

Elders (2)

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Amen. So if you are visiting this morning, let me just give you a bit of background.! As a church we've been through quite a number of testing things over the past year and we're still in that sort of situation.

I'm going to be, having been working for the church as a full-time pastor elder for some, I don't know, 30 years or something like that. But I'm not very good at arithmetic.

I am going to be stepping back from full-time service at the end of November. And the plans that we had to find somebody who would come and just slot in as full-time hasn't materialized.

So we are now going back to basics, just thinking as a church how we serve, how we relate, how we organize. And we've been looking at the subject of deacons and hopefully we're going to, we've been having a process of choosing deacons and that process is going to continue.

I think we've made some progress but we've still got some way that we can progress that still further. And then we're looking at the subject of elders. And that's what we are going to be continuing to look at this morning.

[1:18] So my question was, how does God get people to heaven? And that's quite a fundamental question, isn't it? How does God get people to heaven? And the answer is going to be by Jesus.

Jesus is the only one who died on the cross. Jesus is the only one who rose from the dead. Jesus is the only one who's coming again to make all things new and to judge the living and the dead.

So Jesus is the big answer to that question. However, how does he do it? Does he use any other things in between?

And the answer is actually yes. How does Jesus make this have a long-term effect in people's lives? What does Jesus do into people's lives to keep them believing, to keep them going on? And we thought about this last time. We said by his word, of course, we feed on his word. By his spirit, the living third person of the Trinity who indwells the people of God.

[2:21] By his people with whom we interact and whose lives brush up against ours and through whom God's love is shown to us.

And then I said that there are particular people who shepherd us. And these people are given various names, the pastor, teacher, elder.

And God uses these people to get us to heaven. And we need to have those people in place. And just looking back over what we've thought of before, just reviewing some of this.

Why have elders? Well, why have a church? And the answer is that Jesus Christ's project is to build his church, bringing in the lost, beautifying the ugly, so that this body of people becomes his bride. And that is what Jesus is doing in this period of history. And it is the most important thing for any human being to be part of that process.

[3:24] So if you are whoever you are this morning, that is the group of people that you should belong to. Those are the people of the future.

Those are the people under God's favor. Those are the people who have the hope that Annie was talking about, looking forward to something beyond death. Are you part of that group?

Because if you're not, you need to talk to Jesus about becoming part of that group. And what I'm trying to say is that elders are an indispensable layer in that process.

And we looked last time at our elders, and we said they had different names. Overseers, elders, older ones, shepherds, people who stand up and manage the affairs of the church.

They're role models, authority figures. And they work mostly by ministering the word of God, the gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ. And what are they like? They're like Christ.

[4:27] They're meant to be servants. They serve by leading. And they do things like encourage and command and rebuke, etc. And just to remind us again of things that we've learned before, that the great shepherd is Jesus himself.

And the undershepherds are only undershepherds. They're not the savior. Jesus is the ultimate elder, bishop, overseer, shepherd. He's the one who gathers and shepherds his flock. But it's right and necessary to be concerned for the future church to have elders. So without elders, a church is in a vulnerable condition. That it looks as though in the New Testament churches, it's always plural.

So not just one man, but a team. Being old is not a disqualification, but neither is being younger. You can have a younger elder. You can have a youngest elder.

You can have an older elder. And a medium elder. Okay. And the Bible says a lot about the quality of life of these people. It doesn't say a lot about the organization, but it does say a lot about the people.

[5:37] And it also says that doctrine matters. So it's not just having a good heart, but being able to teach true, helpful doctrine.

And to be able to deploy the health-giving message matters, to be able to motivate, to encourage, to prove wrong, to rebuke, all sorts of motivational things as well.

And the thing that is deployed is the apostolic word. I'm sorry, I'm getting myself mixed up. The people are appointed by the apostolic word, by the congregation, but it's the Holy Spirit who makes people overseers.

Do you remember that from when Paul talked to the Ephesian elders? So that's just a review of what we looked at the other time. And to say appointing elders is a serious spiritual matter, and people prayed and fasted and took that very seriously.

So that's just a review. You remembered all that anyway, didn't you? My plan this morning is to look at these three things, just to digest this subject a little bit further.

[6:49] Elders. Fixed versus flexible. God's plan for elders is flexible, I would say. In-house versus outsourced. Where to look for elders.

And thirdly, maintenance versus vision. What sort of leadership should we expect from elders? Okay, number one, fixed versus flexible.

Number two, in-house versus outsourced. And number three, maintenance versus vision. Okay, is everybody awake so far? Good. Right, let's proceed. So let's look first of all at fixed versus flexible. To my mind, the teaching of the New Testament about elders is very flexible.

It doesn't have a lot about structure. It's much more about the sort of people. So I reckon you could end up with elders in Manhattan.

[7:47] And elders in Manhattan might include, you know, Tim Keller, very famous American preacher. And he's a, what sort of elder is he? Well, he's a theologian, a philosopher, a top expert on all sorts of things.

You see him on YouTube. He writes books. And that's the sort of elder that works in a Manhattan big church. And if we think about Joel, whose book I know a number of you have been reading, in a Cambodian village, well, what sort of elders do you have there?

You wouldn't expect Tim Keller, would you? You could get men, and hopefully men, who know their Bibles, who are able to care for other people, and have got God-given common sense.

And those would be your elders in a Cambodian village. So you can have all sorts. It's flexible. You can have elders with PhDs in historical theology. And you can have elders who just prayerfully and thoughtfully give wise scriptural advice.

You can have elders with management skills needed for a church of 1,000. And elders with the patience and love to care for a church of 15. So I think there's a lot of flexibility in the whole matter of elders.

[9:06] And just thinking of our experience here in Calvary. So going back over the decades, we've had, if we go back to where I can remember, two spare time elders.

They did this in their spare time. They were unpaid. And having lived through that for 14 years, I think that there's something somewhat unsustainable about just having unpaid elders.

It's a lot for unpaid elders to do. My colleague, Les Hill, who was the other unpaid elder back in those days, died.

And Ray would tell us how old Les was. How old was Les? 52. Which is quite young to die, isn't it? You could, I mean, it's a little bit cruel to say, did it kill Les?

But certainly he worked really, really hard. And he died at an early age. And I found that working as an unpaid elder in my spare time, by the time I got to being married and having a job and having kids and a home to look after, it was really not sustainable to run the church with two spare time elders.

[10:24] What have I got here? So in our experience, we had one paid full-time elder and two spare time elders. So this was when John Cropley came and worked for us.

And that was a good model, I think. We had different gifts, different personalities, different dynamics. Dynamics. So Les, unpaid, was senior in experience, but he was not as on hand as John was, who had been full-time.

And so we had a dynamic there which I think worked. In some ways you say it was a very flourishing time of the church, not without its problems, of course.

Les died. John Cropley got a call to go to the States. I became a paid full-time elder, and I did that by myself for a while. And I found that quite a difficult thing to do on my own.

I was quite inexperienced in being a church minister. And I think if the church expects one person to do everything on their own, it would need a very special person.

[11:38] And I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment. The pattern that we've had, as many of you will remember, is to have one paid full-time elder and one elder who does it in his spare time.

So this was how it was with Rod, who's gone to North Wales, and Chris, who's gone to Glory. And I think things have worked well when you've got two elders and you have one full-time and one spare time.

I think that's a reasonably sustainable model. But what I'm just trying to say is there's flexibility. Giftings and dynamics can flex. And when you get one team or another team, then people move around.

And, of course, latterly we had two full-time workers and one spare-time worker. And that was, apart from other problems, that was a good model as well.

So fixed versus flexible. It just seems to me that the smaller the church group is, the more the pastor elder has to be a jack-of-all-trades.

[12:49] It's very difficult for somebody to specialize if they're trying to do lots and lots of different things. So the jack-of-all-trades finishes by saying a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none, doesn't it?

Meaning that a pastor in this sort of situation tends to be a generalist rather than a specialist. So like primary school teachers.

Primary school teachers have to know classroom management, probably music, probably PE, a bit of all the curriculum, IT, everything, printing, publishing.

It's right, isn't it? When you're a teacher, you have to know all of those things, a bit about all of them. And I think a pastor in a small church tends to have to be a bit like that. So they can do preaching, counseling, people skills, office skills, admin skills, evangelistic skills, IT skills, apologetics, technology.

And they spend all their time in the office and they spend all their time visiting people outside. So it's quite a tall order really. You just have to think of what is being expected of somebody working full-time like that in a smaller church.

[14:02] So when we embark again upon advertising and looking at criteria and job descriptions and things, I think as a church we should just try and be aware of what it is we're looking for and what it is we're expecting.

You know, the archangel Gabriel would probably be underqualified in some of our thinking. We've just got to be realistic about what we expect there. So that was just a little bit about flexibility, because I think there's a, just as we sort of round off our thoughts on eldership, flexibility.

And the second thing to think about is in-house versus outsourced. And let's just turn to Ephesians 4, please, 11 to 16.

And there's a bit here about the aim of church ministry. Ephesians 4, verse 11.

He's quoted from a psalm, I can't remember, is it Psalm 68, about the triumphant king ascending and then giving gifts.

[15:20] And Paul takes this as being Christ who descended and has ascended and gives gifts.

And the gifts he mentions in Ephesians 4, 11. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers.

So he puts pastors and teachers together. So I think it's the same people, sort of pastor stroke teachers. To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching, and the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

[16:38] So, just thinking of the aim of ministry here, there are apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastor teachers, and what do they do?

It says, to prepare God's people, this is verse 12, for works of service. So it's equipping other people to do stuff, to prepare God's people for works of service.

For building up the body, so that the body, this is still verse 12, so that the body of Christ may be built up. So there's an up-building, and seeing as he says body, I think he's referring to relationship, working together, and not just individuals being built up, but a community being built up into a strong community, building up so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we reach unity in faith, and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature.

So he's aiming for people who are built up in faith, built up in understanding, and who come to a maturity. And you might remember, as we've gone through this series, we've been in the background thinking of the mature church, rather than the immature church.

And this mentions this matter of maturity. So the pastor teachers are there to train others to serve, to bring them in service to maturity.

[18:12] Maturity is the working, functioning, of a well-functioning, growing body. And hence the pastor teachers are investing in people, so that they can be able to serve, and so that the body is able to be built up.

So that's what the ministry is about. And let's just think about the in-house route. So please turn with me to 2 Timothy chapter 2.

2 Timothy chapter 2.

2 Timothy chapter 2, verses 1 and 2. So here is Timothy working the in-house route, where he says, Then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and the things that you have heard me say, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

See what he's saying? In 2 Timothy 2, verses 1 and 2. The things that you have heard me say, in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

[19:53] So let's just take that to pieces a little bit. Part of Timothy's task was to perpetuate the gospel via faithful men who are able to teach.

Timothy himself learnt the gospel from the apostle, the things that you have heard me say. And he had heard many witnesses, many witnesses had heard this, so many people had re-echoed to Timothy what they'd heard Paul say.

And this now needs to be passed on to the next generation. So it seems to me this is the rationale for teaching the next generation, for investing, for example, as we've done with our preaching team, to find reliable people who are able to teach others and to pass this on to them.

So that's what happens. We've done a bit of that in the church, and as many people know, there's a ministry training course run by the Sussex Gospel Partnership that a number of people have

passed through and found very, very helpful.

Something that we can do in partnership with other local churches, within the local church, and perhaps even with the assistance of specialized educational establishments, the academy, like Bible colleges, and, yeah, like we've helped out in, well, if you think about it secondhand, you've helped by sending me to Boldeus Theological College to train people like this, and you might not realize it, but you've also given me time to go to the Sussex Gospel Partnership and teach on that training course, passing on to reliable men the things that the apostle taught so that they can teach others.

[21:47] And we are looking to be recipients and beneficiaries of that training as we look for somebody who will come and teach us. Well, this is the in-house route, so I'm getting ahead of myself.

I guess we probably don't pray for training as much as we could do. Maybe we should pray for the ministry training courses, pray for Bible colleges. If you use the church's prayer list, you'll find that those things are itemized on that list through the course of a month.

And what things did Timothy learn from Paul? So this assumes that there is something that you could say, this is what Paul taught, this is what I've learned, and this is what I need to pass on to other people.

And he's not saying, just regurgitate every single word that Paul ever said. He's saying, what did it mean? What did it boil down to? What was the content of the apostolic message?

And believe it or not, we're members of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches and the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, FIEC, has a summary of what Paul taught, what the gospel is, and it's written up on a board outside there.

[23:22] You might like to look at it. I've just copied and pasted it up onto the screen without reading every single word. You see there's things about God. There is one God who exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And something about the Bible, God has revealed himself in the Bible, the Old and New Testaments. Every word was inspired by God through human authors so that the Bible is originally given in its entirety the Word of God without error and fully reliable in all matters of fact and doctrine.

The Bible speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice. Do you believe that? Do you believe that? Shall we be a little bit more emphatic?

Do you believe that? Yes. I hope so because that's basic, isn't it? And there's other things that are here about the human race made in the image of God with equal dignity and worth, a purpose to obey and worship and love God and then about everyone, the universality of sin, without Christ we're all sinners and under the just condemnation of God and needing to be born again, things like that.

Do you believe that? Yeah. It's a thing, isn't it, to believe that because it's saying that I, in myself, am a sinner, I'm not right with God, I'm not a good person, I don't have a good heart, I need a new heart, I need to be forgiven and I need God to do something to me and for me otherwise I'm stuck.

[25:04] So that's quite a statement there. The Lord Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, I'll just say, do you believe that? Could you be a bit more emphatic? Do you believe that?

Yes. Okay. He died on the cross in the place of sinners, bearing God's punishment for their sin, redeeming them by his blood. He rose from the dead and in his resurrection body ascended into heaven where he's exalted as Lord of all.

He intercedes for his people in the presence of the Father. Do we believe that? Yes. Amen. Okay. Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace and cannot be earned or deserved.

Do we believe that? Yes. It has been accomplished by Jesus Christ and is offered to all in the gospel. God in his love forgives sinners whom he calls, granting them repentance and faith.

All who believe in Christ are justified by faith alone, adopted into the family of God and receive eternal life. Amen. Yeah. And then about the Holy Spirit, about the church, about baptism and the Lord's Supper, about the future.

[26:10] The Lord Jesus will return in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment and the righteous will be welcomed into a life of eternal joy

in fellowship with God.

God will make all things new and we will be glorified forever. Amen? Amen. So, I'll just stop to say there is a body of things that Paul taught that we are to receive and that reliable people are to be entrusted with to pass on to the next generation.

And Timothy, we presume, was thinking of people inside the church and finding reliable men and training them up and working on the in-house option. But I thought we would look at the outsourcing option.

There's examples of that as well. We've looked at this before but no harm in just making sure we've all got this point. So, this is in Acts chapter 11 and it's in verse 25.

And this is repetition. We've seen this before but I don't think there's any harm in repeating something so we just make absolutely sure we've all got this point.

[27:41] So, this is the church in Antioch. Acts chapter 11 and in verse 20, some men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus and the Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

So, the church now is not just, this church is not simply Jewish people who believed in Jesus but non-Jewish people who believed in Jesus. This is a change.

And verse 22, news of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas means son of encouragement.

So, he was an encouraging guy and they sent Barnabas to Antioch and when he arrived and saw the grace of God he was glad and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Now, then notice what Barnabas does. Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he found him he brought him to Antioch and for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.

[29:02] The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. So, this is a new thing that happens at Antioch. This is where the nickname Christians arises but just taking this through in verse 20 the gospel was being told and good things were happening verse 23.

The grace of God was working. There were a lot of converts verse 24 a great number of people were brought to the Lord and it's in ethnic and cultural new territory so not only Jews but Greeks and Barnabas goes to Tarsus to look for Saul and they end up teaching a large number of people people.

So, just notice what's happening. God is blessing. It's not as though the work is in sin. It's not in a ruin. The work wasn't going wrong. It didn't need correction but there was a special need and I think the need is to be able to teach converts who were from a Gentile background and how are they to understand the Old Testament?

How are they to understand when the Old Testament says you need to circumcise your children? You need to keep the food laws? Is that for them? How are we to understand the Old Testament so as to teach it to people who are not Jews?

I think this is Saul's speciality because he had this wonderful insight into God's purposes so that people could become part of the people of God the nations could become part of the people of God the nations could become part of the people of God without having to become Jews first.

[30:52] That's the bit that Paul saw understood and that's what he taught and Barnabas headhunted Saul he thought that's just the guy we need and they brought him on board and it would be great if we had a Barnabas who knew a Saul who could say what Calvary church needs is somebody like this I know somebody like that I'll nip over to wherever it is and bring them back and bring them here it would be brilliant wouldn't it?

that's the sort of thing we should be praying to happen and there are all sorts of specialist skills that would need somebody to be brought in from outside so perhaps the specialist skill of running a larger church or the specialist skill of church planting or some churches run multiple sites and how do you do that specialist skills in apologetics or perhaps specialist skills in building from a low base so bringing in someone from outside and that's what happened in act 1125 and just as an

observation it seems to me that the larger denominations seem to work on this model particularly so you train specialists in bible college and then you send them off to get jobs for that to work one church can't do that on their own you need churches to cooperate together to fund bible colleges or to have training courses and you end up with people who have a good training perhaps in theology or church history and the original languages and preaching and perhaps some training in leadership and management theory and some training in counselling theory and that's great it just seems to me that that goes to one end of the spectrum where you end up with people who think this is a job rather than being part of a family and to my mind serving in the church here is not for me just a job it's being part of a family and having a particular role in the family but anyway there we are outsourcing getting people from outside

I think looking for people inside looking for people outside third thing maintenance versus vision so I want to say as I said before I think there's more to the work of eldership than simply keeping things going maintenance I think there's there is the value of or even the need of having leadership that has vision and I'll try and explain what I mean by that if you went through the list of qualifications or actually that's a list of things that disqualify elders you wouldn't just get this but I think this is important so if you think about shepherding leading the flock where are you leading them to thinking of

Paul's view of the plan of God as for example Isaiah chapter 2 the mountain of the Lord's house will be established as chief among the mountains and all the nations will flow to it how does that happen that vision of many nations being drawn in how does that happen it happens through churches where they are led to be part of that happening many people coming to the Lord and it seems to me I'm going to say this two or three times but it seems to me that leaders in the church need to see what that vision is and be finding ways for that to happen so I've put solutions and strategy so leadership is not just saying oh there's loads of problems leadership is saying yeah there's loads of problems but here's the way we solve them here's the way we work towards solutions and I've called that strategy how is it going to happen what steps can we take and planning forward like that so here's the example of Nehemiah who saw that the city of God was destroyed and its gates burned with fire and if you just flip back to

Nehemiah if you can find it I'm going to see if I can find it it was in my Bible earlier yes it's still there I noticed from Nehemiah which we read earlier so he certainly prayed and he certainly spoke up but in the bit that we didn't read in chapter 2 verse 7 he had a plan so when the king said what do you want Nehemiah said if it pleases the king may I have letters to the governors in trans-Euphrates so that they will provide me safe conduct until I arrive in Judah and also may I have a letter to Asaph keeper of the king's forest that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple for the city wall and for residents I will occupy and because the gracious hand of the [36:43] Lord was upon me he gave me what's it say the king granted me my request so he'd actually thought of the steps so here we are at A and we want to be over here at Q or wherever it is and we've got to go A B C D E F to get there and Nehemiah has got some plans he probably hasn't got all the letters but he thinks we're here at A so I shall definitely B C and D give me letters to this person letters to that person I'm going to need timber and I'm going to need permissions I'm going to need to travel and he started to thinking of solutions and strategy he cared he prayed and he saw what ought to be he saw where they actually were and where they ought to be and he believed in the ability of the almighty God to bridge the gap and he had solutions and strategy towards that am I making sense he was making a plan well I've put on my screen here to get to

H but anyway from A to H but he's thinking well it was B C D E F at least we can find B C D and then the Lord will show us the other letters to get through the alphabet and he had the ability to motivate people to say to folks look this is what God wants this is what he says in his word this is where we're at now come on we need to get our act together we need to pray and then there's the things that we can do and that's what we're aiming for so he was able to motivate people and this my understanding of leadership in the kingdom of God and may God send us as a church this precious gift of people who care and have a vision and can lead and can motivate for the future Paul had the same sort of thing in

Romans 15 23 he says there's no more place for me to work in these regions and since I've been longing for many years to see you I plan to do so when I go to Spain he's got some plans he's going to go places I hope to visit you while passing through there and have you assist me on my journey there after I've enjoyed your company for a while he had this vision he was thinking the nations are going to be one for the Lord now then Spain would be a nation I like to go to Spain and I'm planning how do I get to Spain I go via Italy because that's a good route and he's forming plans and strategies to fulfill God's plan in reality and he was able to motivate people I think that's reason he wrote the letter to the Romans he said I'm going to come through you I want you to understand where I'm coming from I want you to understand what I'm up to and I want you to be behind me when I get there he was able to motivate people and this seems to be to be!

So we have looked at eldership from the point of view of fixed versus flexible and I've tried to say eldership is a flexible thing what was my second point in house versus outsourcing and saying there's a precedent for finding men within the church reliable men to whom these things are passed on there's also precedent for getting people from outside if we don't have the resources within and then my third thing here is that there is not just a maintenance thing I would personally be very dissatisfied with leadership that just kept things ticking over I think leadership has got to have a vision this is what we should be aiming for and here are some steps to get there and it seems to me this is what leadership is about and having such leadership we need to be people who will follow such leadership if

God sends us leaders to inspire us and motivate us it's up to us as church members to say I'm going to follow if God sends this leadership I'll be one of the people who follow and we're going to sing a song about offering up our lives to the Lord I'll hand over to David to conclude ending Thank you.