

The Model Church

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Date: 05 February 2023

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 6 and verses 17 through 19, the model church, the model church.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

What is the Christian church? There are many possible answers to this question and many people will have different views. Maybe you're new to the church and you want to know what it is or at least what it should be. As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord of the church and through his life, death, and resurrection, he has created the church. The church isn't a human institution like a golf club or a national government. It is of divine origin. Luke, who wrote this gospel, also wrote the book of Acts where he charts the growth of the early church in the years immediately following Jesus' ascension into heaven. He wanted to ensure that the early church modeled itself on the life of Jesus, that Jesus should be its inspiration, its strength, and its example. And for that reason, he includes Luke 6 verses 17 to 19. He describes to the early church the various kinds of activities in which it should engage and how it should engage in them. Just as Jesus is head of the church, so the church must mirror

Jesus in everything it does. And what we discover, therefore, in Luke 6, 17 through 19 is a description of a model church based upon the example of Jesus.

This is the model of the church to which we aspire and which to which, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we try to be like. Be in mind that Jesus has just appointed 12 apostles to continue his mission after he was gone. These apostles would guide the early church in its formation and in its growth.

[2 : 34] And now Jesus is showing them the kind of activities in which his church is to engage. As we read through this passage, recounting for us Jesus' regular ministry, because this was nothing exceptional, this was his regular ministry, we learn the following five features of the model church.

Balance, audience, focus, conflict, and power. Balance, first of all. Balance.

Our passage begins in verse 17 with the words, Jesus had been on top of the mountain and had spent the whole night in prayer and then chosen 12 disciples whom he then named apostles. Now he comes down from the mountain to engage with the crowds.

He was on top of the mountain and now he and his apostles have come down to a plateau. So we have this balance. Jesus on the mountaintop in prayer to God and fellowship with his apostles and Jesus on a plateau with a diverse crowd of needy people.

He always perfectly struck this balance between being wholly committed to a holy God and wholly committed to a sinful people. Jesus was both spiritual and social, heavenly and earthly, pious and practical.

[4 : 31] The cross on which he died is the ultimate demonstration of both his love for God and for his people. The church which he created must strive to achieve this balance in all its activities because there are dangers on either side.

On one hand, a church which is always on the mountaintop with God and never on the plateau with needy people and never on the mountaintop with God is powerless and doesn't have a gospel to proclaim, which is the ultimate solution to human need.

So the model church strikes that balance between the spiritual and the social, the heavenly and the earthly, the pious and the practical.

Its life doesn't consist in one long series of worship services, Bible studies, prayer meetings. Neither does its life consist in one long list of ways in which it serves the community by helping people out of poverty, by lobbying politicians on moral issues and spearheading environmental initiatives.

The model church is balanced in one long list of ways in which it is. The moral church is balanced in its activities just like our Lord and Master was here in Luke 6. There must be a spiritual element.

There must be times on the mountaintop where we enjoy the heavenly presence of God and fellowship with other Christians.

[6 : 13] But there must also be the practical element, times where we engage with the community in which God has placed us, expressing Christ's self-giving love in acts of service.

The early church took up this challenge. Not only did they meet every day for prayer, teaching, and the Lord's Supper, but they also instituted a new office in the church called deacon, the job description of which was to meet practical need, to feed the hungry, to manage the financial resources of the church.

So healthy churches strike that balance between the spiritual and the social, recognizing that Christ's love cannot be kept to ourselves. It must be expressed in good works so that God has prepared for us already.

The church here in Luke 6, 17 through 19, is a balanced church. That's the first thing. Balance. Second, audience.

Audience. Now the very early Christian church was monocultural. It was solely made up of Jewish Christians.

[7 : 32] As time went on, it diversified. Not only were there Jewish Christians from outside the borders of Israel proper, but Gentile Christians began to be recognized. Soon after, the church became entirely as diverse as the communities in which it was found.

There were male and female, slave and free, poor and rich, able-bodied and physically challenged. It took time for the apostolic leadership of the church to understand this was always the way Jesus had intended it to be.

In fact, one of the reasons that Luke wrote this gospel was to encourage the understanding that a church is always to be as diverse as the society in which it is found. So, in these verses, Luke provides us with the evidence of the kind of audiences with which Jesus dealt.

In the first instance, Luke wants us to understand the size of Jesus' following. The size of his following. He talks about a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people.

As we've already seen from Jesus' interactions with individual people, Jesus was always interested in the small. But he was always interested also in the big.

[8 : 55] Albeit, at this stage, Jesus was at the height of his popularity and his time would go on and his followers were called to suffer for him. His following decreased.

But he always envisaged that his church would be big. So, the early church grew rapidly across the entire Roman Empire until it became highly numerous.

In general, in Presbyterianism, we have settled for the deceitful mantra that small is beautiful.

But when it comes to the church of Christ in its totality, we're not talking small. Look out over the world today and try to count the number of Christians.

Like that famous scene in the Hollywood film, Jaws. You're going to need a bigger calculator. In the second instance, Luke wants us to understand the diversity of Jesus' following in terms of its commitment.

[10 : 02] Some were apostles. Some were disciples. Others were those who had just come to hear him speaking and watch him working. The apostles were those 12 men Jesus had chosen the day before on top of the mountain.

We don't know how many disciples Jesus had, but Luke tells us there was a great crowd of them. They were more generally followers of Jesus, but perhaps were not as committed to him as the apostles were.

And then there was a multitude of people who were experiencing Jesus for the first time. So, in terms of level of commitment, there was a variety in Jesus' audience.

That's the way it was in the early church. That's the way it is today. Every church has a committed core, circling around which are those who are committed to Christ, but not quite so involved.

And then there is the peripheral fringe whose experience of Christ is perhaps maybe not quite as deep. The aim of any church is always inward movement.

[11 : 08] For those on the fringe to become disciples. And for disciples to become apostles. But then in the third instance here, Luke wants us to understand the diversity of Jesus' following in terms of its variety.

Its variety. Some were from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religion and power. Others were from Judea in general. And still others from the regions of Tyre and Sidon to the north.

Some were affluent. Others were poor. Some were Jewish. Some were more Jewish than others. Some commentators believe that those who are described here as being from Tyre and Sidon may have been Gentiles.

But the point is this. They weren't all the same kind of people. As you work your way through Luke and Acts, we discover that the early church was an incredibly diverse community.

There were Roman centurions and there were Jewish slaves. There were business women. There were beggars. And there were beggars. There were blacks. There were whites.

[12:13] That's the way Christ intended it to be. The Free Church's mission director, David Meredith, often talks of how he'd like the Free Church of Scotland to be darker and poorer.

Because in general, our church is fairly monocultural. But this is the diversity to which we must aspire as a church.

People of all sorts. To be a reflection of the community we serve. But lastly, under this point, Luke wants us to understand the common thread which links all these diverse groups together.

Their need. Their need. They came to bring to Jesus their sick relatives and friends. They were all, in one way or another, damaged goods.

These huge crowds who followed Jesus about were expressions of human pain and need. And they followed him because they saw in him the answer.

[13:16] The early church was not to dismiss those who came to it with need. Rather, it was to encourage them to find in Jesus and his gospel comfort and hope. The common thread which links every one of us in this building here this morning, and every one of us who's watching this online, is that we're coming to Christ from a position not of strength, but of weakness.

It may not be physical or mental, but it most certainly is spiritual. We are alienated from God. We're without hope and without him in this world. Rich or poor, prominent or unknown, we come to him as beggars, every one of us stooping low to receive from him his mercy.

We're all damaged, every one of us here, in our own ways. But there's good news. We're those for whom the gospel exists.

It's good for our churches to be the spiritual cleavage of one flew over the cuckoo's nest, because it's the way our Lord intended it to be. When it comes to the church, monoculture is bad.

Christ calls us to aspire towards a growing, healthy, numerous body of Christians which boasts great diversity linked by our common need of Jesus.

[14:48] This is the audience to which he ministered and the church community we aspire to be. Audience.

Balance audience. Third, focus. Focus. We read about Jesus that the reason the great crowd followed him was so that they might hear him and be healed from their illnesses.

The words and works of Jesus were always tightly connected in his public ministry. He spoke and he acted. He proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God both by word and by work.

He preached good news to the poor and he made the sick whole. He proclaimed freedom for the captive and by his miracles, he released those imprisoned by their various illnesses.

He gave the blinders sight. He made the lame walk. Here then we have this focus on Jesus' ministry. Word and work.

[15:53] Earlier on we spoke of the balance between Jesus on the mountaintop and Jesus on the plateau. Between Jesus' piety and his practicality.

And we saw how the church is to balance his activities between being turned inward and being turned outward. Now we see another balance at work in the ministry of Jesus and therefore the focus of our ministry.

The church must aspire to imitate the balance of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the gospel of his name, both by good words and good works, by speech and by service, by preaching and by healing.

And just like before we face dangers on either side, do we not? If the church focuses merely on oral proclamation, it will lack credibility.

Why should anyone believe a message about the love of Christ if Christians aren't meeting the practical needs of those that message is being proclaimed to?

[17:05] The church's practical expressions of the love of Christ authenticate its message. But on the other side, a church which merely focuses upon the social aspect of meeting need has no message to proclaim.

How does a church which meets the need of the community but doesn't talk about Jesus differ from a government agency or the social work department?

But place the two side by side. The oral proclamation of the gospel of Christ and the practical expression of Christ's love for those on the outside and we begin to imitate the powerful ministry of our Lord.

One of the reasons the early church grew so quickly was because it had a passion for both the spiritual and social. It fed the hungry. It preached good news.

It authenticated the message of Christ by loving its needy neighbor. This is the kind of church we must aspire to be. A church known throughout our city for its powerful and orthodox proclamation of the gospel of Christ and for its passionate love for the peoples of Glasgow expressed in ministries of mercy to those in great need.

[18 : 34] That's what made Thomas Chalmers' experiment such a success in the early 19th century East End of Glasgow. He and his church met both the spiritual and earthly needs of those who lived in his parish round about the Trongate.

I wonder whether we in our church could have a similar impact on Glasgow today. Focus. Fourth, conflict.

Conflict. Throughout the previous chapters we've frequently read of Jesus' encounters with those possessed by evil spirits.

This was a prominent feature of Jesus' ministry, his conflict with evil. He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. He exercised his unclean spirits. And now in Luke 6.18 special mention is made of those whom he healed who had come to him with unclean spirits.

The holiness of Jesus was a magnet which drew forth the opposition of the devil. The devil threw everything at Jesus, tried to derail Jesus from his mission of saving grace, kill the general, and the victory will be Satan's, strike the shepherd, and Jesus' sheep will scatter.

[19 : 59] Jesus' encounters, either directly or indirectly with evil, form a significant portion of his ministry of course we know that in Jesus' case he was always victorious, always victorious.

Nothing the devil could send against him could stand. Even the cross upon which the devil thought he had won the victory became the weapon of his defeat and the mark of Jesus' triumph.

The early church was also marked by conflict. As in years to come, we work our way through the book of Acts. Christians are persecuted by Jews and Gentiles alike.

No, we're safe. Wherever they go, there's always opposition. Sometimes that opposition turned violent, as in the case of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Christians were driven out of Jerusalem, scattered over the whole Roman Empire.

Their possessions were confiscated, their reputations destroyed. And Luke, writing under the influence of the Apostle Paul, wants the early church to know you are in a spiritual war.

[21 : 06] But all these conflicts you'll face ultimately have their source in the malice and hatred of Satan for your Lord. Paul will later write, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Today's church in Great Britain doesn't face the same kind of opposition the early church faced at the hands of the Jews. Nevertheless, we are mocked and our viewpoints dismissed as medieval, naive, and irrelevant.

In other parts of the world, the church is persecuted. Even today, this very day, 5th of April, 5th of February, 2023, hundreds of Christians will be killed in our world for no other reason than that they are followers of Jesus.

The true Christian church will never win the favor of the world around it because we challenge its fundamental worldview. If the world hated Christ, the world will hate Christ's church also.

we don't need to go looking for it. The sooner we realize that we're in a spiritual battle, just like Jesus was, the better. Conflict.

[22 : 30] And then lastly, power. Power. Our passage concludes on a rather strange note. And all the crowd came to touch him for power came out from him and healed them all.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, who in another place is called the Spirit of Power, had the power to heal all those who came to him in faith. What the NHS could not do for all its amazing skill and heroic care, Jesus did, even as people came to touch him.

Suppose there had been such a thing as hospitals back then. It would be like Jesus walking down a nightingale ward, healing every single patient. Here's the great power of Jesus at work, undoing the carnage of sin.

We've seen him doing it before in the Gospel of Luke. He'll do it again. Likewise, after he'd gone into heaven, he gave power to his apostles to heal in his name. Think of the lame beggar at the gate, beautiful Nate preached on a few months ago, of how in the name of Jesus, Peter healed him. The early church had its share of healers. The later church, even unto today, does not possess the same healers as did the early church.

[23 : 52] No doubt there are miraculous healings, but those who claim to be healers fall far short of Jesus' standards, lest the wards and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital on the south side should be emptied of all their patients.

But what the church does have, in just the same measure as Jesus and his apostles, even more so perhaps, is the power of the proclamation of the word.

This is the church's power. The power of the gospel to change lives. And it does. As the word is faithfully preached and the Holy Spirit is poured out upon its listeners, hearts once dead to the truth of the grace of God and the cross of Christ come alive.

Hearts blinded by sin and Satan are miraculously opened by the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit comes, it's like he switches on a light in our minds.

What once made no sense now makes ultimate sense. What once was of no relevance at all becomes the most important thing in the world to us. The grace of God and the cross of Christ becomes the most valuable of possessions and the offer of forgiveness and new life through faith in Jesus Christ is hungrily accepted.

[25 : 26] I've seen it happening in our church. Right in front of my eyes. I remember one student who came from a very devout Roman Catholic background. Perhaps it was her second time in our church and our previous minister to overseas students the excellent Finley McKenzie was sympathetically reading through Matthew's account of Jesus' crucifixion.

He was reading it with great expression. I was watching this girl and in the blink of an eye you could tell her heart had been opened to the reason for the cross and her need for personal salvation.

And there and then while Finley was still reading she committed her life to Jesus Christ. This is the power our church wields today. A power greater than the cheap magic tricks of revival meetings where if a healer fails to heal someone the disappointed victim is accused of having too little faith. the church wields genuine power the mighty spirit filled proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ which once for all wipes away all our sins and gives us eternal life free of charge just for the asking. the great challenge for us of course is to bring our sin sick friends and our sin dead and friends to hear this good news of Jesus so that not merely the ones or twos come but the great crowds like those who were with Jesus back then in Luke 6.

[27 : 10] Let's ask ourselves the question who can I invite to church to experience the power of the touch of Jesus through the proclamation of his word.

Think of that person right now in your mind and begin to pray for an opportunity to invite them to come. Perhaps perhaps there are some among us who who have not yet experienced the powerful touch of Jesus Christ in your life.

forgiving sin bringing hope. Isn't it about time that you reached out and touched Jesus? Isn't it about time?

You can speak to me after the service if you want to do that today. I'll be in the small room the back of the church here where the Bible study where the Bible class meets or over coffee.

But do not delay. Come now. So this was the ministry of Jesus it's to be our ministry also. This is to be the description of the church.

[28 : 22] Balance audience focus conflict and power how big a challenge it is for us in our church. But knowing that you know we'll never get everything right.

No church gets everything right. Let's commit ourselves to pray for God's power Christ's presence and the Holy Spirit's dynamism to work among us.

And then let's get cracking on becoming the kind of church Christ wants us to be. Dios and do the to be the word Christ.