

Discussion on gathering

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Preacher: Jerome Peirson

[0 : 00] Amen. Well, as we were reminded this morning, as a church, we will be starting a new series.

! We're going to be thinking about a number of topics with regards to what it means to be the church. And we're going to be looking at, we've looked at, why do we gather?

However, we will be looking at, why do we sing? Why do we pray? Why do we give? And Daniel will then look at what it means to be male and female in the church, and the implications of that in terms of service and positions in the church and so forth.

As Phil said earlier on, that's quite a hot topic at the moment when you think of our wider culture and the view around male and female roles and so forth. But why look at these things?

I think it's helpful for us who have been around a little while to be reminded and refreshed. It's a new year, and I think it's good at the point of a new year to kind of recalibrate, to reset, to re-evaluate our priorities and what's important and what we need to do.

[1 : 18] I think as well in the life of the church, we're changing. I mean, the church in one sense is always changing and growing or not growing, but we are, particularly at this time, we're seeing quite a lot of new faces, which is a wonderful thing, isn't it?

And we might have those among us who are confused or not entirely sure what it means to be part of a church and what it all entails and maybe asking these questions.

So hopefully this will be instructive to them. I mean, I think we all need to be challenged and to grow in these areas. So we were thinking about why do we gather?

And it was interesting to me because Phil, without launching straight into the kind of positives of why we gather and his kind of points and so forth, started rather unusually because he started with some objections.

Do people recall what those objections were before I kind of click them up? I don't need to go to church. I can just have a relationship with them all. Yeah, I guess if I was to ask any of you if you've met anyone that said that, I bet if we all said, raise your hand if you've met someone that said that.

[2 : 35] Quite a few of us, haven't we? Yeah. Any other objections that you can recall? Yeah? Yeah. It's an interesting one, isn't it? Because I guess life has always been busy.

I'm sure back in the day of the apostles, life was incredibly busy, probably in terms of workload and stuff. They probably worked a tremendous amount from before sunrise to sunset. But I think this is a time where we are all busy with stuff, isn't it?

In a kind of distracted way. Maybe we're not all working from 5.30am to 8.30pm or what have you in kind of agrarian, agricultural, whatever.

But we are busy and we're all distracted with devices and emails and everyone can contact us any time, can't they? So, yeah. Anything else? I don't feel like it because I don't like to speak.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I'm sure many of us will have heard that as well. Something I've heard, sadly, is I got hurt in that church.

[3 : 43] And it is sad. Or, you know, someone treated me not the way I wanted to be treated, so therefore I'm done with church. But, yeah. Too?

I'm too tired. Yeah, me too. Yeah, I mean, absolutely. Life's tiring, isn't it? And Sundays, you know, to come back on a Sunday evening, yeah, it's tiring.

So, I mean, there are a lot of objections that we hear and we don't want to dwell on those. But the way the sermon was structured this morning was, if you like an answer to those objections, it wasn't an exegesis on a specific text.

There were a lot of texts that were spoken of and referenced very helpfully. But Phil, let me get... There you go.

And Phil mentioned, he structured the sermon with three reasons. The answer, he said that he's going to give an answer. There'll be three reasons, three principles, three benefits, and four pieces of advice.

[4 : 50] So, if you like a four-point sermon, bucking the trend there. But I do think it is important we just spend a moment... There you go.

This whole matter of, I meet God on my own. Because it's something we do hear a lot. And I think society generally is more atomised. It's more people stay in, more people...

A huge amount of people gather their spiritual kind of knowledge. Not from books, not from being gathered with other people, but actually probably mostly from the internet, I would have thought, nowadays.

And there can be some good in that. But Phil reminded us... And I think here, biblical balance is really, really important. Because there are examples in the scripture where it's good and necessary to have kind of solitude, to withdraw, to have communion with God on your own, to be prayerfully and meditatively in the word, on your own, just you and your Bible.

There's a place for that. And that would be wholly appropriate and biblical. So don't think for one minute that we as a church are discouraging that. I actually think, you know, there's a relationship between your personal worship and how you are in church as the gathered body of...

[6 : 09] I see you nodding for... Would you agree that that's... The two kind of interrelate to a degree, don't they? But Christianity as a whole, it's not just about me and God.

It's... To use your words, it's not a... It's a group ticket. Is that right? You can't be saved on a group ticket. You have to be saved one-to-one.

Oh, yeah, sorry. It's not a group ticket. Yes, it's not a group... Yeah. Salvation is not a group ticket. Apologies. Salvation is one-to-one. It's a personal thing.

It's... One cannot be saved by being part of a Christian family would be the obvious one. My kids aren't going to be saved just by being raised in our family and coming to Bible... You know, family devotions.

They need to be born again. There needs to be regeneration. We've thought...

[7 : 07] I thought when you were talking about this how there can be such an imbalance where you have one extreme, and I think of the Roman Catholic Church in a sense, where it's all about the church and your Christian religion is just about submission to the church traditions.

and... So church is everything and the hierarchy and so forth. But then if you think of many of the cults and you think of false teaching, often that could be just me and my Bible off somewhere without any accountability, any conformity to the great tradition...

I guess the confessions and the accountability of being under sound Bible teaching, which we all need. So... I think we need both, but certainly...

being gathered as the people of God is an essential. And it's an essential because although communion with God on our own is a good thing, Phil spoke about there's so much more blessing being in the church.

You know, some of the Reformers went further. I think Calvin said that the church is like the mother. The church is like our mother. And some of the Reformers said that there's no salvation outside of the church.

[8 : 23] Whether you agree with that, I'm not entirely sure. But certainly, what we can say very, very... with clarity and with conviction is there's so much more blessing by being in and among the church.

And I think it would be near impossible to live your Christian life not among the gathered people. Anyway, three reasons. Do you recall? Sorry. Please comment on that.

Get the written one. Finally. Yes, go for it, Steve. Do. Yeah, I was going to say the same thing you mentioned, that of course the Reformers took the view that I think normally you could not be saved outside the church.

Obviously, they do put the word normally in because there are exceptions like the thief on the cross, of course. But I think the point is that the church has been given the keys of the kingdom.

Yeah. And therefore, you know, if you want to get into the Tower of London you have to go to the guy who's got the keys. Thank you, Steve.

[9 : 23] That's really, yeah, really helpful. Put much better... Yeah. I think most of us have been saved within the church. I mean, you do hear people who just have a Bible and they just flick it open

and God does his work there.

but generally, the church will be a part of that. Three reasons for us to gather together.

Do you recall what they are? Yeah, thank you. Jesus' example. This made me think as well when we think about Jesus, particularly in churches like our own and we rightly prioritise the person of Christ who he is and we think of, you know, his humanity, his divinity, his priestly work, his prophetic work, his kingly work and so forth and salvation.

But it's important to think of the example of Jesus as well in his humanity. I think, you know, it could be argued that liberals do that too much or only do that but I think there are many great examples and this is one.

His devotion, his... You know, we mentioned earlier on about the importance of having solitary time and you can argue he withdrew at times, didn't he, Christ? But he was that beautiful balance.

[10:44] He was among the people of God. He was in the assembly. We can think of numerous times but Phil quoted or pointed us to Luke 4.16 where he went into the synagogue.

Would anyone want to turn that up? Well, I'm using this term, turn that up. That's something Daniel says, isn't it? Luke 4.16 Can you read, Julia?

Do you mind? He went to Nazareth where it had been brought up and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.

Unrolling it, he found the place where it was written. I don't think you can carry on. No, that's fine.

That's good. I think that's good. Do you recall some of the points?

Phil made some really important points that I think are so applicable to us with regards to that. Just to give you a clue, it was one particular word.

[12:09] Habit. Yeah, yeah. What was Phil saying with regards to habit? Is it a bad thing as Christians? Should we just be spontaneous and should we just go with the flow and do it because we feel like it and we feel the Spirit is moving us in that direction because surely if we apply habits that's confining or impeding the Holy Spirit, true or false?

I think that's false. I think because routine, you know, if you have a routine, your life works better than the one thing. And for you, it doesn't have a routine.

Sorry. Oh, sorry. Yeah, I think if you have a routine, your life works better in routine. and, you know, just the world around us has a routine, night, day, et cetera, et cetera.

So I think habit is a word, but I think just putting it as part of your routine, your everyday routine, like you have your breakfast, dinner, and tea, I think it's a good thing.

Yes. And I think the Holy Spirit would honor that. Yes. No, absolutely. Absolutely. And we learned very clearly this morning that this is something that Jesus did from this word.

[13:27] It was his custom. It was his habit. And Phil was reminding us of how important it is for us as Christians to have good habits and not to be tossed to and throw by our emotions and feelings.

And I think as you exercise those good habits, it just creates spiritual muscle, doesn't it?

It creates a kind of spiritual muscle where this is what we do, this is how we live. I was speaking to Chikondi earlier on. If I was to say to my family every Sunday morning, kids, how do you feel about going to church this morning?

I mean, I'm sure some Sundays they want to come and they genuinely do want to come but, you know, we wouldn't be here consistently as we are. You know, it's a non-negotiable.

This is what we do. As for me and my house, this is where we'll be. I mean, sometimes we can't be here for various reasons, of course, but generally it's a good habit to have and it's the right habit and it's that steady diet of the word, isn't it?

[14:35] It's kind of incremental, you know, just sermon, week in, week out, hearing the word of God. It's so good for you. I mean, I like the analogy that people, you often hear about food, don't you?

You don't kind of gouge out on a meal and then wait two weeks and then, what do you do?

Hopefully, you intentionally think about eating a balanced, healthy, good diet, day in, day out and you'll reap the physical rewards of that, won't you?

And I think the same principle can be said for kind of spiritual life. I mean, of course, we all eat things when we feel like it and we overdo it and we indulge but usually we feel pretty rough when we've done that.

As we, the other thing I think is really important, I mean, do you recall what, do any of you recall what Phil said about the preaching?

Did he say that you need to just go to a church where the preaching is the absolute top notch kind of, you know, the best preaching you're going to hear in the world, you know, it's going to be a cross between John Piper, MacArthur, Spurgeon and Robert Murray McShane rolled into one every Sunday and you're going to be, I thought it was interesting because Phil said maybe there would be varying preaching, I don't know how the synagogue worked but my understanding is people got up to speak so I'm not entirely sure but I think this is significant because we live in a day and age where you can access absolutely fantastic preaching through sermon audio.

[16:22] You can go online, you can listen to all the stuff you want to listen to from real top notch reformed, sound, biblical preachers and teachers that are going to be so, you know, you can listen to Sinclair Ferguson all day long and that's not a bad thing but I think it's important to say that doesn't replicate the church and what we do in gathering because as much as I love Sinclair Ferguson but he doesn't know me, he doesn't know you or he doesn't know, I use him as an example, whoever your favourite preacher is.

So we shouldn't kind of just gather on the basis of just evaluating the preaching in that sense, we should evaluate it in that it should be biblical and sound for sure.

I think there's probably some thought to be had on that because it seems to me it's more spiritually valuable to be going to a church, a church like ours where, yeah, we don't have, we've never had Sinclair Ferguson as the preacher, I think we've, we've never had Martin Lloyd-Jones as the preacher but we do have the word of God open to us faithfully and regularly and it's not just the preacher, it's the community listening.

I think John Stott once said that the church is an exegetical community, was it exegetical? But meaning to say that it isn't just a one way thing that the preacher gets up and spouts but rather the congregation absorbs and in a sense amplifies or feeds back.

So when the gospel is preached and in the power of the spirit just through an ordinary human being people nod and say amen and smile and there's a sense that we're agreeing on that and I guess if the speaker says something off there's a sort of hmm I'll have a word with them afterwards about that.

[18:36] So it isn't just a one way thing it's a living community in which the word is alive and working and that's why I know some people who sort of seem to live off internet sermons but that I think that there's something very unnatural about that.

You don't know who the guy is speaking you don't know what his relationship is with his hearers but in a living church you have the word spoken and you have the fruit of it because what sort of community is it producing and by their fruits you shall know them if it's producing a community of holiness and of love and of mutual concern then that word must be the right word and you don't get that on the internet you can't tell that it's just a complete different thing but a living church as God by his grace has placed us in I think there's a different dynamic going on in terms of preaching yeah yeah thank you Phil that's really really helpful it's it's not like a TED talk for Christians is it where we're kind of being entertained it's kind of a bit that entertainment culture it reminds me of when it is in Ezekiel where he talks about listening to prophets or preachers because it sounds almost like musical and it's nice and it's yeah and that whole idea of that we're together and responding and it's not just about you being up there and entertaining us we're all engaging in this and there's something yeah really

I mean my view on sermons online by all means listening to them that's great that's fine they have their place but never ever should that replace the church or be an alternative and don't get into a thing where you just see one man as the man I mean I've heard that and it can be someone who's sound I think that can be a dangerous thing anyway but going back to kind of I think I'm out of here