

This New Testament Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 March 2025

Preacher: Pastor Shane Eccles

[0:00] Man, thank you so much for being here today. I do have a word for us today.

I feel, I always feel like God gives me a word, but especially to today, I feel God's really wanted to show us something today. So if you turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 19, starting in verse one, and it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?

And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, unto what then were you baptized?

And they said unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him, which should come after him. That is on Christ Jesus. Verse five, when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them and they spake with tongues and prophesied.

[1:22] And verse seven, and all of the men were about 12. Verse eight, and he went into the synagogue and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

But when divers were hardened, that means when many different ones, their hearts were hardened to the message that Paul had. And believe not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude.

He departed from them and separated the disciples. He took the ones that did listen, the ones that he converted when he first got to Ephesus, those 12 and all those others that did listen to him during that time of three months.

He took them with him, disputing daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years, so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Amen. Pray with me today over this word. Lord Jesus, God, I thank you for your word, your timely word, God, your anointed word, God. I appreciate, God, the blessing of knowing your word.

[2:32] And, God, I want to show that appreciation today by lifting my voice and thanking you, God, for your word today. Lord, I pray, Lord, that you would allow your word to penetrate us today, our hearts, our minds.

God, let it get through the distractions of life and the distractions that we bring in here and the things that we carry in here, God. And, God, that you would help us, Lord, God, to understand your word today, God, and see where it is that you want us to be, God, and that you would take us there in your word today and let it be within our hearts today.

And we would leave here with something tangible. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. You may be seated. In our opening scriptures, we find Paul arriving at Ephesus to start a church there.

Paul's a church planter. The Bible says he just came from, he was on his way from Corinth, which is a city where he started a church. And he's on his way to Ephesus to start a church there.

And Ephesus was an ancient city. It's located on the western coast area of what is modern-day Turkey. And it's now in ruins today, but it's a popular tourist attraction.

[3:38] You can go there and you can see the different things from actually a lot of the things described in the book of Acts chapter 19. You can actually go there and see some of those things still today.

A lot of Christians take pilgrimages there to see those things. But the Bible tells us more about the Ephesian church, the Ephesus church, than any other group of believers.

There's no other group of believers in the Bible that the word of God talks about more. And so we should look at the church in Ephesus as an example to us and for us. And to learn from as we launch this New Testament church in the city of Houston today.

Because this is a New Testament church. And that's my title today, this New Testament church. The Disciples of Jesus Christ in Houston, California is a New Testament church.

We're still living in the age of the New Testament church. The New Testament church began on the day of Pentecost and it is our heritage. That's our heritage.

[4:37] We trace our roots. We place ourselves. We associate ourselves with Pentecost. We are the Pentecostals in Houston today. We associate with the day of Pentecost.

And when the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the apostles and the disciples in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 2. That was the birthplace of the New Testament church. And you can read it in Acts chapter 2, verse 1 through 4.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. And it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of a fire. And it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And this birth of the New Testament church, this Holy Ghost experience found in Acts chapter 2 was not just a one-time event. But it was the beginning of an era.

[5:35] And that era is the New Testament church of the living God. And the New Testament church that was born on the day of Pentecost is a Holy Ghost-filled church. And it's a church that's on fire for God.

It's a church that's making herself ready to be a spotless, a blemishless bride for Christ. Amen. For when he returns for his church. Amen.

It's a church that's on fire for the things of God. And it will continue. It will continue until Jesus comes back for his church. Because Jesus is coming back for his church. And this United Pentecostal church is going to be standing ready to meet Jesus when he comes.

And right now, in 2025, it is continuing. And this New Testament church is here to stay in Houston until Jesus comes. Amen.

Praise the Lord. Amen. So there are some of those out there that was going to tell you that the Holy Ghost-filled church disappeared when the apostles died. That there's no more Holy Ghost-filled church.

[6:37] And they'll do their best to quench the spirit. You go to their services. And they're going to do their best not to get too excited about living for God. And that's what I like about an apostolic Pentecostal church. Is you can get excited about what God's done for you.

You can come into church. And you can give God glory. You can give God thanks. And no one's going to try to get you to quiet down. And they want their churches quiet and low-key like it's a museum. As if the New Testament church was a thing of the past.

But I declare today that the Holy Ghost-filled church, that spirit-led church, is a New Testament church. And it's an ongoing reality today. And that is because it is rooted in Christ's unchanging, unwavering, unending mission to go ye therefore and teach all nations.

And Jesus said, I am with you always, even until the end of the world. And the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Christ, is going to be present in his church body until the end of the world.

And just in case you haven't noticed, we're still here. The end of the world hasn't come yet. And we're still in it today. And so that means that there's a Holy Ghost-filled New Testament church still today.

[7:43] And guess what? You found this New Testament church. You're inside of a New Testament church today. This is the age of the New Testament church that Christ died for.

Christ died for this New Testament church. And we are co-missioned with him and empowered by his Holy Spirit to preach the gospel until he comes back. And Ephesus wasn't a one-off situation for the history books or to go back and, you know, and travel over to Turkey and just look at the ruins of it now or to see artifacts from it in a museum somewhere.

It's not just a one-off thing. It's not just for the history books. It's our blueprint for church planning today. The Ephesian church began with a Holy Ghost-filled preacher and 12 Holy Ghost-filled

[12:38] It was a church that was on fire with the Holy Ghost. It was a church boldly proclaiming the gospel in the city that was obsessed with idol worship to the idol goddess Diana.

And the city of Ephesus was proud of that temple they had. It was one of the seven wonders of the world during that time. And it attracted people from all over the region. And all over people would come for idol worshiping.

And they brought prophets to that city because they would sell them their false idols. But Paul preached what would be a radical truth to those people in that city that day. And the Bible says that he would boldly proclaim the true God is not a God made by hands.

The true God is not a God made by hands. You're not going to be able to craft your God how you want it. You're not going to be able to just fashion your God however you see fit. There's a one true God and he is a mighty God and he's the Lord of Lord and the King of Kings.

Amen. And you can't just create your own little God somewhere. And some rejected it. But many people listened to what Paul had to say and people began to be turned away from idol worship.

[13:44] Thank God. And began to follow the one true God. And that stirred up trouble in that city of Ephesus. And the people that had heard the word of the Lord took their idols and took their magic books.

They had books with seances and things that they would do with their idol worship. And they burned them. And the Bible said that the value of all those things that they burned equaled 50,000 pieces of silver.

50,000 pieces of silver worth of magic books and idols that they burned as they were converted to the truth. Amen. And a silversmith named Demetrius who made his living crafting silver idols for Diana saw his business going down because less people were buying his idols.

And so he rallied up a mob telling the people of Ephesus that this New Testament church was running their business and disrespecting their goddess that they worshiped.

And a large part of the city erupted and they grabbed two of the Ephesus church plant members. Amen. What would you do if the two of us got dragged out of here? Because they were upset of how we were turning this city upside down.

[14:54] And it was, you know, the bars were closing because nobody wanted to go drink no more into the late hours of the night because we're having revival. You know, this is a small town. I mean, how many people would it take to start causing an effect in this city around us?

Amen. But this is what's happening in that city. This is a big city to them, over 200,000 people. But so they grabbed these two from the Ephesus church plant members and dragged them to the theater in town.

And that theater still exists today. It's one of the tourist attractions. You can go see it. It's massive. It can hold over 20,000 people. And the Bible says, for two straight hours, the crowd shouted, great is Diana of the Ephesians.

And the Bible says there was so much chaos and confusion that there was a mob-like mentality that came about. And some joined in and didn't even know why they were joining in or what they were yelling about.

They just started getting involved and yelling something. And nobody even knew. The Bible says they didn't even know what they were yelling. And the Bible says that Paul wanted to go face them. But the other church members held him back for his safety, the Bible says.

[15:54] And the Bible says that the city clerk stepped in and warned the crowd that their uproar could get them in trouble with the Roman authorities. And so they released the two church members, and the chaos fizzled out.

Why am I telling you this story? What's my point? And my point is that the New Testament church in Ephesus turned that place upside down. There was an effect on the city of Ephesus when Paul planted that church, and that church started taking off over those couple years.

And we need to wonder how bold are we and how bold should we be? Because we too are to be a New Testament church that does not compromise the current world culture.

There's modern idols out there all around us, and modern idol worshipers, if you will, all around us every day. And there are 13 other churches in this town, and they all believe in a trinity, a three-person Godhead.

And many of them idolize the Mother Mary and idolize many other saints. And they have statues of them, and they pray to them and burn candles and rub beads and repeat prayers and all these

things. The trinity in this city today for us is the Ephesus city, Diana.

[17:01] It's the same thing. It's just a different name. And we have been taught by society and taught by a sissified Pentecostal church culture that we are to remain silent and to look the other way.

But don't be confrontational. But a New Testament church falling after Paul's model of church planting in Ephesus confronts the society boldly, even if it costs them something.

And so this New Testament church in Houston can't compromise our calling and our commitment to be spirit-led. Amen. And the Ephesian church didn't whisper the gospel. They shouted it even to the point where it upset some people, and it upset the status quo.

And so my question is, are we going to be bold enough to speak God's truth even when it's unpopular? You know, that riot in Ephesus, it proves that that church was not quiet and hidden in some corner street somewhere.

They weren't detached from society. They were a bold church having a great effect on the city. And I wonder today if a lot of our Pentecostal churches, if they were all of a sudden existing, would anybody even notice that they were gone?

[18:09] If the church in Syria shut down tomorrow, would anybody notice, would anybody in the city notice that they were gone? If we shut down tomorrow, if we never came back to this building, would anybody know that we were gone?

And so that's a question we have to ask ourselves today. This New Testament church in Houston is going to be bold and evangelistic. Amen. This New Testament church will take the gospel to where the people are.

And if I ever feel like we are getting too focused on having a tucked away church services only and not being out there with the people, I'll shut this thing down. And we'll become a living room to living room church.

I'll shut this. We'll quit this place. We won't have to set up and tear down every service. And we'll go back to having a living room to living room church. Amen. We're not going to get focused on just having church services in a building.

We need to be out there evangelizing the city and taking the word of God to them and taking the gospel to where they are. Amen. And we need to be an uproar in this city. There has to be some effect that we have as Holy Ghost filled saints of God here to proclaim the truth in this city.

[19:17] There has to be some effect on the city. Amen. If we're to be doing our jobs correctly. Amen. And that Ephesian church had strong discipleship. Strong discipleship. Paul invested heavily in raising leaders.

In Acts chapter 20, when he met the Ephesian elders, he reminded them of his example when he started that church as a young church planner. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, the Bible says, and with many tears and temptations.

And then he charged them to take heed to all the flock. Then he warned them of the grievous wolves that would come, of false teachers. And so discipleship all through the Bible talking about Ephesus is important to the New Testament church plan in Ephesus.

And it included preparing leaders to protect and guide the church. And Paul was a strong leader, a faithful man of God that understood his role to be a good shepherd is to lead by example, to teach the word of God with boldness.

Amen. And you read his letters he sent to all the church plants, all those other epistles, like Corinthians, as I mentioned earlier. You read all those throughout the New Testament, but read the letter he sent to Ephesus.

[20:26] In the book of Ephesus, Paul's letter to his church plant in Ephesus while he sat in a prison in Rome waiting for him to be executed.

He was about to be beheaded for boldly preaching the gospel of Jesus in Rome. And he sent in the letter his last words to his church plant. And that's what is the book of Ephesians.

So you should read it sometimes. His last words to that church he planted in Ephesus were reminding them to know their identity. Don't forget that you are in Christ and Christ is in you and that you were born of the spirit.

Amen. And Paul was grounding their faith, giving them confidence in their calling, knowing that their identity was important. And reminding them they were the elected by God. God elected them.

God chose them. Somehow, someway, just like each and every one of us today. Somehow, someway, God has called us out of the world. And somehow, someway, we are here together serving the Lord together.

[21:24] And he was reminding them that they were elected by God and that they had a redemption. God had redeemed them and given them salvation. And a promise of his return and all these things.

And in that writing, that letter to them, it no doubt gave them confidence in their calling to continue their work in Ephesus. And not to look back to the old things that they left behind when they burned those idols and those magic books and whatever.

And it is in that letter to Ephesus' church plant that Paul reminds them in Ephesians 4.11. And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints.

And for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body of Christ. See, that's discipleship. It was very important to the New Testament church plant. That there would be the edifying of the body of Christ.

And it was in the letter to the church plant in Ephesus, Paul teaches about the whole armor of God. And writes in Ephesians 6 and 13, Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand.

[22:30] And the whole book of Ephesians, you really can break it down and teach a whole discipleship program just from the book of Ephesians. And so discipleship was important. Training up people to have spiritual disciplines was important to that church plant.

And to Paul, as a church planter, in this New Testament church in Houston, we will be a church that focuses on discipleship. Our discipleship has to be intensive.

It has to, you know, Ephesus had two years of daily teaching that was talked about. And that built a deep foundation. Our discipleship has to have a deep foundation. Our discipleship has to be spirit-led.

Our discipleship has to be transformative. In Ephesus, their converts literally burned their old lifestyles away to embrace the one true God. Amen. I can't wait to see the day when people come in here and they throw their packs of cigarettes on these altars or their vape pens on these altars. And in one instant, God touches them and they quit those kind of things. Amen. I can't wait to see the transformative things take place. The miracles that will take place in this church plant that we have here in Houston as lives are changed when they're introduced to the truth of God.

[23:45] Amen. In the Ephesian church, discipleship under Paul was full of teaching, spirit-filled living, and bold transformations. It wasn't just passive. Paul poured himself into it.

And the believers responded with radical faith. And for us today, it's a call to become disciples with depth. We have to be disciples with depth. We can't just be surface-level faith.

Amen. But we are to rely on the Spirit and to be disciples of Jesus Christ who will stand firm no matter what the costs are, no matter what we're faced with in life. Amen.

We're going to stand firm on this. We're going to have the whole armor of God. Amen. And if we have that in this New Testament church, we will be successful in building the kingdom of God here in Houston until Jesus returns for his New Testament church.

Amen. God, I thank you, Lord Jesus. I thank you, Lord Jesus. I thank you, Lord Jesus. You're a worthy Lord. You're a worthy Jesus. Amen. In the book of Revelation, we can find the apostle John writing a letter to the Ephesian church.

[24:50] And by this time, the original church planner, Paul, long had been executed in Rome. And Jesus is speaking in Revelation chapter 2, Revelation chapter 2, verse 1 through 4.

Jesus is speaking to John and telling him what to write to the church in Ephesus. And he says, And verse 4.

Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee. This is Jesus telling what to write unto the angel of the church of Ephesus. Verse 4. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Amen. Let's all stand. The Ephesian church has somehow left their first love. After all that they did. After all the successes. Somehow, Jesus is having to write to them.

Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. The Ephesian church can be looked at as an amazing New Testament church plant example. And they were.

Verse 3 says, I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience and how you can't bear them which are evil.

[26:36] He recognized their works. He recognized their labor. He recognized that they couldn't stand darkness in the world around them. And they stood up to that. He recognized all that. All good qualities for a New Testament church for sure.

But at the end of it all, they were accused by Jesus of leaving their first love. To me, that's so tragic. That the Ephesians church.

The Ephesians were a model church plant until they weren't. They were a model church plant until they weren't. They did everything right on the outside.

But in the end, Jesus saw their hearts. It had drifted away somehow. And what was it? I don't know, were they too caught up in the works of the labor?

They began to neglect their intimate relationship with God. Was it too much? Did they just get a routine of coming in and setting up and tearing down and going through the motions?

[27:32] I don't know what it was that caused them to begin to neglect that intimate relationship with God and just get focused on works too much. Amen. And did they get too distant from the mission and start focusing on themselves?

Did they feel like they arrived at some point? Did they feel like their services were big enough? Did they feel like they had enough people at some point? Did they stop evangelizing to their family? Did they stop evangelizing to the city around them?

I don't know. But that first love that they lost, it was most likely that initial passionate devotion that they had to Jesus. That zeal they had when they first believed.

And when they burned their idols in those books. And they took a stand against idolatry around them. And they passionately spread the gospel across their whole region. Amen.

And they truly had a heart on fire love for Jesus that drove their actions. And not just out of a sense of duty or responsibility, but out of a love for Jesus.

[28:35] That's what drove them. But over time, they drifted and they kept the machinery of the church running. And I see this in churches all around all the time. They just keep that machine running.

But they got the works and they got the labor. But the heart and the passion behind it all somehow cooled down. To the point that there was not even an ember of that Holy Ghost fire anymore.

Or that love for God and that love for Jesus. And they drifted away from that first love. And I want to invite you to take a self-evaluation right now.

Many of you are new to this. But there was a time when you first felt that spirit move. There was a time when you first felt that Holy Spirit. Amen. Some of you have recently received the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Some of you are still looking for that gift of the Holy Ghost. But let's take a moment to self-evaluate right now. Let's find a place to pray before you leave here today. And let's ask ourselves, are we still burning with our first love for Jesus?

[29:37] Am I on fire for God or am I not? And if I'm not, what do I need to do? Am I just caught in a routine somehow? But God doesn't want His people to be caught in a routine with Him. He wants to have an intimate relationship with them.

Amen. He wants you to have His Spirit inside of you. Look back to when your love for Jesus was fresh. You know, what was that? What was it that drew your heart to Him?

Was it His grace? Was it the Word of God? Was it His presence that you could feel in His services? And make sure that you still have that fire burning before you leave here today.

And if you find that you have drifted, then try to recapture that zeal and that first love that you had for Jesus. Amen. So I invite you today, before you leave this place today, let's find a place and pray. And ask God to bring us and draw us closer to Him. Amen. Amen. Amen.