

Be The Church

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[0:00] The church. The church. We've talked about communion, we've talked about fellowship, and we've! got to talk along a little bit more along the same theme this morning. The Bible tells! us about the church and what it is and it shows us by means of many metaphors, different word pictures. One study counted 96 various images of the church.

96, as you would go back in the Old Testament, you could picture the church as kind of pictured in the wanderings of the people of God through all the different phases of time and as the word pictures the church as the different shapes and fashions as kind of metaphors of the church. Now we're not going to look at all 96 this morning, but we're going to look at a few of them, just a few of them. And the church is pictured, we could see, the church is pictured as a light to a building, as a flock, as a family, as a temple, and as a body. Just some pictures of the church and what we can get from that. Friends, the church. The church is God's plan. It's God's plan for us. So it's something important. God puts a priority on it. Something that's very important. The church is God's plan for man. We need the church. We need it. It's good for us to be the church. The word of God shows us how to be the church, not just attend it.

And of course, people would say, oh, I can be a Christian without going to church. Now, theoretically, that's true. But to be the church, it's about being the church, isn't it? Being together, it's important. It's important that we know what the church is and what it means for us to be the church. So the church, when we're using this term, the church, it's not a physical building as such. Though as a church, the assembling, the gathering of God's people, we generally do go and meet in a church building, in a building called the church building. And we have a meeting called a church meeting. So we do get together. And so, but some make that wrong thought of the church is the building. It's not really. We can meet anywhere. We used to meet in a school hall. You know, it was times we met down at Fremont Park. It was times we meet when we, when we gather in the car park and go witnessing together. It's about being the church. That's the point. So the church is not a physical building, though. Often, generally, we do meet in a, what people would call a church building. But the church is people. It's you and me, brothers and sisters, who know the Lord. And the church, the Bible tells of the church as being a called out assembly, a called out gathering of God's people together in this kind of community of faith. And the Lord Jesus says that he is building his church, his church.

[3:15] The Lord Jesus is building it. So what is it? What does the church that he is building look like? What is it? There's something, there's groups of people who call themselves churches.

But not all of them are necessarily God's church. And that's not to say we've got some cultic idea that we're the only church. Nothing like that. But what, the point is, what does the Bible actually tell us what the church looks like? How can we be like that? How can we be such a church? And God's church really shows up for us in the book of Acts? We see it all unfolding there as the people get together. And God's working amongst them. We see that in Acts 2. If you go there, Acts 2. And reading from verse 41, we see the church here. We see what the early church started. And as it started and as it shows up here, you know, some would reflect, well, the church was possibly in a developing form, even when the Lord Jesus was with his disciples. We see the church here as it starts to be really tangible and evident.

And God ministers to the people as they are getting together. And God is at work amongst them. We see from Acts 2.41, it says, when they, the people that got saved, they were gladly, they, they had gladly received his word, they were baptized. And the same day, they were added unto them about 3,000 souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers. They continued steadfastly. It goes on to say, as fear came upon every soul. And many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

And all that believed were together and had all things common and sold their possessions and goods and parted to them, to all men, as every man had need. And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple. And breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved. The church is special. It's God's idea. Now, some people have the thought of certain churches where that beautiful picture has been soiled by sinful men, by reprehensible things done, by professing men of God. And the church has got a bad name out there. The church, as in what the world calls the church. Sinful men have made the church corrupt and damaged. And people have bad memories of the church. You know, when we go and witnessing, you know, some would say, well, I was in the, I was an altar boy or whatever it was. And yeah, don't talk to me about church. We've got that connotation. That's not what we're talking about this morning. We're talking about the true church of God, that the good, godly, the church that Jesus, our Lord is building. That's what we're talking about. So I want to make that distinction. And it says that these early church believers, it says they gathered together. There's something about God, they wanted to be together and they wanted to receive God's word. And they, they was evidence before them was God's wonders, especially the wonder of souls being saved. Wow. That's something precious, isn't it? And they had faith. It says they had unity. They had oneness together.

[7:24] They were together. And it says they were sharing and caring with one another. That's who we ought to be, isn't it? And it says they were rejoicing. They were praising God. There was, there was life there. The God, the life of God was there, spiritual life. It says the church is the assembly, the gathering together of God's saved people. And friends, one day he's coming back for his church. Amen. And so it matters. It says the Lord Jesus says his church is something that he is building. So here's the first word picture, if you like, that the church is spoken of, likened to a building. He is building the church. He is building more so his church. In Matthew 16 verse 18, he says to Peter, he says in part, he says, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The enemy wants to tear the church apart, to destroy it from within, from without, to silence the church. And then we see when the church gets so weakened, the false cults come rushing in and fill the vacuum. You know, I think of this man that we met on the doorstep yesterday. When we're talking about the Bible, he says he's interested in teaching. That's what he asked for, wasn't it, Peter? He said, I'm interested in teaching.

There's a lot of teachers out there. Teachers. A lot of false cults out there that are teaching false teachings. And the false cults will rush in and fill the vacuum. We need to be the church people. We need to be the ones reaching out and think, think these cults to the doorsteps.

The Lord is calling his church. He's calling it, he's calling it something that he's making by his design, by his power. And it says this church, his church will overcome the very gates of hell. It's not a picture of us being a kind of bunker mentality where we're hiding in some holy citadel, hiding from all the things that might hurt the church. We're advancing, storming, crashing down, breaking down, demolishing the gates of hell. That's the church advancing as a powerful army. Another picture you could say. The Lord wants his church to be such a force to be reckoned with, to be built strong on the foundation of faith. Peter calls the church a spiritual house.

[10:18] And he says, you, you lot, you, as lively stones, as stones that are alive, that are living. He says, you are built up a spiritual house. So there's a wonderful truth that the church is meant to be a spiritual house. A house that is of God's spirit, of God's making. It's his construction project.

And God uses lively stones. He doesn't use bricks like this. He uses human people like you and me. Isn't that wonderful? He doesn't use bricks. He uses human beings. You and me, God's people. And you and me, God's people, are compared to as these lively stones, these living stones. Each one of God's people. So each one of us are like a brick.

Now I put to you today, this brick is not much good on its own. It really isn't. It's a pretty good brick. You might want to have this brick in your house. You can buy it off me later.

This brick is a good brick. There's nothing wrong with it. But this brick, if it's on its own, it's not much use, is it? Can you see that? Each one of us is a brick. But a brick on its own is not much use.

[11:48] It has to be cemented together with other bricks to make a building. That's why the church matters. Amen? It matters. Now another picture of the church.

You see here that this brick needs to be put together. Put together. Otherwise it's useless. Another picture is a picture of a flock. Now I took this photo in the backyard this morning.

Because there was some hungry, bleating sheep. And so I know we've got some, a little bit of a flock of sheep.

That's my other flock. We've got some sheep out the back paddock. And they saw me. And they started to go, Julie's probably better at the sound impressions.

These sheep were getting really hungry. They saw the shepherd, that I was here. And these sheep started to get hungry. All make a sound of a bleating sheep.

[12:51] No, they were worse than that. They were really, really loud. Really loud. Go on. Oh, you're doing a fine job this morning. This is what these sheep were like.

And so I went to the hay pile. And I got some feed and fed the sheep. Friends, God's people are likened to sheep. It's an interesting word picture, isn't it?

And the Lord Jesus called his disciples the little flock. It wasn't some big flock. It was just a little flock. A little flock of sheep. But it was his flock. That's what mattered. Amen.

And he tells of how at the night of his betrayal, that you're going to be offended. And he says, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

It tells how God's people are like a flock. We're like a flock of sheep. And Paul later urges the elders of Ephesus to take heed to yourselves and to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.

[13:59] He says, watch out over the flock. Watch out over these sheep. And Paul calls the pastors, which means shepherds, to watch over the welfare of the congregation, to tend to their spiritual needs.

So consider this this morning, how you, me, all believers are likened to a sheep. And our Lord is ultimately the shepherd. Really, he is the ultimate pastor, the shepherd.

And he tells it in Matthew 18, how the shepherd goes. He leaves the 99, and he goes for the one that's out there, on its lonesome.

You can imagine this little sheep, out on its lonesome. Now, you remember how I said, a brick on its own is not much good.

Now, I'd like to say that I've got a sheep here I'll bring out and show you, but no, it would be a bit too hard. He wouldn't fit in the car.

[15:00] But you can imagine if I brought a sheep out here in front of you. That sheep is not much use if it's on its own. The sheep on its own. It's not. It's vulnerable.

The sheep on its own. I know there's farmers amongst us here this morning, and we know as we had the blessing of having a lamb born. There's a little bar-bar lamb that was born, and that bar-bar lamb, that bar lamb, had to stay by the mum sheep to be safe, because this fox is where we live. And they'll tear it to bits. And it's the same, brother sisters, with you and me. It's God's sheep, as it were. That there's safety in being together.

There's protection in being together. Being protection around the shepherd, around the flock, in the fold. And there's provision there. You know, these sheep here, the ones who got fed were the ones that came to me.

There were others who didn't come. Friends, there's people who identify with this church who do not attend. I don't know why. I can't fully understand that.

[16:10] I'm reaching them. I'm trying to be the one reaching the, leaving the 99 and going for the lamb, trying to find them, trying to encourage them. They're saying they're coming, and they don't come.

They are vulnerable. They're like this little sheep here. Not coming to the fold. There's a problem there. Friends, God, our shepherd, wants every believer to be safe in the fold.

There's encouragement as we come together. We can get a theme together. We can get encouragement together. It says that the shepherd, that he anoints the sheep with oil. There's a healing there.

There's a refreshing there. It says he will guide us by the still waters. There's drink there. He says he will lead us to the fresh pastures.

There's feed there. There's nutrition. We can grow. We can be strong. And when we're close to him, he will feed us. He will guard us safely as we're together in the sheep fold.

[17:13] But a sheep astray on its own can end up in real trouble. Now, I fear for those that profess to belong to this church, but they do not attend. Or they scarcely attend.

Let's be in the fold. Let's be the flock. Let's be like this together. The church is also likened to a family. God wants us to be like a family of God.

God's family. A precious family. A family of God. One family. Knit together in love as brothers and sisters. When we're joined together, that's a picture of a family.

That's a precious picture there. And Timothy is told by Paul that the church is the living God. That the church of the living God, he says it's the pillar and it's the ground of truth.

1 Timothy 3.15. This word, I think I missed something there actually, because it talks about the house of God, doesn't it? I didn't quote that scripture fully, and that's the relevant part of that scripture.

[18:20] It's the house of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. It's the house of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.

The word house here, it means household, it means family. And we are God's family. The house of God. So when you think about it, we carry on the family name.

The royal family name. Think of that when someone says, oh, you're one of the Craig family, or you're one of the, the, the, the Stead family, the Orr family.

You represent your family name, wherever you go. And when you think about it, really, more than your family name, for all the honor that you want to give to that, our family name is, we're Christian. We are the Christian family. And so wherever we go, we are members of his very own household, his family. And so when you think, as the church is pictured as a family, it speaks of a joining together of relationship.

[19:32] We unite it with him and with each other. And he calls us to that rejoicing together, that caring for one another. So where a Christian believer does not have a connection to a family of God, it can be hard for them.

And the Bible says, we, we're no more strangers than foreigners. We're fellow citizens. We, we're brought together as, as citizens together, as God's subjects, of the subjects of God's kingdom.

That, that's the picture he wants for us. But for some, they, they don't have the mutual support.

They don't have that encouragement. Of a brother, of a sister, to show love, to show encouragement.

And that's what happens when we join together. As we like a family, we look out for each other. We care for each other. There's a sense of belonging. We consider it of each other. Yet some, are like, spiritual orphans.

They say they are a Christian, but they, don't have that sense of belonging. It's like, they're separated from, their brothers and sisters.

[20:36] There's a disconnect. God doesn't want us to be like that. Amen. He wants us to be, not orphans, but part of a family, together. God's family. Another picture is a temple.

That, the, the word of God tells us that the church is like a temple. And, again, we're not talking about a temple as in a physical building of a temple, but the sense of that spiritual picture of a building of a temple.

And what it speaks to us as we see, this comes to us in Ephesians 2, verse 21. It says, in Christ, all the building is spiritually framed together.

It's joined together. It's, it's constructed together. It's held together. And it grows together, it says, unto a holy temple in the Lord. So, friends, the picture here is of a temple.

Now, a temple is a dwelling place for God. And, someone has commented that this word here, temple, there's one, one word for temple that could describe the whole temple, but the word used here is for the holy of holies of the temple.

[21:41] It's a word, naos, apparently, where it's the holy of holies. So, it speaks of where God, where God meets and fellowships with man. Amen. And in the Old Testament, it says, God came down to dwell with the Israelites in the tabernacle, which means the dwelling of God.

And the people then would fold up this, this tent, this tabernacle, carry it along with them and then reconstruct it. And inside the tabernacle, there was two rooms. One was open to all the priests. And the other was a very special room called the holy of holies. That's where God dwelt, the holy of holies. That's this word here, the temple. It's about the very holy of holies.

And into this very holy of holies, this very holy place, it says the holy, the high priest alone could go into it. And then only once a year to bring a sacrifice.

And then we see after the tabernacle, there was the temple. That was the actual tangible temple in Jerusalem. And that also had this special room, the naos, the holy of holies.

[22:44] And here would be that special presence of God. And that holy awe of God. And that's the picture here, that we ought to be such a holy temple, a holy of holies.

And we know back in time, when our Lord Jesus was crucified, and he shouted, in his finish, in victory, it says that the holy of holies, the very curtain covering the holy of holies, it was torn in two. That holy of holies, that was what we were separated from. That curtain that separated us, was torn from bottom, from top to bottom. And now there's nothing to separate us from meeting the holy God in the very holiest of place.

And we, as the temple of God, the church of God, we are pictured as such a holy dwelling. God causes a holy temple.

A holy temple. And so, pictures for us, how can I be such that we can be a holy people? A set apart people. And then you reflect, well what does a Christian look like who is not being the church?

[23:59] They're isolated. They're on their own. They're not strongly connected. They're easily drawn away. You could say they go to another temple sometimes. You know?

There's other temples out there that will draw us, that we'll go to, that we'll worship in. And it's not to say there's anything sinful about sport.

But it's about what we make of it, isn't it? It's about, does it become our false God? Our vain idol? You know, there's lots of fellowship out there, people. Some people seek it out at the local pub. There's some fellowship there. But rather, let us be a holy temple. Amen? We should be a holy people, drawn together with the worship of our precious Lord.

Another picture of the church, lastly, is this one. It's the picture of a body. We are members of a body, it says. Think of a body with all the different systems working, just the wonder of a human body.

[25:06] It tells us we are like a body. It says this in 1 Corinthians 12, but now, are they the body, are they the body, the members of the body of Christ.

It says we're many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee. Nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

We need one another. And it's a wonderful picture, isn't it, of the body, that our Lord would compare us to a body, that the church is meant to function like a human body, that every part, different, plays an important role.

It's a unit, but we're different. There's different organs that, and you know, again, I could try to picture this by, by plucking out my eye, and saying this eye is no good, except it is in the body. It's the same picture, isn't it? We could cut off this hand, and this hand would still be a hand, but it would not function, without connection to the body. Friends, a Christian, he is not connected, as it were, with the, with the local body, with the local assembly, is like that.

[26:24] We cannot function, if we're cut off, from the church. And, as the body of Christ, his, his church, he is the head. We get the orders from him, from the head of the church, not the Pope, not the pastor, but the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the head, and he is the one, God's seeking, us seeking his will, that we'll know, and do, what he would have us, do, in all things. The local, the believer can't function, unless, they're connected, with the assembly, of God.

And so, each one of us, has different abilities, or functions, roles, and responsibilities. The healthy body, works, when we're all playing our part, when we're all connected.

A Christian, is like a hand, a foot, a toe, an artery, an adrenal gland, or any other body part, we're only healthy, and useful, if we're in the body.

So, it's a good thing, to think, I want to be part of the body, I want to be, such a Christian, not working in isolation, it's a body part, outside of the body, will not work, in fact, it will die.

[27:34] A believer, who is not connected, to church fellowship, is like a part of the body, being cut off, from the body. So friends, just to, as we're summing up, shortly here, be the church, be the church.

Now here's a picture, as it were, those parts of the body, if they're disconnected, they're not connected, to the body, they will not function. We must be the church, be the church.

And so, as a building, it's not an isolated brick. If you're a Christian, yes, you're a Christian, but be a part of the building.

Don't be an isolated brick, join in the divine construction process. He is building his church, and we want to be part of that, don't we? A key function of the church, is to build up the saints, edify, edification, build up each other.

We can't do that, when we're staying at home. And look, this is not to, condemn those that might be, as I know there are some, who are at home today, they're not well.

[28:39] But those who, consistently miss fellowship, I wonder where, where are they at? They still, are able to go shopping, or do other activities.

But fellowship, maybe it's not important, it's not important to them. Not as important, not a priority to them. This is not to condemn anyone, I'm just being straightforward here. You wonder, where are they at?

Friends, is the body of Christ important? He's coming back for his church. It is important. And it's, this is not to, to weigh you down, with some obligations, but yes, this is important, I want it.

To be the church, be the church, as a flock, not as a strange sheep, but together, we're the Lord our shepherd, and it says, my sheep hear my voice, this is his voice.

My sheep hear my voice. We need to come where we can hear the word of God, hear his voice, and feed on it. To be the church as a family, not as an orphan, but a family where we can join together, where we can support one another, where we'll care and love for one another.

[29:53] To be the church as a holy temple, not as a worshiper who is tempted after other gods. And the Lord wants us to glorify him. Unto him be glory in the church. That's his ultimate aim, that we would glorify God, in our worship and our life.

So be the church today. Be the church, be a part of the body, not as an isolated part, but a functioning part. Playing your part, as we gather with one another.

And what are the things we can do together? It says we can love one another. We can admonish or encourage. We can serve one another. We can forgive one another.

We've got a mission. The mission, if you will receive it, is still the same as he gave it in Acts 1.

You shall be witnesses unto me. He says, you shall be witnesses unto me. The one who has all authority, he says, I'm going to send you. You might, you know, you might get a retort from someone, as, you know, as you, as you might try to be a witness for Christ.

[30:56] You know, see, you see some, for example, engaged in, in organized witnessing, in an open air, preaching style, for example, and people say, oh, who, who, who gave you that authority?

Who's given you authority? Jesus has. Amen. His word has. He says, all authority is given unto me, so send I you. Friends, you've got the authority of heaven to go.

And you've got the command of heaven to go. A Christian without a church home, it's like a brick without a building. Friends, it's like a sheep without a flock.

It's like a child without a family. It's like a temple without holy worship. It's like an organ of the body without the body. We cannot function. We cannot strive. We cannot grow and find God's given, God-given purpose for our lives without that connection.

It's important. I urge you to that. Make that a priority. Make it important in your life that the church be the church, would be a force to be reckoned with, that we be that building as we're building up one another, that we be that flock.

[32:04] As we go into the fold together, there's a, there's a sense where it comes to the presence of our good shepherd as we hear his voice, the word of God. As we come as a family together, we're brothers and sisters, we care for one another.

That's what we ought to be. Let's not be cold. Friends, it's getting a bit warm in here, isn't it? Let's get warm in a good way.

Warm fellowship. That's what we want. Not that we give anyone the cold shoulder, but that we love one another. You know, people judge a church by the people in it.

Sometimes by the pastor, but that's just one factor, right? It's about you. People who come in here, they're new. You look at them funny.

Oh, you're in my seat. I can put them off forever. They'll never darken the church doorstep again. It's you that make the church.

[33:04] If you're not warm, you'll put people off. Let's be a warm fellowship, a close family. I don't mean putting on plastic smiles and being fake, but be genuine.

Take time for one another. Let's be a family, amen? And let's be a temple. We're a holy people. This is holy. This is holy stuff. This is awesome.

This is awesome. We're a called out. People, wow, this is better than anything else we could do as an activity. To be God's holy temple unto our holy God, that's precious.

And to be that body, functioning. Everyone's valuable. Everyone's functioning. Everyone's working in their role. Friends, God's got much to say about the church.

Right at the back of the book, I was talking to a friend about the seven churches. There's some churches talked about, and the Lord, it says, he goes to them, and he sees what they're on about. And he commands some, and he rebukes some.

[34:11] Some, he does both. But he commands churches for some good things, like good works, like right teaching, for testing false teaching. He looks at some churches today, and he sees some are astray from his purposes.

They're not doing what he wants to command. We see the qualities that God does command of a church, spiritual qualities that he looks for. He commands churches for service. He commands churches for keeping the faith, for love, for steadfastness, in time of testing, in hardship.

He commands them for perseverance, and then our Lord rebukes them. He rebukes them for unfaithfulness. He rebukes them for worldliness. He rebukes them for lukewarmness, for forsaking their first love.

Friends, there's always room for improvement. Which one are we in? We might do a number of those things. God helping us, let's take his counsel. He rebukes them, he commended them, and then he gave counsel.

He called for churches to renew their zeal, to refresh their love, for a greater faithfulness. He calls churches to repentance. He calls churches to perseverance.

[35:25] And our Lord is promised of his overcoming. Friends, and the point that matters, he that has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

What the Spirit says, friends, that's what counts, that we'll hear what the Spirit of God says to the church. What is the Spirit of God saying to you, to you personally this morning?

I pray that, firstly and foremostly, that you are in the church. And no, I'm not talking about this place. Are you in the church? In other words, are you saved? You must be saved.

And you must be saved to go to heaven. There's people who come to a church, that are going to hell. Because they're not saved. Friends, I urge you this morning, you must settle it with God. Do business with God. Say, Lord, save me. I trust you. I let go of my way. I trust you. Save me. [36:23] I believe you died for me. I receive your gift, given to me. And friends, then you're in the church. And then, be the church. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for your precious word, that these word pictures tell us of what we're meant to be. Help us, Lord, by your Spirit, to be such a people. And help us as we fellowship further now, that you will be glorified in your church.
In Jesus' name. Amen.