

The Local Church, cont.

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're going to finish up some thoughts this morning about the local church and get myself together here.

Just a quick review of what we've covered in the last two Sundays and then kind of wrap it up, cover a few more thoughts. And I'd say the thrust or the intention of it was accomplished in expressing the purpose and the true role of the church in contrast to the modern attitude toward the local church, which, as you probably well know and are aware of, is just a what-can-I-get-out-of-it kind of mentality.

And as we've studied and looked at and even comments that have been made, how it's not just the selfishness in the individual that says, me, me, me, but it's also the way churches have marketed themselves over the last few decades even to where it's ingrained in a generation to think that way when you come to church and to look for the programs and look for what's in it for me and what do you offer me.

And that's never been God's intention or purpose for the local church, is just to make everybody happy and to give you things for your life to fill in your schedules and your calendars.

And I think you have the discernment to understand where you benefit and where you don't and where the line could be drawn, probably not an easy one to be drawn, where it's right or wrong.

[1 : 4 8] One blessing about a local church is the autonomy of a local church, meaning the self-governing of a local church where we can make our own decisions and discuss things and decide if we want to go a direction or not.

No headquarters to check in with, nobody to demand or tell us what we should and shouldn't do. That's a blessing to have that liberty, and it should be that way.

It should totally be that way. And if we want to have a program here for the elderly in our community, we can do it. Because nobody's going to say, no, there's no money in that.

No, you shouldn't do it. No, who cares? If we feel led of God to do something like that as a ministry, we'll do it. And I'm just throwing that out. There's a million ideas and things. That's probably not a popular one by any means.

Getting back to where we began, the inception of the local church, where God began something at Jerusalem with those disciples of the Lord, where people were gathering together, were even in the temple to begin with, where they were praising God and where they were meeting, and there was doctrine being taught that people did not grow up with.

[3 : 0 3] It was new. They were coming apart from their families, from their upbringings, to this new thing, this belief of Jesus Christ. And as it spread, and the persecution and so forth, as it spread into different areas, believers moved on.

They gathered. They assembled. They did their job. They recreated. They witnessed the Lord Jesus Christ, his resurrection, and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And churches began to form. And it was a moving and a work of God. That reminds me. You can turn to Acts chapter 5. I'll get there in a minute. And what God began, he also describes that it's going to fall away, and that it's going to deteriorate, for lack of a better word.

And it's going to be a human problem. It's going to be men in the church, individuals in the church, that are steering the ship a different direction than God ever intended it to be. And I feel like we've seen a lot of that in our day, in our job and intention and goal here, is to resist that spirit and attitude, and to stick with the word of God, and to stick with what we're here to do, and to worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we talked about the modern attitude of the local church. We talked about some things, what the church is and is not. And then last week, what we really spent time with was the terminology, the word church in the Bible, and showed you what it means, and what it can refer to, a few different things.

[4 : 40] One, it referred to the nation of Israel, the church in the wilderness. And so the word church is not this building. I looked up a definition, I just looked online not too long ago, and just said, what does church mean?

Just gave a real simple generic question. And when I got several, you know how it goes, one of the dictionaries online, the first definition was a church, a building.

That was the word, a building. Church is a building. And then the second one was, get this, the clergy. That was the second definition, the clergy, like really. The man in the cloth.

That is the church. What a terrible, first two definitions are dead wrong. And so, biblically, we showed last Sunday that the word church, not only can refer, it's referring to an assembly of people.

It's people. It's always people. And it was applied to Israel as a nation as they were going through the wilderness. They were called the church in the wilderness. And we saw a parallel there, how that matches in some ways what we are today.

[5 : 40] We also saw that the word is given to localities, to local assemblies, like one right here. There was churches in Judea, and in Samaria, and in Judea. There was a church in Laodicea.

There was a church in Babylon. There was a multitude of them throughout the scriptures. The church is in Galatia. And many of them were called the churches of God or the churches of Christ. And Paul says, the churches of Christ salute you.

And so, these are people. These are local assemblies in different localities. But then, it's also a reference to a bigger body of Christ is the term. It's an invisible, a universal, the term is used.

Anybody who's been born again and has the spirit of God inside of them, their sins forgiven, they've been taken and baptized or placed into a spiritual body.

And they're in Christ. And in Christ, they have forgiveness of sins and righteousness and sanctification and justification. And they're predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son.

[6 : 44] In Jesus Christ, we are part of something bigger than this right here. And so, that's the body of Christ, also called the church, of which Christ is the head. So, we studied the terminology a little bit and wanted to make sure we weren't confused about the differences when we read the word church in the Bible.

Then, we closed with some thoughts about the purpose and the role of the local church. And I gave it to you in three categories. First, to God. What is the purpose of our existence for Him? Then, for us, for believers?

And then, for the world itself. And I told you that a common line that's typically accepted and used. And I don't have any problem with it except that the, if you want to say it's a little backwards, it says to evangelize the sinner, to edify the saints, and to glorify the Savior.

And that's a really good synopsis of the purpose and role of the church. So, for God, we talked about that a little bit last week about glorifying Him and fulfilling the work that He has in His will in this age, on this planet.

And He uses local churches to do that. Secondly, for believers, we discussed this briefly as we closed, how it is to help you.

[7 : 54] And there was a huge list I could have gave you of scriptures to turn to and I just kind of picked a phrase or two about growing you spiritually, edifying you in the new man, encouraging you and uplifting you and provoking one another to love and to good works, to mourn, to help, to mourn, to weep, to rejoice with those that rejoice and to prefer one another and to pray for one another and the list goes on of what you get out of a local church family.

But it's also here to help you personally in your walk with Jesus Christ, to train you up in the Word of God, to equip you for spiritual warfare, to reprove you, to correct you in righteousness, to get your mind right, to align up with the Word of God.

You can say that, I'm sure you've heard this, I can worship God on my boat or I can worship God in my camper, I don't need to come to church. Yes, you do need to come to church.

And I know I'm telling that to people that come to church. At least you did this morning. Praise the Lord. But the truth is, no, you can't do what you claim you can do outside of this building.

God designed this. He's specified for this to take place. I heard a guy tell me, oh, we go camping and we go with other Christians and we have a church service. I'm like, oh, sure you do.

[9 : 17] What a blessing. You play church, do you? You play church while you're camping on Sunday morning. Now, I don't care. I'm just telling you, that's not church.

That's not a local church. Just because somebody gets a little devotional together and you sing a song or something, it's not church. That's not what God designed and intended for you. So, if you're going to go camping on Sunday morning, that's on you.

It's between you and the Lord. But don't come back and tell me we had church service because you didn't. Okay. That went over great. Let's keep going. I'll plow right through it.

Don't worry. I'll plow through. I don't have a problem with that. Something this church can do and coming here can do is going to counter the influence of the world in your life because you get an awful lot of it whether you know it or not.

You live in it. You can't help it. You're in it. You don't want to be of it but you're in it and coming here Sunday after Sunday grouping up together can counter that.

[10 : 15] It's a blessing. You go to work every day, don't you? Unless you work from home. You go to work and you're surrounded with unbelievers and even if there's another Christian there, you're still the minority.

You're not going to be the majority in most cases and you're surrounded with it. You hear it. You're involved in it. The music in the environment oftentimes is not God unless you work at Hobby Lobby or something.

You might get a little Chick-fil-A. They might play a little bit of modern Christian music. There's a few spots but for the most part you're surrounded with the world whether you like it or not and you come here you're surrounded with believers and around here we don't want to hear the dirty jokes and around here we don't want to talk about the movies that you watched over the week or those things.

We're here for the Lord Jesus Christ and we want to help each other in that in your walk with God. So coming here can counter that influence and redirect your thoughts to the Word of God and to truth and to our purpose here and what we're supposed to be doing.

So then that's where we closed and then this morning we'll finish with this thought here about the purpose for the world. What do we exist for in the world? I'd say a few things. One of them is to make Jesus Christ known.

[11 : 28] The local church comes together exists as a corporation if you want to use that term but it's to do something it's to broadcast to the world the Lord Jesus Christ starting right here in this city and it doesn't stop in this city but that's what we're supposed to be doing here to preach the gospel.

The Bible says how shall they hear without a preacher? And the local church sends out preachers. The local church itself is a preacher in a sense. In other words our role here is not to fill the bellies of the community with food and to clothe them and to house them.

There's rescue missions these are ministries that have been sprouted up over time and they have a place but if their only goal is to feed them and house them and to clothe them and they claim we're showing them the love of Christ are they meeting the need that's in that individual and are they fulfilling their purpose?

They need to get the gospel to them. They need Jesus Christ so those ministries they have a place but the priority had better be on the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you want to feed somebody feed them give them the gospel.

If you want to clothe them clothe them getting them the gospel telling them why you care about them. So there's a big difference between what modern day churches do in their humanitarian efforts and their benevolent deeds versus the priority being on the soul of man and the gospel of Jesus Christ and ministering to them the gospel first or even using those ministries to get the gospel in.

[13 : 03] That's pretty important that the priority is right. Another thought here on what we are to the world is to support the work of God outside of this city and you see that in the Apostle Paul's epistles and writings he's raising money he's taking care of other saints he's taking care of those ministers that are out there those fellow laborers he's helping them out they're out there and modern day it's supporting missions.

It's supporting men that are called of God into the gospel ministry and it's putting them out there and keeping them out there on the road and helping them to fulfill their role and calling in this world.

Lastly then it's to be a light a light in this city and we'll talk about that here before we're done but being a light in this locality is to reprove the works of darkness it's to hold forth the word of life Paul said shining as lights in the world we exist to be seen we exist to let them know what this is and what we're here for and I'll talk about that a little bit later so we'll pass from that.

Two things and we'll close with this whole study here the first is the importance of the local church and then an analogy of the local church so you're in Acts chapter 5 take a look at verse 38 and 39 so these men in Israel that are the apostles that this thing is getting started the church is growing and they're being added to the church daily and they're preaching and they're teaching and they're preaching Jesus Christ and of course opposition shows up and so when they have them in their council they look at it at the end of verse 33 the very last thing it says they took council to slay them so that's your world that's the law that's religion typical religion wants to kill the true preachers of Jesus Christ because it doesn't work for their religion now in the end here this man Gamaliel opens his mouth and says hey let's think about what we're doing here and in a sense he says look there was this guy that did this and he had a following there was this guy that had a following and let's just watch how this plays out and so he says in verse 38 and now I say unto you refrain from these men and let them alone for if this council or this work be of men it'll come to naught but if it be a God he cannot overthrow it lest happily ye be found even to fight against God so he wasn't convinced that this was just some weird thing off to the side that needs to be squashed but the point is it's a work of God and he's not sure but he's saying if it is but it is and so that's the first thing I want to say here the importance of the local church is it is the work of God that is

God chose the local church and institution in this age by means of which he works and fulfills his will all around the world one location here one location there and several around the city and in other regions that's what God has established he's established this to get the gospel across the globe for one thing it's the work of God I hope you can acknowledge that that the local church and meeting together in the name of Jesus Christ and in the word of God is a work of God it's his deal he established it so then in light with that secondly it's the will of God God designed and established the local church for believers that is it's supposed to be the saved people here that are members and that have joined up and that are established here and say this is what I'm part of because God wants me part of it it's his will made up of believers and it's not a from the Lord's perspective this is not a take it or leave it option this is not just go do what you want to do in this life but rather

[16 : 55] I saved you I established I promoted local churches to exist and therefore you better get and be part of one you better get in get both feet in I believe every saved soul ought to be connected to joined to in submission to and be an active and contributing member of a local church amen a sound a bible believing gospel preaching local church every believer some people refuse to attend they don't want to go to church or they'll go when it's convenient and I wonder even this morning how many saved people are sitting at home this morning or have chosen to fill their calendar with other things I don't want a number I just wonder I know the number's large how many of them are ignoring the will of God in their life this morning to assemble in a local church because they have a plan that they want to accomplish they don't want to be in submission to a local church they don't want to be committed others will refuse to join a local church some will say well you can't show me in the bible where you have to join and they'll say that and I don't even have to have an answer for them they refuse to submit some just don't want to commit they don't want to be tied down they want to stay unaccountable they want to ride the fence and decide just as soon as he says something and I'm not sure nope can't be there we'll go check another one out for a few weeks and see if that one's acceptable to us and I think it's a spiritual issue just opinion and I'm not saying this to any individual here or out there

I'm just saying out broadcasting it people that I think it's a spiritual issue that people refuse to be accountable and to submit and to be committed to a local church it's important to God it ought to be just as important to you and I'll stand by that till I die the local church is important to God that's what we're discussing the importance of it the will of God it's important to him I think it ought to be just as important to us then thirdly it's the way of God the local church is the way of God to accomplish his work his will what he did not do was choose a government and say government you have an army you have power you can force them to do what I want them to do that's not the way of God he didn't choose a government he didn't choose a nation at one time in the Old Testament he chose Israel as his people even calling them his firstborn son what a thing but today he didn't choose a nation to be his contrary to what some preachers preach in their pulpits about this land they're not even going to go there but he didn't choose a nation to be his nation that's nonsense he chose believers he chose the body of Christ and in this age and in this day on the ground where we live we join up as members of local churches and that's what

God chose to establish around the world it's his way and so it's important I think you need to see that it's important it shouldn't be nonchalant take it or leave it not a big deal to me I don't have to I think the local church is important to God and so as I said it ought to be important to you now take your Bible and go to Revelation chapter 1 and finally I want to show you an analogy of the local church now the universal church that we discussed that's made up of all believers past, present and it will be future the universal church that we discussed has its own set of analogies maybe one we've already discussed it's the body of Christ it's likened to a body and in 1 Corinthians 12 it has members like the eyes and the ears and it's all one body though together it's also likened to a building and I think it's Ephesians chapter 2 built up and it's also likened to a bride and there's a few things that the Bible likens the body or the church of God to as the universal church the spiritual church but here we'll talk about the local church it's likened to something as well so look at verses 12 and 13

John gets a revelation here and he gets a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ in verse 12 I turned to see the voice that spake with me and being turned I saw seven golden candlesticks and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man clothed with a garment down to the foot and girt about the paps with a golden girdle his head and his hairs were white like wool and it goes on to describe his appearance now skipping down to verse 20 he describes what he's seeing with these golden candlesticks the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches and now he goes through chapter 2 and chapter 3 starting in verse 1 of chapter 2 unto the angel of the church of Ephesus and then in chapter 2 verse 8 there's a church in Smyrna then there's one in Pergamos and he goes through seven churches and writes to them now this is an individual local church that he's sending a message to but what I want you to consider is they're likened unto an object to a candlestick so now come back to John chapter 1 what's a candlestick it's kind of one in front of me sort of

John chapter 1 didn't really realize that we had candles here right in front of my nose but this is a small candlestick John chapter 1 alright if we're there look at verses 6 through 9 there was a man sent from God whose name was John the same came for a witness to bear witness of the capital L light that all men through him might believe he was not that light but was sent to bear witness of that light that was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world we know that light is the Lord Jesus Christ he's mentioned in the beginning of this book and he calls himself I think it's in chapter 9 he says as long as I am in the world I am the light of the world so Jesus Christ is the true light the true light the local church is likened to what a candlestick alright now come back to Luke chapter 8

[24 : 13] Luke chapter 8 and this thought here is mentioned in Matthew and in Mark as well we'll just catch it he actually says it twice in Luke and he talks about this idea of a candle and a candlestick Luke chapter 8 look at verse 16 no man when he hath lighted a candle covereth it with a vessel or putteth it under a bed but setteth it on a candlestick why that they which enter in may see the light so the candlestick has a purpose in lifting up and in exposing and displaying the light to as I said earlier to make Christ known to make the light visible and viewable what does the light do when it shines into darkness it exposes darkness it reveals what's there

Jesus Christ does that the Bible says I'll tell you what turn to it you're close John chapter 3 John chapter 3 the light exposes the work of darkness and look at verse 19 and in this thought and analogy insert the local church into this to see what our role is verse 19 it says this is the condemnation that light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil for everyone that doeth evil hateth the light neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be reproved but he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God so if we do our duty and job to lift up Jesus Christ to allow the light the true light to display itself into the world the one that's doing truth will come to the light he'll come seeking

Christ seeking forgiveness seeking what we have but he that hateth the light as he loves his darkness he'll stay far far away but it's our job not to be hidden and out of view and not to conceal the light but rather to put it on public display somebody said this I've heard this a few times and I'm not being too hyper critical about the statement but they say this they say what you need to do they'll say it as the pastor you need to get on fire and you need to and people will just come to watch you burn you get on fire and people will come to watch you burn if I'm just so on fire for God it's just going to draw everybody to me to the church and that's a cute saying people say amen but if you put it in the right context maybe it sounds good but considering what we're doing here and what this is I don't quite like that people don't need to watch anybody burn they need to see Jesus Christ lifted up that's the light they need to look to the Lord Jesus Christ you know the world's not supposed to be enamored with the candlestick that's not why

God fashioned and created the local church the world's not supposed to be enamored with it because it gets powerful because it gains prestige because it builds buildings and it pulls in money it's not about the candlestick at all I should have looked this up just to blow your mind with the facts and the stats do you know how much money the Mormon church like their their net worth the Mormon church it's one church it's one headquarters one denomination and they have they have many local they have one right over here on Roxford or right over there they have one right over here behind us about a block away on Sayre I think it is and then they they collect the money and they put it into the send it forward and they are filthy rich filthy rich they own hotel chains they own property all over the world you know how much money and value net worth the Roman Catholic church is it's ridiculous

I have no idea like I said if I looked it up it would have just been me saying a number it's so high and out of this world it's unrelatable just that alone ought to make you realize these institutions are of the world and they are earthy they are growing and gaining and prestige and power and money and net worth and is that is there any evidence of that here for a local church for the Lord God for his organization on this planet is to get rich is to gain power and dominion over people that's that's in the tribulation that great whore that mother that Babylon she's got power over people and that's the antichrist system there now we're not supposed to get excited or enamored with the candlestick it's not about the candlestick the religions around this world that don't have the true light the Lord Jesus

[30 : 04] Christ what do they have they just have their candlestick as in they just make it bigger and they make it more beautiful and they engrave images of Mary on it and they engrave Jesus Christ hanging on the cross because he's not shining to the world instead they grave pictures of people they call saints and so when you look at that religion you see these people you see these engravings you see this golden beautiful jewels and precious things and it draws you and you see that they buy more property you see that they gain a stronger influence in the town and in politics we're not supposed to be enamored with the local church but with the one that the local church is holding up Lord Jesus Christ and so this analogy of the local church it carries it spills over because we're called children of the light and we're to walk in the light as he is in the light and there's other metaphors that illustrate and continue this analogy forward

I'll just leave you with this thought in closing the focus of our gathering and the purpose of our existence is absolutely one and one only the Lord Jesus Christ leave it to man to mess that up leave it to man to make it about him to put his name on it leave it to man to find a way to gain from it and to turn it into something about him and that's a sure sign that it's not fulfilling its role and purpose and so by the grace of God let's just continue to meet and let's grow as God sees fit and let's focus on lifting up the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives let's come here for him let's show up every Sunday and Wednesday for him and let's seek to get something from him and to grow in his word and as we'll carry this a little bit forward even into the next hour let's see if we can minister let's see if we can do it because of him and let's see if we can be found faithful and useful to him here at this local church if churches grow and as they do they gain in resources and as they do they may outgrow the building and have to do something else but it's never about trying to get a dot on the map or to get the name of the leader out there and to get attention to hear if that ever happens it's because

God is blessing if you're doing it right and you can see how there's a temptation to shift over and to start seeing the success and the progress and to get your mind focused on keeping that going forward versus just continuing to lift up the light of the Lord Jesus Christ and letting God add to the church and so I gotta stop because I'm really gonna drive into what we're gonna do next week is you actually uh to forth to