

The assembly

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[0 : 00] Actually the third verse, which I thought was perhaps worth reading.! People will say that God is dead but the house would go on living.

That's perhaps a bit 20th century. You don't get so much of that God is dead theology around nowadays, even in liberal circles. But nevertheless, one does feel that the house may be going on living when the glory is departed in many places.

Well, my hair is getting a bit thin and I suppose I've just been reciting poetry. But you'll doubtless be relieved to know that I'm not going to tell you that you can't find God exactly the opposite.

I've come to tell you exactly the opposite thing. But where? The songwriter here was not the only one to leave those churches where there seemed to be no presence of God.

And millions have voted where their feet, haven't they? They've found that the owner of the house of God was departed, allegedly dead. So, what's the point in the house going on living if the owner, the householder is dead?

[1 : 38] But is that an accurate picture of the church? That's one question one could ask. Here's another question. Is this a picture of a church?

Well, it's our church logo, of course, and it's a picture of our church building. And it's very carefully drawn by a graphic student who was around a few years ago.

And it's very carefully drawn to look informal so as to make our rather austere Victorian building look sort of user-friendly. And it's quite well done, I think.

But it isn't really a picture of the church, is it? But we confuse that, don't we? We confuse the word church with the building. But, of course, a church is not a building.

Is this a picture of just an empty house that goes on living where the glory and the spirit have departed? Well, I hope that's not the case. Well, perhaps one might ask, is this a picture of the church?

[2 : 40] That's the picture from the banner of our website. You may recognize it if you looked at the website. This is more accurately a picture of the church, perhaps, or at least a part of the congregation.

But what exactly is a church or a congregation? As I said at the beginning, most 21st century Christians, if I asked you to say, what is the church, in one sentence, would probably say the body of Christ.

And, indeed, that is a very important way of thinking about the church. And, perhaps, 50 years ago, it had been almost ignored. And it was important that this has been sort of pushed to the fore to realize that the church is the body of Christ.

But I sometimes think that, in fact, it's almost been pushed to the fore to the exclusion of all the other things that the Scripture says about the church.

And I want to look in this series about some of the other things that the Scripture says about the church. And there is one interesting thing about this idea of the body of Christ in that it's almost entirely a New Testament idea.

[3 : 56] As far as I can see, there is no corresponding embedding in the Old Testament theology. And it is also true, I think, that to say that the church is the body of Christ, well, Paul certainly writes, you are the body of Christ.

One can't argue with that. But it's used, this picture of the body, as a description in the sense of how the church works, as how people work together in the church, and how the different gifts in the church work together.

And very important that is, of course. But in a sense, it's not an answer to the question, what is the church in some absolute sense? And actually, the Bible uses many word pictures to describe the

church.

And we're going to look at some of the others. And the ones we're going to look at are ones that are actually very deeply embedded in the Old Testament theology. And so, in subsequent weeks, we're going to look at the spiritual temple, the holy nation, and the bride of Christ.

But this week, I want to look at the word church itself. What does it actually mean? And of course, we're so used to the word, and we use it so sort of broadly to mean the building and denomination, and use it all sorts of other ways.

[5 : 15] Talk about the Church of England. But what does it actually mean? And we forget that, of course, it is itself a picture, a description. But of course, it is.

It translates a Greek word, which we'll look at shortly, which has a particular meaning, and tells us something about the nature of what the church is. But before we do that, I'd like to just point out one thing, because I'm going to point it out now, because I'm not going to sort of keep on harping back to it.

But it is important when we think about the church. And the thing is that there is only one church, as we sang in that hymn. There can be only one church, and it's described in Hebrews 12, 23, to the church of the firstborn, that's of Jesus himself, of course, and whose names are written in heaven. In other words, the records are kept in heaven. There is a membership role, but we don't have easy access to it, because the membership role is kept in heaven.

But the Bible also says that there are many churches. So, for instance, in Revelation 1, verse 4, we find that the book is addressed to the seven churches in the province of Asia.

[6 : 48] As we were thinking this morning when we thought about Turkey, these are, of course, the seven churches in Asia Minor, in what is now modern Turkey. So there is one church, and yet there are many churches, at least seven, but, of course, there are far more than that.

And we often distinguish, don't we, between the universal church, the Catholic church, as the Church of England Creed says, but people worry about that, but, of course, it doesn't mean the Roman Catholic church.

It means the church that includes all believers everywhere. There is one universal church, and we talk about the local church, which, of course, the churches in Turkey were, churches in Asia Minor were, but, actually, even that might be an oversimplification, because, if you look at, again, you needn't turn all these references up, but if you look at the beginning of the first letter to the Corinthians, we find that it is addressed to the Church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus.

So, clearly, he is referring to all Christians in the city of Corinth. Not all Christians everywhere, but all Christians in the city of Corinth. And he refers to that, to the Church of God in Corinth.

But, in chapter 16, verse 19, where, as at the end of many of Paul's letters, you get a list of greetings, we read of the church which meets in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, presumably distinguishing that particular congregation from all the Christians in Corinth.

[8 : 37] So, there seems to be a distinction, even then, between all the Christians in one place and a particular congregation. But the same word, again, is used for both of those.

And we find similar distinctions, actually, in Romans and Colossians, although in the beginning of Romans and Colossians, the address is to all the saints in the city, rather than to the Church of God.

And Church is just addressed to various congregations. So, it seems the word Church can refer to the universal Church, or all the Christians in one place, or, indeed, to a particular congregation. But, actually, there is a more remarkable thing, too, because the word is applied to the whole Church, the Church of the Firstborn in Heaven, and the implication seems to be that what applies to the whole applies to the part.

So, what is applicable to the universal Church is in many ways applicable to each individual congregation. And so, they're given the same name, the assembly, the ecclesia, the people of God, or the gathering, various other descriptions that are used.

[9 : 56] But, even more remarkably, it seems that there is a sense in which what applies to the part actually applies to the whole. And we find that, for example, in Matthew 18.

In Matthew 18, 17 to 20, Jesus is teaching there about what happens when there is some disunity in the Church, in particular, when one brother has a problem with another brother, when there is some dispute in the Church.

And this is what Jesus says. I'm actually leaving out the beginning verses, but first of all, you're supposed to go and talk to the brother yourself.

And then you, if that doesn't work, you can call somebody else to go with you, maybe an elder. But then, he says, if that doesn't have the effect you want, he says this in verse 17, if he, that is the brother who's offended against you, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church.

And if he refuses to listen even to the Church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

[11:09] And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with you, with them. Clearly, you can't gather all the believers in the world together to deal with some internal matter of discipline in the Church.

And yet, Jesus says, if the group of believers is in agreement, no matter how few, it does have to be a gathering, you can't have a gathering of one, but you can, in the extreme case, have a gathering of two or three, if the whole Church is in agreement and the authority of the Church is being exercised, what does Jesus say?

It says, as if Christ himself is present. And the Church, he says, is the ultimate court of appeal in such matters. And he says, tell it to the Church, notice.

It's not the apostles or the elders, in that sense, where the ultimate authority lies. Of course, obviously, it is the apostles and the elders who will administer the authority of the Church.

[12:28] But it is in the gathering itself, when two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, that Jesus is promised, Jesus is present, sorry, and the authority of Jesus himself is there in the gathered assembly.

It's a remarkable claim that not only is it true that what is true of the whole Church is true of each congregation, it is also true, in that sense at least, that what is true of a single congregation binds on earth and in heaven what Jesus binds on earth and in heaven.

So let's think now about what this word Church actually means. Church actually is kind of a made-up word like various words we find in our English Bibles, but it nearly always translates, not quite exclusively, the Greek word *ekklesia*.

That's obviously where we get English words like ecclesiastical and the Greek word *ekklesia*. There are a few other words that also get translated sometimes as church.

So in Acts 15, 31, it's just *plethora*, like our English word *plethora*, which means a lot and when applied to people it means a crowd. In Hebrews 12, 23, various words are used and when it talks about the angels being in festal assembly, that word is *panaguris*, which means a festal assembly, a feast day or something like that.

[14:01] And interestingly, in Hebrews 10, 21, yet another word is used, *epi-synagogui*, which means a gathering.

This of course is what the Jews call their meetings, *synagogue*. I must admit, I hadn't realized it until I looked this up, that *synagogue* was a Hebrew word, but actually it isn't. It's a Greek word and it means a gathering.

gathering. And sometimes that word, a gathering, is used to talk about the church being gathered. So a church is an *ecclesia*, which means a public assembly or meeting.

And in fact, the word *ecclesia* doesn't always refer to a church. In Acts 19, the word is used to describe a public meeting of the citizens of Ephesus.

Paul had been preaching there and some of the priests and people who made their money out of the temple of Diana had got a bit upset and they called all the people together.

[15:07] And that meeting is called an *ecclesia*. And that's what it means, a public meeting. A public meeting called together for some purpose. The word literally means those called out, but it is more the out than the calling that's important here.

It's that the church gathers, the meeting gathers together to do some business. And it was a common Greek word for a public meeting.

And the meaning of church then is that of an assembly, a gathering. Some people called together for some common purpose. And in Christian usage, as we use that word church, which we say more or less translates *ecclesia*, it gets its traction really from two sources.

First of all, there is this Greek meaning of a public assembly. But there are also many solemn assemblies and gatherings in the Old Testament, like the one that we read about in Nehemiah. If you're interested, I can tell you afterwards some of the Hebrew words that are used, but I won't list them now. but it's not largely one word as it is in Greek.

[16:22] There are a variety of words that are used, but they all mean much the same thing, an assembly or a gathering together. So that's basically what an assembly is.

Church is, it's an assembly, a gathering together of people for some common purpose, for a meeting, for something, in other words. But it's worth all considering, I think, to see what an assembly is not, at least in the sense that we use it in Christian usage.

So first of all, assembly is not just a crowd. I mean, you could walk down North Street or along the front or something on a sunny day and you'd be part of a crowd.

But the crowd doesn't really have that much in common. The only thing that they have in common is they all want to be out in the sun or perhaps they're all Christmas shopping if you go in November or something like that. They don't really have much of a common purpose.

An assembly has to have some common purpose. But an assembly is not an audience either because the word audience means those who listen, obviously.

[17:35] Certainly an audience has gathered for a common purpose but it is largely just to listen. They've gathered perhaps to be entertained or perhaps to be educated. And sometimes in our Christian meetings there is a temptation, I think, to turn the congregation into an audience and a choir or a Christian rock group or even the speaker can deliver the message and the people there are sort of passive and not really engaged at all.

They're just being, they may be getting something out of it but they're not engaged in it. They're just listening. But an assembly is not an audience.

Of course there is a place for speaking and singing and sometimes perhaps we don't normally do it here but I have no particular objection personally to having a solo come out, a soloist come out and sing a song sometimes perhaps.

There's nothing wrong with that as long as we are engaged with it. And there is a place for speaking after all that's what I'm doing now and in a sense you are listening as I hope you are but I'm hoping that you're more engaged than that and this is what Nehemiah and his Levites did didn't it?

It says that the Levites spoke but the whole point was that the Levites spoke for all the people they were speaking on behalf of all the people and while the people were in a sense being educated they were also participating in what was said.

[19:06] We need to ensure at our meetings that the traffic is not all one way that the whole congregation is involved in the activity and Paul makes a good point about this in 1 Corinthians 14 where he has a lot to say about how we conduct worship but in 1 Corinthians 14 24 to 25 he says the following If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying that is speaking the word of God he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare so he will fall down and worship God explaining God is really among you.

Now Paul has earlier made it clear that he doesn't mean everybody should be talking at once he says that just leads to confusion one person should speak at a time but yet he says in a sense everybody is prophesying because all are speaking the word of God and a sinner who comes in will say that God is really among you because he will be convinced by not just the guy standing up at the front but the whole assembly who are engaged with the word of God and an unbeliever comes in was being engaged in the same way with that same word of God so an assembly is not an audience and thirdly I want to say that an assembly at least the way we use the term as a church is not a mob now I have to be a bit careful here because actually an ecclesia in Greek thought can be a mob and actually the in Acts 19 that meeting that I talked about of the people of Ephesus actually started out with rather the nature of a mob or a riot and a mob has a common purpose certainly and a mob even has a common spirit but it's a dark spirit a kind of group mind takes over a mob doesn't it people do things which they wouldn't do on their own a kind of group mind group spirit takes over now a mob can sometimes turn into a lawful assembly and this happened in Ephesians and again I won't go all the way through that passage in Acts 19 though it's interesting to look at it sometime but what actually happens if you read the story there in in well Acts 19 the disturbance actually started out more or less as a riot and it says the ecclesia of the meeting was in confusion everybody was shouting and rushing about not really knowing what to do and it could have really got nasty but

for prompt action by the city clerk one of the city officials who quietened the crowd and restored order it says and what started out as a riot finished peacefully and the city clerk said this is the wrong sort of meeting you're having you are having an ecclesia if you like but it's not the right sort of ecclesia the sort of meeting you should be having is what he calls a lawful assembly and that word is used in verse 39 it says if you've got business to do then we'll do it lawfully in an orderly way according to the law because otherwise we will be accused of riot so sometimes by strong action as happened by that city official who's obviously a hero of some sort but that city official turned a mob into a lawful assembly but unfortunately what more often has happened and sometimes to be honest has happened in Christian circles even is possible for an assembly can turn into a mob and there are some lamentable examples of that in Christian history

I've just mentioned three of them there that I put up on the screen there you may or may not be familiar with them in AD 415 in the city of Alexandria which was one of the two great cities and centres of learning in the ancient world one of the last of the Greek philosophers and mathematicians Hypatia was murdered by an allegedly Christian mob a riot followers of the church father Cyril and that is one of the worst examples in Christian history of the mob spirit taking over people who claimed at least to be Christians though it is hard to see how they can have been Hypatia was a woman and so this event is kind of cause celebra among feminists actually but that wasn't really the point that she was a woman the point was that she represented the old Greek learning

Christians didn't like it in some ways some of them didn't anyway followers of Cyril didn't and she was murdered that is not that is an example where what claims to be an assembly of God's people turns into a mob and we need to be careful of that and they have another example as well as well in 1534 during the Reformation in the German city of Munster it was taken over by the Anabaptists Anabaptists were people who believed in re-baptising those who were baptised as children the kind of thing we were thinking about in this morning but the Anabaptists that particular Anabaptist group was very extreme they wanted to re-baptise people by force they they imposed their rule by force and by more or less by tyranny and eventually the whole thing took on cult-like features because the leaders introduced polygamy and violently suppressed dissent as very often happens in cults and it took a year-long siege in fact led by the expelled

[25 : 47] Lutheran bishop to restore order so we do need to be careful that we don't become a cult that we don't need to become a mob mob a mob has a spirit but it is a dark spirit and one other example again a well-known one in 1693 in the Massachusetts city of Salem Salem of course means peace but there wasn't peace then and there because 20 people were executed for witchcraft largely due to the musings of one hysterical young woman again a terrible event in Christian history there was in that case a pastor who stood up for the people and said this is wrong and although he was able to repeat the Lord's prayer and various other things it was held that if you're a witch you couldn't repeat the Lord's prayer and this pastor stood up and said no what you're doing is wrong and he was a demonstrator he could indeed repeat the Lord's prayer yet he was one of those in the end who was executed for witchcraft standing up for what was right and true so we do need to be careful that we don't become a cult or a mob a mob has a spirit indeed but it's a dark spirit a spirit of disorder and chaos and Paul reminds us when describing a Christian assembly in 1 Corinthians 14 33 that God is not a

God of disorder but a God of peace so that's what an assembly is not not a crowd not an audience and not a mob but what is an assembly of God's people well the first thing I want to point out is that it is a meeting and in a sense it's a physical meeting well a meeting together of bodies of people of course that meeting in heaven that the writer to Hebrews refers to it's in a sense is not a meeting yet we're not assembled all as the church of the firstborn on Mount Zion one day we will be but as yet but the writer remember didn't say you will come to that he says you have come to that so in one sense that assembly is already present but it's not an actual assembly now but in Hebrews 10 25 we read the following let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching the assembly that the meeting together that is described there is clearly a physical meeting of people together and because we can't all be assembled in Mount Zion in the heavenly Jerusalem that is all the more reason why we need to meet together as God's people and in a sense when we meet together we are part of that assembly on Mount Zion but it is a physical meeting together local churches really need to meet and indeed they need to keep records and they need to maintain a list

of members

I think because we are part of that assembly whose records are kept in heaven but what is kept in heaven should be mirrored on earth and you can't have a virtual church I mean I know people have tried people have tried to set up a Facebook church or something like that but really you can't now email and Facebook and Skype are all useful tools and when we had a baptism here a few years back the lady who was baptized her husband was in Beijing and we Skyped the baptism to her and that was a useful thing to do but it doesn't replace actually being here and of course the early church used the idea of its day didn't it that's why we have all these letters they employed scribes to write letters not everybody could write or not everybody could write efficiently and read and legibly and so they employed scribes they used the technology that they had to pass messages around but these didn't mean that the believers weren't expected to meet together they were in fact usually these letters were addressed to a meeting of the whole church the idea was that the whole church would get together and read the letter from Paul or Peter or whoever and then act upon it another disciplinary issue

Paul writes the following this is 1 Corinthians 5 verses 3 to 5 even though I am not physically present I am with you in spirit and I have already passed judgment on the one who did this just as if I were present when you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus is present hand this man over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord again this was a disciplinary issue that was being dealt with but the main point here is of course that is when the church is assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Lord Jesus is present in that assembly Paul couldn't make that meeting but it was important that those who could did make it actually the word used here is not ecclesia but synago a gathering when the church is gathered there's a sense that even those who cannot make it physically can be there in spirit so Paul says well

[31 : 56] I can't make that meeting I can't make that gathering but I will be with you in spirit but it was necessary that there was a gathering as we read in Matthew 18 when two or three gather it is almost as if the whole church is assembled well it is as if the whole church is assembled in the sense that Jesus says he will be amongst them but as I said you can't have a gathering of one there has to be a gathering so when the church is gathered what does the gathering do and well if you've got your bible you could open it at Nehemiah 9 and 10 because I think it's quite a good example actually of what the assembly actually does and I'm not going to of course go through it in detail but I just want to point out a few things that it tells us about what the assembly there did and conveniently there's actually a summary at the beginning in verses 2 and 3 where it says that well it tells us what they did those of

Israelite descent they separated themselves so in other words we said we are the people of God as opposed to those people over there who are not they separated themselves from foreigners they stood in their places and they confessed so they stood in their places in other words they were gathered they were assembled they confessed their sins and wickedness of the fathers and then they read from the book of the law and they spent another quarter of a day in confession and worshipping the Lord their God so they separated themselves they studied the law they confessed their sins and they worshipped the Lord their God so that's a summary of what they did and then Nehemiah goes on to give us a bit more detail and again I won't go through it in great detail we did read it all but notice one or two things first of all in verses 4 and 5 the leaders speak both to but they do speak to the people but they also speak for the people they're not just saying their own words as it were they are saying the words of the people together just as in when Ben led us in prayer we are where I hope all engaged in that prayer and all praying it together and there's praise in verse 5 and then the major section of the passage is this sort of counterpoint between God's grace and the sinfulness of the people so in verses and I've just listed them there in 9 to 15 and then again in 19 to 25 and again in 29 to 33

God's character is described and the two aspects of it that are described there are God's grace and faithfulness on one hand but also his wrath over their sin and disobedience so they're told things they note things they review things about God and then there is repentance past and present and it's interesting the way this is done in verses 16 to 18 and 26 to 28 the sins of the fathers are enumerated or spelled out but they could have said of course yeah but we didn't do that you know they were terrible but look we're much better and we're always rather tempted to do that aren't we one way or another but that's exactly what they didn't do they said well yeah our fathers did this our

forefathers did this and you know what we're just the same we've done just the same things we're no better than they are we didn't even learn from their example and so that repentance for sins past becomes repentance for sins present and then we notice there's this covenant at the end that's the business of the meeting as it were in one sense a covenant an agreement to do better to not neglect the house of God as it's summed up but there's a lot more detail of course to it but the covenant is that they will not neglect the house of their

God they will do better in future now in a sense of course this Nehemiah meeting is a special event and we wouldn't expect to produce a written covenant I think every time we meet although we might want to do so from time to time at our business meetings but the principle is there the church is gathered there assembled to do business and what kind of business does it do well those things that we've listed learning separation study confession and worship that's the business that it does and repentance faith and the covenant to do better in the future but that's the Old Testament but let me just point out one more thing from this Nehemiah passage in Nehemiah 9 verse 20 we read the following you gave your good spirit to instruct them and then he says you did not withhold your manner from their mouths and so on but the first gift that

God gave them was the spirit to instruct them and the same idea occurs in Nehemiah 9 verse 30 for many years you were patient with them by your spirit you admonished them through your prophets it is it was even in the Old Testament in a sense the spirit who assembled and addressed the people but in the New Testament assembly this idea becomes as it were centre stage becomes the main focus almost and so in John 14 15 to 19 we read the following part of what I think that Chris quoted this morning in fact if you love me you will obey what I command and I will ask the father and he will give you another counsellor to be with you forever the spirit of truth the world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him but you know him for he lives with you and will be in you

[38 : 49] I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you before long the world will not see me anymore but you will see me because I live you also will live so the promise is that the separation that occurs is by the spirit the world will not see you but you Jesus but the spirit says you will see Jesus and later on Jesus relates this to the church because in chapter 15 26 reading through into 16 he said John chapter 15 26 says when the counselor comes whom I will send to you from the father the spirit of truth who goes out from the father he will testify about me and you also must testify for you have been with me from the beginning all this I've told you so you will not go astray they will put you out of the synagogue in fact a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God so it is the spirit who testifies to

Jesus and his presence in the assembly they were going to get it themselves excommunicated from the Jewish assemblies the synagogues but they didn't need to be fearful or confused because it's the presence of the spirit which marks the true assembly as I said every public assembly has a spirit whether it's a dark spirit of a mob or a spirit of lawfulness and order but the church is the assembly because it is gathered by the spirit we don't meet in private and yet it is the assembly of the firstborn Jesus whose members are recorded in heaven there are those who are in and there are those who are not in we don't normally separate ourselves physically from the world because in fact we invite people to come to our meetings but we invite them then to separate themselves and join with us we don't meet in private and yet we meet as the assembly of the firstborn and that of course firstborn is Jesus himself whose members are recorded in heaven now as

I said our membership list might not be as clear cut as that but it actually aims to be the local church may sometimes have to exclude members because they in fact excluded themselves and that of course is what Paul was talking about in that Corinthians passage we read the local church may have to exclude members but no one can be deleted from the Lamb's book of life that is the perfect membership record in heaven and you can't be excluded from that there were no edits it was written before the foundation of the world and it will be the same until the end of the world nobody can be deleted from the Lamb's book of life but on earth say we don't have access to that record we just do the best we can and sometimes we will have to exclude people from membership there is a warning John wrote later books of course after his gospel in particular he wrote that book of Revelation that I referred to earlier and he addressed those seven churches in Asia

Minor one of which interestingly enough was the church in Ephesus and this is what he says on the Lord's day I was in the spirit and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet which said write on the scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches to Ephesus Smyrna Pergamum Thyatira

Sardis Philadelphia and Laodicea I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me and when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest and of course that person was the Lord himself and he was walking among those lampstands and it's clear from the context those lampstands represent the churches in particular those seven churches in Asia in fact John tells us that in verse 20 the lampstands represent the churches and the Lord is walking among the lampstands but then later on when those letters to the churches find warnings and the church in Ephesus is given the following warning remember the height from which you have fallen repent and do the things you did at first if you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place what is Jesus actually saying there well we know that in fact the church in Ephesus no longer exists it did die!

[44 : 12] die the lampstand was removed but I would suggest to you perhaps the lampstand was removed in fact before the organisation itself died that may be the case I don't know the history of it but that's kind of where we came in wasn't it can the house go on leaving if the owner has departed if the owner is dead or has gone away surely it cannot and that is the warning for any church and it's the warning for us if a visitor comes into this house one Christmas what will they hear will they just get poetry will they just get traditional carols and an ancient but now really meaningless story like the visitor in the song would they be better off looking somewhere else I trust that that will not be true of us or will the visitor be like that visitor that

Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians which will say the Lord is indeed present amongst us because without the presence of the Lord this is indeed just an empty house a pointless meeting we might as well be at home watching the television or down on the beach with the crowds there without the presence of the Lord through the Holy Spirit we are the house is living on for no good reason but if we are assembled in the spirit then the Lord is indeed amongst us and that's going to bring us on to what we're going to be looking at next week which is the description of the church as the spiritual temple the house of God but I hope we've now seen what the ecclesia the assembly is it's not a crowd it's not an audience it's not a mob it's a group of people gathered together to do business a group of people assembled by and in the spirit and if we are that then the Lord himself he said even if there were just about 20 of us here tonight even if it were just two or three if we gathered in his name and to agree together on what needs to be done what the Lord is telling us to do what business he wants us to do then the Lord has promised that he would be with us so I thought we would finish our formal part of our time we will after we have sung again Chris will come and organize us and lead us for group prayer but I thought we normally of course sing this hymn at the beginning of a meeting but I thought it might be good this time to sing it at the end to remind us and of course we haven't quite finished! anyway because we are going to gather together for prayer but to remind us that we should be still for the presence of the Lord is in this place or if he's not then we're wasting our time.