

"The Church: An Introduction"

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[0:00] word association, you know the game? I say dog, you say? I say Marco, you say?

I say Jesus Christ, you say Lord and Savior. But when I say church, you might go, meh.

You might say, ouch. You might say, what's the point? You might say, what a mess.

This morning we're starting off on a series on the church. Let me be up front with you on a definition of the church. The church is the blood-bought people of God, set apart by the Holy Spirit on mission for Christ.

That's the church. The blood-bought people of God, set apart by the Holy Spirit on mission for Christ. We, the church, belong to the triune God.

[1:09] Here's what I'm interested in over the next two months. I'm interested in what you think about God's church. I'm interested in what you feel about God's church.

I'm interested in how you prioritize God's church. Well, that's not the real question. The real question is, what does God think about his church?

How does Jesus feel about his people? Where does the church fall on God's priority list for the day? So, over the next several weeks, I am praying. We're praying. Would you join me in praying that we would think about the church more and more the way that God thinks about our church?

That truth shapes our minds and our understanding of God's people. Would you, my prayer is that you would feel about the church the way that Jesus feels about his church more and more?

[2:21] And my prayer, of course, is that we would all prioritize the church more and more as God himself prioritizes the church. And so, here's what it's going to look like over the next several weeks.

This morning, we're going to start off with an introductory sermon on kind of five basic truths of the church. And then we're going to get into New Testament images of the church.

The body. The building of God. The flock. The family of God. And what are all these things? What is God saying to us about his people?

The goal, overall, is that you and me would love the church the way that Jesus loves the church.

So, come the end of March, that there would be an upwell of spirit-given affection for God's people.

That's the aim. That's the prayer. So, this morning, five introductory truths about the church. This is by no means exhaustive, but again, I need your yes and amens.

[3:30] That's what I'm talking about. All right. introductory truth number one. The church is the called out people of God.

In Matthew 16, Jesus is walking into Caesarea Philippi with his disciples, and he says, hey guys, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

He's talking about himself. Who are people saying I am? And his disciples start shooting off a bunch of different answers. Some say JTB, John the Baptist. Others say Elijah.

Others still say Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But then Peter chimes in in verse 16, and he says this, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And in the book of Matthew, that is a mic drop. And the reason why you know it's a mic drop, it's what Jesus says in response to it. In verse 17, he says, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah.

[4:32] Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah. For faith and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. In other words, he's saying, hey Peter, you didn't come to that realization on your own.

It was a supernatural revelation from my Father to you to know who I am. Mic drop.

Jesus continues. He says, I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

What is Jesus talking about when he refers to this, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Well, if you've got a Catholic background, you probably think, well, this is Jesus institutionalizing the Pope ship. But I don't think that's what Jesus is saying.

[5:42] Jesus is addressing Peter, but I believe that the reference to this rock is actually a reference to his profession.

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. On this rock, not a man, but on Christ himself, I will build my church.

When Jesus says, I will build my church, he's picturing himself as a master builder. He's building a people, one person at a time.

That word church is a lovely word throughout your Bible. It's the Greek word ekklesia, and it literally means called out ones.

So Jesus is saying, on this profession of who I am, I will build my called out ones, my people.

[6:58] That word church, ekklesia, is used 100, over 100 times in the New Testament. But interestingly enough, in the Gospels, it's just used twice. Here, Matthew 16, and then in Matthew 18.

In the Old Testament, the Old Testament that was translated from Hebrew to Greek, it's called the Septuagint. When the word ekklesia is used, it's referring to the gathering of God's people Israel.

Called out from the nations. And so when we get into the New Testament, it has the same sense.

The called out of God. Called out through the blood of Jesus from the world.

Called to God Himself to be His people. So when Jesus says, My church, I will build my church.

That my is a blood-bought my.

My church. Everyone who would one day believe in me. Everyone who I shed my blood for. They are the ones I build to form my people.

[8:07] The church. The church. The church is the blood-bought people of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit on mission for Christ. Speaking of mission, if you're looking in Matthew 16 right now and you're looking at verse 18, you have a metaphor change.

Jesus is talking about building the church like a building and then he shifts gears and starts picturing the church in action. I will build my church and he says, in the gates of hell, literally the gates of death will not prevail against it.

now the church has gone from a building to a people raiding the gates of hell together on mission for Jesus seeking to rescue those who are in dark death and bringing them to the light of life through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Christ. When you hear the word church, what comes into your mind? Hey, look at the building.

Look at that steeple. Open the doors, see all the people. The church is not a building. It houses the church.

[9:34] Maybe you think of, oh, the church is a bunch of rules. Oh, the church, oh man, they hurt my parents, they hurt me, they're a bunch of losers. The church, they're so irrelevant, it's just mired in controversy.

Oh, they're familiar faces I see every couple weeks. Brothers and sisters, when we talk about the church, and when we talk about the church biblically, we are talking about the blood bought people of God, set apart by the Holy Spirit, called out by God himself to be his people on mission for Christ. Now, classically, the church has been understood in a couple different ways. It's how this word ecclesia gets used throughout the New Testament. So, church is used in a broad sense of the universal church.

We're going to wrap up the service in a little bit by reciting the Apostles' Creed. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church. It's a reference to the universal church.

church, all of the blood bought people of Christ from all ages and times and places. That's the universal church. And typically, the universal church is understood as being the unseen universal church.

[10:50] Until you get to Revelation 7, and then you have the snapshot of the universal church. Blood bought from every tribe, tongue, and nation, too many to count, all around the throne of God, singing to the Lamb who is risen, who was once slain, salvation belongs to our God.

You see, at the center of the church of God is the crucified and risen Christ. Do you know why we exist as a church? Jesus shed his blood for us.

Now, the church universal, we see in Matthew 16, there's other passages in the New Testament, it's what Jesus is referring to here, but then we get into the understanding of the local church.

And what a local church is, it is a visible outcropping of the universal church. So, the local church is time-bound in a particular people, in a particular time, in a particular place.

They have their own local leadership, we observe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, they unite us together and they unite us with other faithful churches from ages past.

[12:14] Christ the King church is a local outcropping of the universal church. And so, when you read through the New Testament and Paul's addressing the churches of Galatia or the church in Colossae or the church in Rome, these are local churches, specific place, specific time, with their own leadership.

Revelation 2 and 3, the seven churches are local churches in Asia Minor. Jesus had something specific to say to each one. So, the local church is an outcropping of the universal church, all bought by the blood of Jesus.

Now, I just want to make one more point here. there is an emphasis when it comes to the local church.

The church has a rhythm. We scatter during the week and then we gather together on the Lord's day, the day that Jesus was resurrected, Sunday. We scatter, we gather.

And there is this huge emphasis. You see it played out in 1 Corinthians 14 in particular, where when the church gathers together, our Lord Jesus Christ is very interested in what happens.

[13:29] He wants to be exalted. He wants his church built up. He wants non-Christian evangelized. It is the Super Bowl of the church every week.

When we get together, it is a unique time for the blood-bought to come together to pray together. to praise God together in worship.

Oh, it's so sweet this morning. To hear the public reading of Scripture, to speak timely words, to hear God's word preached faithfully.

There's nothing like it during the week. This is the church, universal and local. And at the center of the church is the risen lamb, Jesus Christ, the center of it all, our reason for being.

So the first introductory truth of the church is the church is the called out people of God. The second truth is this, the church is the converted people of God.

[14:46] Just because you gather with God's people doesn't necessarily mean you're actually part of God's people. people. In order to become part of God's people, you first need to be reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus.

And when you're reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus, then he places you into his people. He moves you from one people, the world, into another people, his church. For example, let me try to make this point this way.

Let's say you drive up to Flambeau. and you happen to get onto Flambeau Field and you're standing on the grass. Just because you're standing on the grass of Flambeau doesn't mean you are a Green Bay Packer.

Does it? Or just because you drive up to Carthage College and you're standing on the college, that doesn't mean you're a student there or part of the staff there.

Does it? No. Just because you go to someone's family's Thanksgiving, that doesn't mean you're an official part of their family. I experienced that when I first stayed at Jenny.

[15:58] Just because you've been going to church your whole life doesn't mean you're actually included in the blood-bought people of God. Humanly speaking, conversion is the singular moment a sinner, having heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, realizes that they are condemned under God's just wrath for their sin, and then they turn their tail to their sin and head

for Jesus.

It's a moment in time. Conversion is when you repent and believe the gospel. It's what Jesus talked about in Mark 1:15, where he shows up.

He says, the time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel. The moment a sinner believes on Christ for the first time, that sinner is justified by the grace of God, redeemed through the blood of Jesus, and adopted into God's family.

God's sin. That sinner is immediately transferred from the domain of God's beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. At that moment in time, a sinner who believes their eternity goes from being under God's wrath forever to now having the promise of being numbered in glory around the throne for everlasting peace and joy in the glorious presence of Jesus.

It's conversion. Conversion consists of both repentance and faith. I like to call it the two sides of the conversion coin.

[17:56] There's tails. You turn your tail to your sin, and then there are heads. You head straight for Jesus. Have you heard the expression, when the penny drops?

It's a way of saying, hey, that's when things get real. When the conversion coin drops in your heart, things get real. You realize that not just everybody's sinner, you're a sinner against the holy God, and his wrath is against your sin.

And with that comes a working of the Holy Spirit in which you are sorrowful over that, and that leads to turning tail to your sin. And it corresponds with this faith, newfound faith, where you head solely for Jesus, who alone can deliver you from your sin.

So this initial act of repentance and faith is the moment a sinner is converted. Truth in advertising. It's the first time one is converted, this exercise of repentance and faith, but it just starts a whole life of repentance and faith.

To be a follower of Jesus, be numbered with his people, the church, is a life of repentance and faith, a life of turning tail to your sin and a heading straight for Jesus over and over and over again.

[19:28] We do this together. Now if you're sitting here thinking, well that's not exactly how I became a Christian. I didn't have that quote unquote light switch conversion moment like the Apostle Paul.

Well many people do have kind of a light switch moment where the conversion is very clear. They know down to the day, hour, and minute where they were believed, they turned from their sin, they believed and they were transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son.

I went to college with a young lady. On the anniversary of her becoming a Christian, when she was converted, she started wearing all black because she was like mourning the death of her old self and then she realized, no, no, this is a celebration, so she swapped to all white.

That was a light switch conversion experience. But many of the people, many Christians don't have a light switch conversion experience.

They have a dimmer switch conversion experience. In fact, I spoke to four Christians this week who all had a dimmer switch conversion experience and here's what I mean by that.

[20:41] It goes something like this. I grew up in the church and I agreed with everything I heard. But there was a season when I basically walked away from the Lord and I sowed my wild oats.

I didn't give a rip about God. And then at some point I sensed a need to go back. And eventually things got real.

So people who experience something like that tend to say something like this. Between 2008 and 2011 the conversion coin dropped in my heart. In 2008 I was not following Jesus.

By 2011 I couldn't get enough of Jesus. So somewhere in between there something happened. And here's what's happened. I realized that Jesus just didn't die for the sins of all mankind.

He died for me. That's how a convert to Christianity talks. You may not know the day, the hour, or the minute of your conversion, but you know a time frame.

[21:58] I know I wasn't living for Christ then, but by this time I couldn't get enough of Jesus. Now if you have a dimmer switch conversion story, what you need to understand is this.

That at some point in that time frame, you actually went from being dead to alive. From being not justified to justified.

From being not redeemed to redeemed. From not being adopted to adopted. you went from being under God's wrath to be now an object of mercy and grace.

You went from being outside of God's family and not of God's people to inside of God's family and now you're part of God's people. You might not know the specific time and hour, but it happened. And you can live there. I do. That's the story of me. I was a pastor class dropout in eighth grade. Ironic. But here's the real question.

[23:11] Let's say you're sitting here this morning and you realize, hey, I've been going to church. I don't think I've ever been converted. Don't be surprised by that.

There are stories all over the place of preachers while they're preaching realizing they've never been converted. Well, here's how you respond if you don't think you've the conversion coin has dropped, but you're like, oh, I want that.

You've got to realize that God in His grace is prompting you to take this step of repentance and faith. So here's what you do. You pray.

You say something like this. You say, Lord Jesus, risen Jesus, I have been living for myself, and I've been doing smoke and mirrors when it comes to you.

You say, Lord sin. I repent of living a life for myself and living for my sin.

[24:24] I turn my tail on that, and I head to Jesus alone because He alone on the cross died for my sin. I know it. It was for me. That's what you say.

That's what you say to the risen Christ. You put a stake in the ground, and you say, I am that no more. I will not go back to that. I am for Jesus now. And based upon the Word of God, you are saved.

If you haven't taken that step, come talk to me after the service. I'd be glad to walk with you through that. And it's just the beginning. The conversion coin needs to drop because you've got to be reconciled to God first before you can be placed into the people of God.

But the church is the converted people of God. Do I have an amen? The church, three, introductory truth, is the Bible saturated people of God.

One of the telltale signs that a sinner has been genuinely converted is that now there is this new spirit-generated desire for the Word of God, the Bible.

[25:48] It goes something like this. Matthew 4, Jesus talked about it this way. Man can't live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And you're like, I just can't get enough. I can't get enough of God's Word.

I can't live without God's Word. 2 Timothy 3, 316, all scriptures breathed out by God and profitable. You're like, give me some of that. I can't get enough of that. That's not you.

That's the Spirit of God in you, changing your affections, giving you a new desire for something.

Before you were converted, you had nothing wanting to do with it. Psalm 119, Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light into my path.

Here's what happens when someone gets converted. They have a new set of desires, and God's Word becomes the final governing authority, giving all clarity and direction to every square inch of your life.

It defines, God defines who you are. So as a church, we don't approach the Bible like this. Yeah, I think I'll obey that. I don't think I'll obey this. That's of God. That's not of God.

[26:56] We don't live that way. We believe every Word of God. Everyone came from God's mind originally, and so we place ourselves as a church under the Word of God.

Every word. And not just because we have to, we want to. Because this gives us life. Shows us the way to walk.

And the Spirit empowers us to walk according to His Word. That's why 1 Timothy 3.15 says the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

The truth. God has revealed how things really are through this book. And we get to be the purveyors of it.

The protectors of it. The delighters in it. When you come across a passage in Colossians 3.16 it says this. It basically says, let the Word of Christ dwell richly among you.

[28:00] Let the words that Jesus said dwell richly among you. Let the words about Jesus dwell richly among you. It's all about Jesus. And that word dwelling is the idea of taking up residence.

God wants His Word dwelling in every square inch of your person. He wants His Word dwelling in every square inch of His people.

A Bible saturated people. We could say more. But let's move on to point four. The church is the distinct people of God.

God. In John 17, Jesus is praying for His disciples. And Jesus prays that God His Father would not remove them from the world, but because they're no longer of the world, that God would keep them in the world and protect them from the evil one.

We're not of the world, brothers and sisters, anymore because we've been converted. We've been called out by Jesus. Called out from the world. We are His people now. And in verse 17, Jesus prays, sanctify them in the truth.

[29:21] Your word is truth. And that word sanctify means to set apart, to be holy. As God's people called out from the world, we are to be holy, set apart in the world.

We are to be distinct as God's people. Now, when John talks about the world in John 17, he's not talking about the planet, he's talking about a group of people.

Let me try to illustrate. Have you ever been to a stadium during a huge football game or sports event, maybe a concert, and you're actually outside the stadium, but the event is over, you have mobs of people streaming out of the venue, but you need to try to get in.

Do you know how crazy that is? It's really hard, because you have this mass of humanity coming at you in the opposite direction, and you need to try to make your way to your goal through them.

The world is the mass of unregenerate humanity, not moving towards God, moving away from Him. and so a Christian is called to be set apart by God's Word to go against the grain of the world for living for Jesus.

[30:55] Now, the Holy Spirit, on the moment you're converted, comes and dwells within each of us, and He empowers us to live according to God's Word against the grain of the world.

If you turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 1, we read this, As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, what you were like before you were converted, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in your conduct, since it is written in holy book scripture, you shall be holy for I am holy.

God has called us out of the world to be distinct from the world, according to His Word, by the power of the Holy Spirit. If you look at chapter 2, verses 9 through 12, we read this, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved church, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. We are to be distinct from the world.

[32:33] The church is the distinct people of God in our holiness. We just don't do what we used to do. It's not who we are anymore.

And God has given us his word. He's given us the Holy Spirit and he's given us each other so that we can press against the grain of the world.

Now there's one thing to move against a mass of humanity on your own. It's another thing when you have a counter mass of redeemed humanity with minds full of the Bible empowered by the Holy Spirit locked arms together and you're like we're going.

That's the church. And what the scriptures say is we're just not arms linked to each other we're one person together we're the body of Christ which brings me to a second distinction of the church our unity.

in the same passage in John 17 Jesus prays and I think it's verse 20 and 22 I had to mark all these down because there's so many Jesus prays this verse 22 the glory that you have given me I have

given to them that they may be one even as we are one I am them and you and me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you love me now flip over to John 13 in verses 34 and 35 we read this a new commandment Jesus says I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you you also are to love one another by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another not just our lifestyles distinguish we don't shoot our wounded we we help them be restored we lovingly confront one another because it's not good for us when we're sinning we pick each other up when we're down we spur each other on with good good good words we say well done when someone has been faithful honored

[35:14] Jesus what I love about being a Christian here at Christ the King Church is I I I'm so praying for God to do a work in our midst in which he diversifies our body in our union in the blood of Jesus where we have black white Latinos we have men and women different age groups different social standings different income levels education levels and we're all united together through the blood of Jesus and we love one another fervently from the heart because we're God's people now because Jesus loves us like that we are distinct people the church is the distinct people of God we have a holy unity that distinguishes us from everybody else anybody want some of that finally the fifth introductory truth and this is the one

I get juiced over I get used over the other ones too the church is the sent people of God if you flip back to John 17 Jesus is praying to his father father don't take them out of the world keep them in the world protect them from the evil one they're not of the world they're of me sanctify them in the truth your word is truth back in 22 and further he said keep them united as one but then we read this in our 18 verse 18 he says as you sent me into the world so I have sent them into the world so just to make sure you're understanding this God calls us out of the world and we're converted and then he sets us apart from the world in a holiness that befits him all to send us back into the world in order to be proclaimers of the gospel and makers of disciples so

God calls us out sets us apart sends us back in all to be making disciples of all nations and there we go turn in Matthew to Matthew chapter 28 in verses 18 and 19 we're sent back to the world as Jesus was sent to the world to make him some disciples Jesus says the risen Christ all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me go therefore and make disciples of all nations I'm sending you to go make disciples of all nations now I've been reading a very helpful book with the rest of the leadership team it's called the vine project and this book is designed to help a church move further and further into focus more clearly on seeking to fulfill the great commission to make disciples of the nations and this book outlines a basic way to go about doing that they're all ease engage non-Christians evangelize non-Christians establish those who become

Christians and then you equip those who become Christians that's a disciple making process so let me try to spell that out for you what that looks like here back in December you remember we on December 23rd we set aside a day in which we would fast and pray as a church over a meal that God would do a work that only he could do at the Christmas Eve outreach do you remember that the Christmas Eve outreach took place downstairs in the fellowship hall there was a bunch of tables set up we had table hosts from our church at every table engaging with non-Christians handing them response cards to fill out that invite us back to their homes we got about 25 26 response cards and so two weeks ago we sent out 12 people over two days and teams of two and three and those people went back to those the people our guests at the Christmas Eve outreach shared the gospel prayed for them and of course with everything like this happens you end up meeting more people that you talk to about

Jesus and invite to things and one Bible study on the gospel of Mark we figure is there any better way to get a non Christian face to face with Jesus than reading about Jesus in the gospel of Mark so this coming Thursday is the inaugural evangelistic Bible study here Thursday 6 to 7 if you're not a Christian you are more than welcome to come and see who Jesus is and what he's done for sinners but it's our way of taking an evangelistic step as a church and let's say we have a number of people come through this evangelistic Bible study the gospel of Mark and two or three of them the conversion coin drops in their hearts they turn tails to their sin and they head straight for Jesus and they are converted justified redeemed adopted at that point we need to establish them in the faith

knit them into a life group bring them into the family it takes work it takes effort it takes intentionality and then eventually the next step is to equip them and what that means is to train a [41:35] Christian in order to engage evangelize establish and equip a mature disciple of Jesus Christ is a disciple making disciple of Jesus Christ a disciple of Jesus is multiplying disciples I don't know about you but I want to be a part of a church like that where God is at work rescuing establishing equipping sending out God called us out of the world and set us apart from the world in order to send us back into the world to make disciples of the world throughout the series I think you're going to be realizing several things about the church the blood bought people of

God set apart by the Holy Spirit on mission for Christ here's a number of them I think you're going to realize the church we need our God as a body is dependent on the head as a building rests on a cornerstone as a flock needs a shepherd as a bride needs her groom as branches need the vine brothers and sisters as the church we need our Jesus the second thing I think we'll realize is this church we need each other we are a holy unity there is a necessary interdependence within the church within a local church a body of Christ just as this hand needs this knee so is with the body of Christ we need each other third thing God has sent out his church the church is

God's plan A to make disciples of all nations there's no plan B we must be about preaching the gospel and making disciples of Jesus Christ one preacher talks about the church as not being a hospital ship but an aircraft carrier the fourth thing over the next two months I think we're going to realize how much Jesus loves his church as a groom as a holy love for his bride even a jealousy for his bride Jesus loves his people the church is the called out people of

God the church is the Bible saturated people of God the church is the converted people of God the church is the distinct people of God the church is the sent people of God when you hear the word church what comes to your mind in two months time I hope it's my beloved let's pray God thank you so much for my brothers and sisters in this room we continue to pray for Taz God would you provide him the care he needs God help us show us how we can come alongside him and his wife in this time of need God I pray that you would form your mind in us and that we would love what you love and we would prioritize what you prioritize God would you bless us your people and we want to proclaim the excellencies of who you are in Jesus name we pray amen again Thank you.