

Church Planting: A Foretaste of Heaven

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Preacher: Dan Nelson

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, Christ the King Church. How are you guys doing this morning? Oh, good. You guys are a little awake. That's good to know. Good response.

Well, just in case you haven't heard my name already, my name is Pastor Dan Nelson. We are planting the Grove Church in Union Grove, Wisconsin later this year. And I'm just so thankful to be here again with you, worshiping with you this morning, and being able to bring God's Word.

I'm here with my lovely wife, Heather, and my daughter, Abby, and son, Levi. And we are just so thankful again to be here. We know that, or I know, that it's really an important thing that I'm getting to share Pastor Mike Silvati's pulpit, and he's sharing the congregation with me.

And so I take that, I don't take that lightly, but I am very thankful to be here this morning. Today's sermon is going to be anchored in Revelation 7, 9 through 12.

I've been asked to cover church planting, and I am so thankful to do that. You'll notice I did say the word anchored, so we're also going to be preaching from a couple other texts, which is not my normal mode of apparatus, but I'm excited to talk to you about church planting this morning.

[1 : 13] One of the most frequent questions I receive is, why are you planting a church? And so that's one of those questions that we'll answer today. But before we do that, let's read God's word, coming from Revelation 7, 9 through 12.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Why?

Parents, isn't that your favorite question to receive from kids? Why? Anytime your kid asks why, you have two possible responses.

[2 : 36] Either the Lord in that moment has given you enough grace to say, Yes, son or daughter, let me answer that question for you. Let me give you a little extra piece of knowledge.

Or maybe, just maybe, you're lacking that grace and you respond, Because I said so. Right? So many of the best questions, the root of almost all questions, is why?

And we are often, even as Christians, asked, Why? Why do you believe in Jesus? Maybe even a step beyond that.

Why do you go to church? If a friend asks you that question, how might you answer that? You might say, I love Jesus.

And Jesus loves me. Maybe you say something like, I don't know, they're just really good at throwing these parties called potlucks. Right? I hope those aren't your only answers, but I'll let Pastor Mike work that out in the future.

[3 : 48] Another question we receive is, Why is the church dying? Oh man. Have you guys seen the headlines over the last four or five years? I've got five or so of them here.

The American church is dying. Decline of Christianity continues at a rapid pace. Is the American church dying?

The great de-churching. Oh, and my favorite one that I actually came across this week, is thousands of churches will likely close down. What happens to all the real estate?

Now, that probably reveals people's hunger for the church to maybe die, so they can use these spaces for something different. One could argue that if the church were dying, it would be because

we have not adhered to preaching the gospel, making disciples of the gospel, and multiplying the gospel.

Over the last few years, my favorite question, my favorite why question has been, Dan, why plant a church?

[5 : 00] My favorite response is, why not? We've been reminded for years that the American church is in decline. Our culture is becoming increasingly hostile towards Christianity.

Churches are closing down all around us. 40 million Americans have left the church over the last 25 years. That's a real stat. Like no other time in American history, we are at a point of crisis in the church.

This seems like the perfect time to plant more churches. Not to mention, church planting is a mandate of the Great Commission and a foretaste of heaven.

To be clearer, I am saying that we must plant churches to fulfill the Great Commission and expand God's kingdom. Let me say that again.

We must plant churches to fulfill the Great Commission and expand God's kingdom. This morning, our sermon is titled, Church Planting, A Foretaste of Heaven.

[6 : 13] We're going to look at three points to show the importance of planting churches. First, we're going to look at the Great Commission. We're going to look at Paul's example of bringing out the Great Commission.

And then, of course, the passage in Revelation 7 that I told Mike that I would originally preach. So turn with me to Matthew 28, 18 through 20.

I know I am cheating here. I'm supposed to be in Revelation 7. I get it. However, to understand the end result, we must understand the mission and mode that gets us to Revelation 7.

Our first point this morning is that the Great Commission is a mandate to plant churches. Let me repeat that for our note takers in the room.

The Great Commission is a mandate to plant churches. Let me read Matthew 28, 18 through 20 for us. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[7 : 14] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Now Jesus Christ, resurrected after his death, did ministry and showed himself to many witnesses.

But he had one last thing to say directly to the disciples. Brothers and sisters, these words are not just historical instruction to the apostles.

They are a living and breathing mandate for us today. The Great Commission is our marching order, our divine directive, and it drives the essence of what it means to be the church.

Go is an active, intentional movement. We are not called to sit back and wait for people to come to us. We are commanded to go out into the world, to step into the lives and communities of those who do not know Jesus.

[8 : 40] Going is the very foundation of church planting. It requires us to leave our comfort zones, to reach out to new places, new cultures, new generations, with a gospel message.

Next, we see that we are to make disciples of all nations. The scope of the Great Commission is global. It knows no boundaries, no barriers of race, ethnicity, or nationality.

Church planting embodies this global vision. By establishing new churches in diverse locations, we extend the reach of the gospel, bringing the light of Christ to every corner of the earth.

Every new church plant is a beacon of hope. A city on the hill, in the words of Jesus. A place where disciples are made, nurtured, and sent out to continue the mission.

We're also called in the Great Commission to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward transformation.

[9 : 53] A public declaration of faith, an entry into the community of believers. Through church planting, we create spaces where new believers can be baptized, publicly declaring their faith, and welcoming them into the family of God.

These new churches become the birthplace of a faith, the starting point of a lifelong journey of discipleship.

Finally, Jesus commands us to teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. Church planting is not just about gathering converts. It is about making disciples who live out Jesus' teachings in their daily lives.

New churches provide an environment where believers are taught, nurtured, and equipped to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. They become centers of teaching, where the gospel is proclaimed and practiced.

The Great Commission is our divine mandate to plant churches. It calls us to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach.

[11 : 09] It is a call to action, a call to transformation, a call to bring the light of Christ to every nation, every community, and every heart. Whether you live in downtown Kenosha, Ghana, Africa, London, or the small rural village of Union Grove, Wisconsin, we are called to make disciples of every nation and people group.

There are people locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally who do not know Jesus Christ. It is our mission to bring the gospel to them and plant churches that make disciples who are rooted in the gospel and that continue to grow in it.

Then, just as Jesus did, we send them out to participate in the mission of multiplying disciples through evangelism and planting churches.

Planting churches is not just one way that we bring the gospel to the lost. It isn't just one strategy. It is the way. It is the strategy.

Let me give you a practical example of this. Now, you don't all know me well yet, and I hope to get to know you more as we plant the Grove Church together.

[12 : 34] But, spoiler alert, I am a sinner, and I once was a very lost man. My faith was shaken at the age of 20, and quite honestly, it really was just revealing a lack of faith.

I was lost, and I went to the world to seek answers. I found my answers on the internet and the meaning of my career. The internet told me that God wasn't real, and the world told me that my career would give me purpose and identity.

During this time, I got married to Heather. We were high school sweethearts. She watched this good man who was supposedly a Christian when we met, when we started dating, this man transform into something, anything but that.

Became angry. I had an insatiable appetite for power and money. She knew I was lost, and she begged me to go to church with her for years.

My excuse was that the church is filled with pretenders and phonies. there's no way we would be able to find a good one. My wife, early on in my slide into being even more lost, got me to attend one church, actually.

[13 : 59] And after we left that church service, she looked at me so excitedly, and she said, Dan, what do you think? I shrugged. I said, the people seemed fake, and I'm not going to go to church where all of your Trinity friends are attending.

Now, that last line is actually much closer to the truth. What I was calling fake was actually a genuine Christian. They were genuine Christians who knew and loved Jesus, and they were being sanctified and being made more righteous.

I know this to be true because now I know that church to be faithful with a genuinely loving community of Christ followers, and quite honestly, they are one of the major pillars of the community they serve.

this church was Crossway of Bristol, Wisconsin, your mother church. But in my blindness, all I saw were clicks, phoniness, and weirdos.

Crossway would have been about 10 years old at this point. It wasn't an institutional church yet. I know they just celebrated 25 years. However, the church my wife finally got me to attend a few years after this, the church in which I became saved, the church in which I entered into a real relationship with Jesus Christ, the church in which I recognized my sinfulness, the church in which I proclaimed, Christ is the King and the Lord over my life.

[15 : 29] This was a church plant that had been recently gifted their first building that maybe had 100 or so people between two services. Their congregation was just younger in their faith and not as sanctified or threatening to me.

This church allowed me to feel comfortable in my lostness until I found Jesus. And then once I found Jesus, they were willing to continue to deal with me as I grew in the gospel.

This church was less than four years old when we went there. I can almost guarantee that some in this room have a similar story or have felt a similar way about churches.

You walk into a holy place filled with holy people as a sinner, a broken, wretched man or woman, and you might not even know it yet.

And you just bounce right off of that holiness. And yet, you can walk into Christ the King when it was three, five, eight, or ten years old and see a church that faithfully preaches God's word and is filled with all sorts of righteous, sanctified, intelligent people and yet somehow, somehow, you were able to feel more at home.

[16 : 56] Some of you to this day might still be lost and yet this church, Christ the King, I know it to be true, will continue to love and accept you as you are in hope that one day you too will call Christ the King.

We must embrace this mandate with passion and purpose. Knowing that planting churches will fulfill Jesus' mission and advance his kingdom here on earth.

Now, if you're an astute reader or listener, you might be saying, now Pastor Dan, Jesus didn't say plant a church.

You know what? You're right. You got me. That is true. Now, I have made an argument that church planting is how we complete the Great Commission.

So let me defend and claim, let me defend that claim with irrefutable evidence. We know from the disciples' actions and responses to the Great Commission that the church is how Jesus wants to build the kingdom of God.

[18 : 07] Our second point this morning is that Paul understands church planting as the key to fulfilling the Great Commission. Let me repeat that. Paul understands church planting as the key to fulfilling the Great Commission.

Paul establishes a pattern in his Great Commission work throughout the book of Acts. Paul's first missionary journey as recorded in Acts 13-14 began with the commissioning by the Holy Spirit in the church of Antioch.

This journey takes Paul and Barnabas to several cities including Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe where they preached the gospel and established new Christian churches.

Paul faced significant opposition in each city and yet he remained steadfast in his mission. His perseverance resulted in the formation of new churches.

Paul's second missionary journey detailed in Acts 15-18 expanded his church planting efforts even further. He revisits the churches he had previously established strengthening the believers and addressing any issues that had arisen and this journey also saw the planting of new churches in places like Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus.

[19 : 31] Each city has unique cultural and religious context and yet Paul's approach to acting out the Great Commission remains consistent.

He preaches the gospel, he gathers believers and he establishes local churches to nurture and grow their faith. Paul preaches the gospel, gathers believers, and establishes local churches to nurture and grow their faith.

We see him do this again and again. We also see that this is not just a method to be used by Apostle Paul because Paul instructs others to participate in the same work.

Titus 1, 4-5 gives us this instruction. It says, To Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

This is why I left you in Crete so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. Now I know you all know this, but the role of an elder is to know, lead, feed, and protect the local church, the local flock of Christians.

[20 : 49] An elder's role is unique to the church and Paul instructs Titus to raise elders. Paul is essentially telling Titus, Finish planting or establishing those churches in these towns.

Plant churches. Not only does Paul model what it looks like to pursue the Great Commission through planting churches, but he also shows us that planting churches is not just for the apostles. Church planting is passed down through the generations of the church as the strategy for completing the Great Commission. Since the time of Paul, church planting has been directly tied to the growth of Christianity in any given region.

You obviously know that to be true for the establishment of the church during the life and ministry of Paul. But it's also true in our own Protestant history after the Reformation. For any of our history nerds, you're really going to enjoy the next little piece here.

In 1555, 100 church planting pastors were sent from Geneva to France. These 100 pastors planted churches, made disciples of the gospel that grew in the gospel and then were sent out to plant churches.

[22 : 13] Seven years later, these 100 pastors had planted 2,000 churches. 50% of the nation of France was thought to be Protestant Christian by 1562 because of this church planting effort.

100 pastors went out, they equipped disciples, they made disciples of Christ, they equipped disciples to do ministry, and those disciples went out and continued to plant churches.

2,000 churches in seven years. How about here in America? What's our history of church planting tied to Christianity? Christianity. In 1820, there was one Christian church for every 875 U.S. residents. From 1860 to 1906, the Protestants of America, that's us, planted one church for every 350 people added to the nation's population.

At the end of this movement to plant churches, there was one church for every 430 people in the nation. Church double. At this time, 40% of all Protestant churches were under the age of 25.

[23 : 28] To give some idea of the growth from this church planting movement, in 1776, just 17% of the U.S. population was considered religiously adherent. But in 1916, after this church planting movement, this had increased to 53%.

How about today? Today, there is one Christian church for every 1,000 people in America. If our goal was to get back to at least one church for every 500 people in the next 20 years, we would need to plant a minimum of 15,000 churches a year.

Oh, wait. 4,500 churches or so close every year. So we actually need to plant 20,000 churches a year. How many are we actually planting?

In 2019, through all the major Protestant denominations and evangelical denominations, 3,000 Protestant churches were planted in 2019.

That's it. We're not even keeping up with the amount of churches that are closing, let alone trying to get back to a meaningful number that can serve the community well. If the Great Commission is to be executed through planting of churches, and we see that in Paul's model and teaching, then we must take up the mantle of church planting and make it our strategy for spreading the gospel.

[24 : 52] We need to make disciples who are rooted in the gospel, who grow in the gospel, and who multiply the gospel through evangelism and church planting. It is clear that we must plant churches to fulfill the Great Commission and expand God's kingdom.

Pastor Dan, all of this is fine. There's some nice stats. Yep, I agree. Paul planted churches. That makes sense. But does this really matter for me today?

I mean, I have Christ the King. It's a great church. You know, there's still room in the pews. I can invite my friends here. Like, it's still okay. Right? Now, I'm sure none of you are actually angsty enough to be asking that question.

But let's go ahead and dive into Revelation 7. It's been a minute, so I'll reread it for us. We're in Revelation 7, 9-12. After this, I looked and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen!

[26 : 24] Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen! To answer this question first, the Great Commission mandates church planting.

Paul modeled it and taught it to be true, and church planting ignites God's kingdom on earth. Our third point, church planting ignites God's kingdom on earth.

This passage paints a breathtaking picture of the culmination of God's redemptive plan. A vision of unity, diversity, and worship that inspires and propels us forward in our mission.

What an awe-inspiring scene! This passage gives us a glimpse of heaven, where the multitude from every corner of the earth stands united in worship before the throne of God.

It is a vision of God's kingdom fully realized, where barriers of race, ethnicity, and language are completely dissolved, and we are in the presence of the Almighty.

[27 : 44] But this vision, brothers and sisters, is not just a future hope. Church planting is our means of working towards this heavenly vision.

But each new church plant is also a microcosm of Revelation 7. It is a tangible expression of Christ's diverse and unified body.

Consider the diversity that is depicted in this passage. A multitude from every nation, every tribe, every people, every language, every socioeconomic situation, poor, rich, whatever.

Republican, Democrat. Democrat. This is all clear, this is a clear call to reach beyond our own cultural and ethnic boundaries, to reach outside of our people.

Church planting enables us to engage with diverse communities, share the gospel across cultural lines, and to build congregations that reflect the beautiful diversity of God's creation.

[28 : 52] creation. We begin to mirror the heavenly assembly described in Revelation through planting churches in various contexts and among different people.

Secondly, the image, the unity in this image in worship is striking. Despite their diverse backgrounds, the multitude is united in a single purpose, to worship God and the Lamb.

Church planting fosters this unity. By establishing new churches of faith, we create spaces where believers from different walks of life can come together, united in their love for Jesus and commitment to his mission.

These new churches become beacons of unity in a divided world, showcasing the power of the gospel to unite people. Thirdly, the worship of the multitude is central.

They cry out with a loud voice, declaring the salvation of God and attributing all glory, wisdom and power to him. Church planting is fundamentally about creating a worshiping community.

[30 : 17] glory. It is about establishing a place where God is glorified, his salvation is proclaimed, and believers are equipped to live lives of worship.

Each new church plant is a fresh voice in the chorus of praise that will one day resound in the throne room of heaven. God. In light of Revelation 7, 9 through 12, we see that church planting is not merely a strategic initiative, it's not merely a response to declining attendance, it is deeply theological endeavor that aligns with God's ultimate plan for humanity.

It is our participation in the unfolding story of redemption, our contribution to the diverse, unified, worshiping body of Jesus Christ that will one day all be gathered in heaven together.

We must, and I know I'm saying that word a lot today, but we must renew our passion and purpose for this mission Christ has given us.

We must commit to proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and planting churches. churches. Our motivation is that this is the mission that God has given us.

[31 : 42] And as we engage in church planting, we are not just building institutions. We are building the kingdom of God here on earth. We are working towards the day when people of every nation, tribe, people, and languages will stand together before the throne, united in worship and declaring the glory of God.

God, and I can't think of a more beautiful purpose to our lives here on earth. I just can't. We are to live lives of worship and bring others into that worship as well.

The importance of church planting cannot be overstated, even if I did say we must about a dozen times. It is a direct response to the Great Commission, an essential part of living out our faith, and a powerful means of advancing God's kingdom on earth.

By planting churches, we follow the example of Paul who demonstrated through his missionary journeys that planting new churches is vital for the spread of the gospel.

moreover, church planting is a foretaste of the heavenly vision depicted in Revelation 7, 9 through 12, where people from every nation, tribe, and language worship together before the throne of God.

[33 : 09] Each new church plant we plant is a step towards realizing this divine vision, bringing us closer to the day when all creation will join in unified worship.

church. We must, I know I've said it a ton, but we must embrace the call to plant churches with a renewed sense of urgency and commitment.

There are many challenges facing the church today, both here and abroad. As we step out in faith to plant new churches, we address these challenges and we participate in God's redemptive work in the world.

Church planting is not just about numerical growth, it is about transforming lives, communities, and cultures with the power of the gospel. May we be called by the Great Commission, motivated by Paul's example, and driven by the vision of Revelation 7, dedicating ourselves to planting churches and expanding God's kingdom here and now.

God, we have a role to play in this great work. Some of you may be called to plant churches, like myself, planting the Grove Church at this moment.

[34 : 31] Some of you may be called to that. If that is you, talk with your pastors, talk with your elders, let them work through that call with you. Whether that is for you to go and be sent by Christ the king to plant another independent church or to join a church plant that is already in process, they can help you pray through that and think through that calling.

They can help guide you with some next steps. Lastly, there are, not lastly, you also might just be called to pray. To pray for church planting.

To pray for the in-breaking of the gospel in new communities. To pray for planters such as myself or my church, the Grove Church. And lastly, there are some of you that might be called to support church planting financially.

If you feel called to this, I would still recommend that you bring that to your pastors and elders.

Christ the king may be called to start a church planting fund for your future.

Or they can help direct you to appropriate plants for your support. As members of Christ the king, I want to make sure that I say this very clearly to you.

[35 : 42] As members of Christ the king, you are already actively participating in this work. As a local church, you are sending the Grove Church to Union Grove, Wisconsin.

You are planting the Grove Church. And we couldn't be more thankful for your partnership in this essential work. This is not a weight for you to individually carry the burden of. The church is essential to God's redemptive plan.

And local churches should do the work of church planting, just as Christ the king is doing with me.

And again, I say thank you for participating in this work.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the incredible privilege of being part of your mission on earth.

God, we ask that you would empower us with your spirit as we commit to planting churches and making disciples. Give us the courage to go where you lead, the wisdom to build strong, Christ-centered churches, and the passion to reach those who have yet to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

[36 : 55] May our efforts bring glory to your name and draw many into your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.