimes free of charge.

You can sit in on class or you can take them online, not necessarily to get credit for it, but they're always worth it. I remember an Old Testament survey course I took, one of the most difficult Bible classes I have ever taken.

[11 : 22] An Old Testament survey was taught by a professional rodeo clown. And that, first of all, blew my mind. But I had a professional rodeo clown who was really fluent in Hebrew.

Now, I don't know how he spoke to the bulls when they ran at him in the barrel, but I know how he spoke to us as we were trying to learn the Old Testament. But he was real particular on the Hebrew usage.

And I had a hard time at first. I wish he would have never told me what his occupation was before he taught college because I just had a hard time listening to him. But then when he began to give me poor grades on some of my tests, I began to listen because he would pick apart my writing and he would pick apart things.

But I learned so much just from that survey. We hit the Old Testament in its entirety in just six weeks. And then I've taken New Testament classes and they are an amazing thing because you begin to see things in a broad view.

Because by the way, my friend, the Bible only says one thing, right? There's only one great truth pronounced in Scripture. There are a number, a number of applications. But the Bible only says one thing and it says it over and over and over and over and over again.

[12 : 27] And it just continues and it says it in different ways. It says it through law. It says it through history. It says it through love songs. I mean, if you want to know that God loves you, all

you have to do is open up Song of Solomon's, right?

And you'll see love like they can't put in the movie theaters. And you'll begin to see all these things. It says it through poetry. It says it through action. It says it through drama. The Bible always says the same thing.

So when we come to certain topics, it's good to kind of look at a survey and understand that the Bible is really only pointing to one thing. And here this morning specifically, we're trying to get a biblical vision of what the church should be.

Now, I'm not a big proponent of vision statements, but I have a vision for the church, which I have penned out in my Bible, in the front pages of my Bible, which is kind of my driving force.

I'm going to share that with you this morning. And we're going to kind of pick that apart, and you'll see it in three aspects. I'm going to give it to you now, and then I'll give it to you later. James McDonald used to always say, tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them what you tell them, and then tell them what you told them.

[13 : 32] That's how he does his sermons. James McDonald's a great pastor, by the way. So I want you to understand, I believe the Word of God calls the church. If you want to write it down, you can.

If you don't want to write it down, you don't have to. But I believe the Word of God calls the church to be the visible, properly functioning fellowship of believers, reaching out into the community and world Christ has put us in with the love of the Father.

That's my vision. I believe that the Bible calls the church to be the visible, properly functioning fellowship of believers, reaching out into the community and the world Christ has put us in with the love of the Father.

I choose my words very carefully a lot of times. I know sometimes all of my points seem to be across it. They all seem to start with the same things. But I am a man that has understood that words mean something.

My wife and I have this statement around our house. We're going to say what we mean and we're going to mean what we say. Okay, so don't try to read into my words more than what I say and don't try to read out of my words more than what I say.

[14 : 41] I do have a very heavy southern accent and I understand that and I try to work on that a little bit but I also believe words are important because the Bible is full of words and God chose those words and He means for those words to mean something.

So number one, I believe that God has called the church to be, first of all, visible. He has called the church to be visible. This idea of a mystic, spiritual church that is always kind of somewhere out there but nobody really ever sees is foreign to Scripture.

There is a thing, and we saw it in Romans 16, called the universal church. And the universal church is the capital C. It is the bride of Christ, which means that I do adhere to the fact that there are believers from various denominations that God has redeemed individuals that are not necessarily contained just to the Southern Baptist Convention.

I'm going to be gathered around the throne with people of totally different denominations and even totally different practices. That's why it does not scare me to fellowship with believers of other churches, right?

I'm not contained to just one body. It does not scare me to preach from the pulpits of other churches. I have had the opportunity to preach in non-denominational churches. I've preached in Methodist churches.

[15 : 58] I'll preach in any church they allow me to preach in. They may only let me preach once, but I will preach in any church they allow me to preach in because the gospel does not change. And we understand this.

A.W. Tozer used to call it the fellowship of the burning heart, which means that if God has set your heart on fire with the love of Christ, that though that love may compel you to do things differently than me, we can still have fellowship because you're in love with the Savior just as I am in love with the Savior.

And sometimes the way I display my love is a lot different than the way you display your love, right? Sometimes my love may make me shout hallelujah and go glory, amen. And your love may make you sit there and be a little bit more silent.

And that's okay. But we understand this thing called the universal church, that some of us are going to be blown away, gathered around the throne of glory, because there are going to be people who say, I didn't know that God saved those people and that they are a little bit different than us. But the danger in that is, I have met people who say that they are a member of the universal church, but they have no membership in any particular church.

[17:03] They love to point to the universal church because the universal church is spiritual and mystical. It is something out there. And the universal church, usually those individuals, the only church members they know in the universal church are themselves.

And they don't really have fellowship with anyone else in the universal church. And they are a member of this church. Friends, listen to me. While the church is universal, we see in scripture that that concept and that thought is completely foreign to the New Testament.

In each of these passages of scripture we read this morning, I hope that you noticed that there was a very distinct, set apart group of people present. That they were there.

Someone was there. It was the disciples. Or it was the 11. Or it was the 120. Or it was all of these individuals. There was somebody there.

Jesus was not just talking into the air a truth to be recorded. He was talking to individuals that comprised the church. Now we can pick these passages apart and we can get into all of them, but I'm not really going to right now because we're doing something a little bit different.

[18:13] But I want you to understand first of all and foremost that this was a visible body of individuals. You could shake their hands. You could hug their necks. You could talk to them.

You could interchange thoughts with them. You could grow together beside them. God has called His church to be visible.

He has absolutely called His church to be visible. And the reason we know this is true is because the Bible tells us that God does not change.

He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And God has always been in the habit of putting forth a visible representation of Himself to a watching world.

God in the Old Testament was always wanting and seeking to be known. And God wanted the world to understand Him. And the way God wanted the world to understand Him, He knew He was so much further above the world.

[19:18] Once Adam took of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Adam took that bite from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God could no longer walk in the cool of the day with created man. God could no longer walk in this intimate fellowship with man because now man had entered into death, and God is eternal life.

And there's this great chasm fixed between them. And God says, You can't know me intimately because you chose to rebel against me specifically. And so God wanted man to know Him so bad, and God says, I'm going to put a representation of myself.

The very first visible representation we see of this is a man building an ark for 120 years when it hadn't even rained yet. I mean, tell me that's not visible. You read the story of how big that ark was. You read the story of how massive of a ship Noah was building. And Noah was a preacher of righteousness, the book of Hebrews tells us. And Noah was telling them, The rain is coming. The rain is coming.

God told me to build an ark. You must repent. You must repent. And if that wasn't enough, if Noah could have just been discounted as a crazy man, what about the representation of all the clean animals coming by sevens and all the unclean animals coming by twos?

[20:27] When you begin to see a line of animals all walking to the same ship, and you begin to take notice, Noah must have been on to something there. There is this visible representation. And then you have the visible representation of them getting in the ship, and God closing the doors.

I mean, God was making Himself known. And then He set forth a rainbow into heaven so that the world could know of His covenant. And then He called Abram from the land of the earth, the Chaldeans, so that He could choose Abram to be His representation to the world.

And He raised up from Abram a nation called Israel. And Israel had all these laws and all these standards. Is it because God was a big mean God? No. It's because God wanted them to live so differently that the rest of the world would have to take a double take and say, what's wrong with you people?

And they would say, well, God is our God. And He's a holy God. And then when they went into Egypt, God raised them up. And the Bible says, this blows our mind.

God tells Pharaoh, I raised you up so that I could show my power. God says, I want to make a visible representation of my power to a watching world.

[21 : 36] And the best way to do it is by taking on the power of the world, that is you, Pharaoh, and to show the world that even the world's superpowers aren't strong enough to resist the heavenly powers.

And then He parted the sea and He took them through the wilderness, a pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night. He gave them a tabernacle, the Shekinah glory. He brought them into the promised land and they defeated the enemies. And then He set up the temple, again, the Shekinah glory, over and over and over again.

And you see God making Himself known to a watching world. And then Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2, that you are coming to Him as living stones, each of you as a little stone.

And you are being joined together, one with another. To be built up to be a spiritual house of worship. So that the world could see. Friend, listen to me. The very first thing God has called His church to be is to be visible.

Because God so wants this world to know Him. And where is this world? I want to ask you something. In your mind, see if you can do this.

[22 : 41] In your mind, you tell me what a world looks like without the church. As a matter of fact, you don't even have to go to your mind. You can go to Revelations chapter 4. And you can see what the world looks like without the church.

Revelations chapter 1. John is on the island of Patmos. Revelations chapter 2 and 3. There's a letter to the seven churches. Revelations chapter 4. The church is in heaven. And in Revelation chapter 5.

You'll have to pardon my language. But in Revelation chapter 5. All hell breaks loose on earth. Do you want to know why all hell breaks loose on earth? It's because Revelation chapter 4.

The church is called home. And if you want to know what the world looks like without the presence of the church. All you have to do is read Revelations 5 to Revelations 20. And you begin to see the plagues.

And you know what it says in Revelation 6. I believe it's Revelation 6. It says that things get so bad on the earth that mankind cries out to the mountains. Fall on us and bury us and kill us.

[23 : 42] But God won't let it happen. This is what the world looks like when the representation of the church is removed. Now, I said that the very first thing God wants the church to be is to be visible.

And you and your mind said, that's great. We have a beautiful building. And we do. We have an amazing structure. And we do. And people drive by it all the time. And they do. And I'm here throughout the week.

And I see I've had questions asked. I've had people come in and ask me questions about this building. And they do. And people take pictures of this building. And they do. And it is a magnificent building. But that's the problem.

It is a building. The scripture does not say God wants us to have buildings that are visible. The scripture says that the church must be visible.

You know the only time this building turns into a church is when we walk into the doors. That's it. That's the only time this is a church.

[24 : 43] I come here throughout the week. And I'm usually here five to six days a week. And of those five to six days a week, about four of them, it's just me and a building. There's no church here. It's just me.

Now if another brother comes by, all of a sudden we have a church. Because the Bible says we're two or more gathered together. I am there as well, right? And that's great. And somebody else shows up. And they want to talk to me and give me a hard time. Awesome.

Now we have a church in the building. Because the church has showed up. So if the church is going to be visible, guess what? That means every aspect and every area of our lives must be visible for His glory and His honor.

How is the church going to be visible? Is if we live our lives intentionally. You say, well, wait a minute. The Bible says I shouldn't let my right hand know what my left hand is doing.

And I shouldn't be right. But it also says, let your good works so shine before men that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven. God has called His church to be visible.

[25 : 42] This is why, I mean, I know maybe I'm to the extreme a little bit. That's why I love to have hats with the church name on. That's why I love to have shirts with the church name on. That's why I love to have everything with the church name on. Not because I want people to know War Trace Baptist Church.

We were in Utah and we were a big group of 20 people, right? And we were walking up the side of this mountain and we were doing things and I got to realizing, you know, of all the people on this mountain, there was only one evangelical group and that was us.

And I got to notice and a bunch of people kept stopping and talking to me. And I got to have all these gospel conversations. And then I realized by the time they got to me wearing a church hat, they had already passed four other men wearing a War Trace Baptist Church hat.

So they wanted to know what in the world was going on with War Trace Baptist Church hanging out around Salt Lake City, Utah. And the church all of a sudden was becoming visible. We were all scattered out like, man, I got to talk to these people.

So it opened up gospel conversations. Why? Because it's important that the church is visible. But I also, I also encourage and caution individuals. If you're walking around with a church shirt on, guess what?

[26 : 43] You're visible. You can be a good visible representation and you can also be a poor visible representation. But God has called his church to be visible.

Number two, not only has he called his church to be visible, you're like, man, pastor, you're going along and I'm trying to be quick. He has called his church to be a fellowship. A fellowship.

A properly functioning fellowship. When we read of the church in the New Testament, we do not see this all inclusive, everybody's welcome to come in body. You say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, just stay with me.

Stay with me. When Christ said, I will build my church, he didn't just say, I'm going to take everybody in the world and I'm going to turn them into a church. He didn't do that. What we see in scripture is a very small segment of the world's population comprising the bride and body of Christ. And this segment of the world's population had this in common. They fellowshipped around a common truth, that is who Jesus Christ is. They fellowshipped around common facts that he was dead, buried and raised again on the third day.

[27 : 57] They fellowshipped around common teachings. The book of Acts tells us that they met together daily, going over the disciples teaching and fellowship and breaking their bread from home to home. And their hearts were set upon the things of Christ.

We see that fellowship was so important. This is why we see in the Matthew 28 passage, and again, I know I'm not doing really good exegeting each of these passages, but Matthew 28 doesn't just tell us to go out and tell everybody about Jesus.

That's great news. It tells us to go out and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are to make disciples, teaching them the truths which we already know, and baptizing them.

Here's a good part to pay attention. Why is baptism so important? Baptism is not a Christian idea, by the way. Baptism did not start with the church. It did not start with Christianity.

Baptism was something that the Jews were doing, and even the non-Jews were doing in different parts of the world in the times of Christ. But Christ gave this command. Those who adhere to this teaching, baptize them. Why is baptism important?

[28 : 54] Baptism does not save you. I'm going to go ahead and say that, okay? Baptism is not your salvation. If that is the case, I would take every one of you. I'd get a super soaker water gun, and I'd squirt every one of you with water right now.

If just by getting you wet, I could save you, I'd get every one of you wet when you walked out the door. That's my heart and my mind. But listen, I got wet when I was 15, but all I did was get wet. I'm sweating right now, and I'm wet right now.

There's no difference there, okay? Baptism is not your salvation. Tony Evans said it this way. At its core, baptism is an identification, not a salvation.

Which means at baptism, we identify with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. This is why I go all the way under when I do baptism. Take you all the way under so you can identify with, here

you are as the old person.

You're going to be dead and buried under the water and raised up to walk in the newness of life. Our shirts that we wear at baptism, they say that, right? I'm dead and buried and raised to walk in the newness of life.

[29 : 48] It is identification with Christ. Just as Jesus was dead, buried, and raised to walk in the newness of life, so am I. I'm going to identify with him. It is much more than that. It is not just an identification with Christ.

It is an identification with other believers in Christ. It says, I believe what you believe. I accept the truth that you accept.

See, the Jews would do this when a non-Jew would convert to Judaism. They would always do this ceremonial washing called baptism. And they would have these pools outside the temple, these synagogues in the times of Christ.

And if I, being a Gentile, wanted to accept Judaistic teaching, I would walk up to that pool and nobody would baptize me. I'd baptize myself. I would walk up to that pool and I would dump myself under the water signifying that I was washing away who I used to be so that I can identify with you and who you are.

And I want to be as you are. It is an identification. Identification. And we see this. This is why it's so important. Because there is no other fellowship in all the world that has such a standard of identification than Christianity.

[30 : 54] And the church is important and baptism is important. Why? Because God has called his church to be a fellowshiping body of believers. And to be a right functioning fellowship.

Which means if you are not following the Lord in believers baptism, you are not identifying with the body. Therefore, you cannot be in a proper fellowship with that body.

You say, Pastor, that seems kind of hardcore. Therefore, Jesus says, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The great commission to go and make disciples also includes identifying with one another.

The church is so important. Friend, listen to me. The church is so important. I want to identify with you and you want to identify with me so that we can have fellowship and we have to have these similar truths.

The main things have to be the main things. And the greatest way to display that is just getting wet. Baptism. Baptism. Because fellowship is important. It's not only the identification of baptism, but it's just the fellowship of the saints.

[31 : 57] You say, wait a minute, I thought the church existed for so much more than that. You know what I have found out, though? That a true fellowshiping church is a true caring church. When a church really fellowship one with another.

Fellowship, spending time, living life together. Eating their bread from home to home. Hanging out with one another, right? When a church really fellowship together. I mean, when it becomes your family that you identify with more than any other family in the world.

All of a sudden, that church begins to care for one another. And that church begins to fulfill or to seek to fulfill all of the one another passages. You say, well, I thought the church was to take care of the sick and the church was to do.

It is. When the church fellowship, guess what? When it hangs out and does life together, when a part is missing, you don't have to tell somebody. Because you look up at a fellowship and that part's not there.

That's why I even encourage you, come back tonight, decorate for VBS. Eat a meal with you. You say, well, that's not important. That's not real important, right? I found out more eating a sandwich besides someone in the fellowship hall than I ever have sitting in the pew during the preaching in the sanctuary.

[33 : 01] I really have. Fellowship. It's important. And it is to be a properly functioning fellowship of believers.

Here's the third and final one. Reaching in to the world. There is one distinct difference between Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament.

I'm trying to be quick because I know time is getting away from us. There is one very distinct difference. The Israel of the Old Testament was to live their lives by this code and this standard and these laws.

And it was to live its life in such a way that the world would take notice. It was to be visible. Jerusalem itself was to have the temple in it. And that temple was to be the place where God's name dwelt.

And all of the world was supposed to look upon Jerusalem and see how God blessed Jerusalem. And the world would walk by Jerusalem and go, wow, what a God that is.

[33 : 59] And all throughout the Old Testament, the intentions and the plans of God that he knew would never come about, but he had laid out for man is, you live in such a way that the world comes to you.

You live that the world takes notice and the world finally says, I want that God. Think of Naaman as he comes to Elijah. Think of the world came to him and said, I've got this problem. Can you take care of it? And he said, yeah, Naaman go dip seven times in the Jordan River. Right? That was God's plan. Live in such a way that the world comes to you. Now we move into the New Testament.

By the way, man couldn't do that. Man was supposed to live in such a way that the world came to them. God says, by the time the nation of Israel goes into the Babylonian captivity, now the world walks by Jerusalem and wags their head and says, I thought they had a big God.

Now they have a big problem. Now they have a big mess. Man couldn't do it. Now we transfer into the New Testament and God says, okay, I'm going to do it for you. I'm going to draw you to myself through my son.

[34 : 59] I'm going to build my church. And now rather than the church living in such a way that the world comes to them, which by the way is a place where a lot of local churches are today and they're in problems, they're in trouble because the day is spent where the world is coming to the church, by the way.

The day is spent where the world is knocking down the doors of the church when it has a problem. If you want to see what's about to happen in America, we've got to go across the other side of the ocean and see what's happening in Europe.

And the statistics in Europe is somewhere around like 85 to 90% of Europe's population when asked if you have a major problem in your life, if there's a death or an illness or a concern, if there's all these problems in your life, where will you go to find help for that problem?

And about 85 to 90% of them said, I would never consider going to the church. Never. Never.

There's not a reason in my life I can think why I would need to go to the church down the road.

That's where it's, and it basically it's coming this way, my friend, listen to me. It's coming this way because that's where we find our church roots. So the time where the church sets back and waits for the world to come to it is already gone.

[36 : 07] And by the way, that didn't create the church the Bible wants. Because the very first mentioning of the church, Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Gates are defensive matters of protection. You put a gate up at the end of your road whenever you go house to house. We were doing that here. I learned something. We were passing out VBS flyers. I learned something a long time ago.

When people have a fence around their yard and the gate is shut, that means don't come in. It's just pretty basic home. Unless you know that person, that means don't come in. People don't put fences and gates up for nothing.

I mean, they just don't. One of the very first mission trips I went on, the church planter said, if there's a gate and a fence and it's closed, you stay out. Because if you don't, you're going somewhere you don't belong.

Gates are defensive. Stay away, right? So when hell sets up its gates, hell is saying stay out of here. But the church doesn't obey that principle because Jesus said the gates of hell will not prevail against it, which means the church will bust through the gates.

[37 : 09] Which for the church to bust through anything, it has to be moving, right? Then Matthew 28 says, go therefore. It says go therefore.

It literally means as you are going and make disciples. Friend, I don't know if you've noticed it. Then we get to Acts 1, 6 and 8. And it talks about as you make disciples in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Then you get to Acts 2. And the Spirit fell upon the believers and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they all began to speak in tongues. The Lord's telling me it's time to stop. My voice is about to leave me, but this is what I want you to hear.

I don't know if you've noticed it, but everywhere in the New Testament the church is mentioned. The church is always on the move. The church was never called to be a passive waiter for the world to come.

Rather, the church was called to be an active pursuer of the lost and dying. The church has been called to reach into the community and into the world that it's placed in with the love of the Father.

[38 : 24] We are to be visible, and God may draw some people to us because they see us. But we'll miss the opportunity unless we're actively reaching to pursue them.

God's called the church to reach. The Bible tells us, snatch some out of the fire, even despising the clothes that they're wearing, but loving the individual enough to actively pursue them.

We have been called to reach into the world. Why? Because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

There's a lot of questions on laying that out. What does that mean? There's a lot of truths and salvation and all these things. Johnny Hunt said at the Southern Baptist Convention not too long ago, Johnny Hunt said, No matter where you fall on the predestination election, I know I just said some terms and some people's ears perked up, and Johnny Hunt said, No matter where you fall on all those theological truths, he said this, I have found one great truth.

The more I share about Jesus, the more I reach into the world with the love of the Father, the more people God predestines to come to faith in Him. He said, That's just the truth I have found.

[39 : 48] The church has been called to be a visible, properly functioning fellowship of believers, reaching out into the world.

Christ has placed in Him with the love of the Father. And you say, Well, I don't know if I can be that. Well, friend, you can't be any of that. And I'm wrapping up until you are a part of the church.

You say, Well, my name is on the roll. That has nothing to do with it. Well, I have a seat assigned. It has nothing to do with it. The church is comprised of those whose name is in the book.

The Lamb's Book of Life, found in the book of Revelations. They've been given a new name because they have a new body. They have a new person. They have a new soul. They have a new drive. They are in love with the body they're a part of.

You say, Well, I've never thought this way about the church. I don't have this. I don't know if I can buy into this with the church. I don't know if I can... Friend, listen to me. If the bridegroom calls you his bride and he makes you a part of his body, you will love what he loves.

[40 : 57] You will. Are there problems with the church? Absolutely. Listen, my wife did not marry a perfect bridegroom. And I got real close, but I didn't marry a perfect bride.

That may get me in trouble later. But I didn't. I married one that was perfect for me, but she's not perfect, and I'm not perfect.

Oh, but I love her. With all of my heart and all of my soul, I love her. I love her imperfections. I love how she completes me.

I love everything about her, and I don't say this just because she's sitting here. I say this because the bride of Christ is the church. I love the problems of the church, because that means it's alive. Something that doesn't even have any problems is dead, right? I love the discomforts of the church, because that means it's an organism. It's growing. Growth always produces discomfort.

[42 : 00] I love everything about the church, because even in her mess-ups, and even in her imperfections, Jesus has said, that's my bride, and I'm going to wash her as white as snow.

There will be a day. Lecrae has a song called The Bride. If you're into Christian rap, you can read it. I'm not that good. Lecrae has a song called The Bride, and he talks about it. She may be dirty now, but there's a day coming where she's going to be perfect.

And I just want to ask you real simple. Where do you stand with the church? Before you can ask that, you have to ask, where do you stand with the Savior who started the church?

Where are you? I don't know. Only you know that. May the Lord Himself show you your stance.

Let's pray together. Lord, I thank you so much for this day.

God, I rejoice in your church. I rejoice in your work. And I thank you for all you're doing even today.

God, I know that there's a lot of things where we fall short, each one of us.

[43 : 06] God, you're so merciful. You're so loving, and you're so kind. Thank you for your concern and your love for each one of us. I pray, oh, now, you would be glorified in this time. You'd be honored through our decisions and our actions.

We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[45 : 46] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.