

Planting the First 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: 07 May 2023

Preacher: Pastor Tim Goble

[0 : 00] Well, we're starting a series, we started last week with a series on the Acts of the Apostles, alright? Some call it the Acts of the Church, other names, Acts of the Holy Spirit.

But turn with me in your Bibles to that first chapter, and we want to read the first 14 verses together. If you have a similar version, you're on page 1160.

I'll bet there isn't one person that has the same that I have. 1160. Let's stand together in reverence to the Lord Jesus as we read the verses together.

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which he was taken up after he, through the Holy Spirit, had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.

To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

[1 : 22] And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, you have heard from me.

For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. When they, therefore, were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, will thou this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?

And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times of the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.

But you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the earth. And when he had spoken these things while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven?

[2 : 45] Then, this same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner, as you have seen him go into heaven.

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Oliver, which is from Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus, and Simon, the zealot, and Judas, the son of James.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Father, we have been flooded with such familiar terms.

And in the redundancy of hearing them over and over again, the meaning has slipped away from us. And I pray that through the power of your word, you would refresh us this morning.

[4 : 11] Help us understand the church from your perspective. Father, may you speak to us through the word of God, and may because of it, our lives be changed.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. You may be seated. I don't know if I woke up this morning and thought this would be a good Sunday just to throw out questions.

But if I was to ask you, what does YMCA stand for?

Or what is the thought that comes to your mind when you hear that? What comes to mind? What? What? What was that, Mason?

Young Men's Christian Academy. It's actually Young Men's Christian Association. Okay? He would have gotten, you know, three or four other words right. But at lots of times when we hear that, we think, so where's the gym?

[5 : 32] That's where we go work out, right? It's been used, and it got started about 1844. It got started in England. And we hear YMCA all the time.

But if you were to walk into a YMCA, you would be at a loss to find how it was named actually being instructed or carried out in any way in any YMCA throughout our entire country.

And as you think about that, you think, why is the term so common to us, and we really don't know what it even means? Well, YMCA is just one of many things that we use so commonplace today.

And for the most part, we don't know what it means. With streets of Colville marked by church after church after church, there's the last I counted, there's a little over 30 churches in Colville.

And for a town that's, you know, 4,500, we're pushing it a little bit with the number of churches. If you just divided out the people. But when we think about church, lots of different ideas come into our mind as to what in the world a church is.

[6 : 53] And because churches are on every corner, we look at church being a building. And all kinds of weird things happen in some churches, we think.

By the way, it's weird if it's another church. But when other people come to your church, so to speak, they consider where you go as being someplace unusual.

That was a nice way of putting it. The realization is that we throw around lots of words, and we've never really done our homework to find out how they began and what they meant.

Even with something so familiar with us as the word church. As you go through school, there are several classes that you might struggle with.

We saw last week how important it was for us to know the history of the church. And as we think about history, some of you tuned out as soon as I said the word history.

[8 : 01] History can be knowing things about history. Or it could mean understanding why that history ought to be important to us.

Or it could be wisely that because this happened, I should be doing that. Okay? The same thing is true with math.

You learn facts about numbers. The problem is, as you grow up, you wonder why in the world you ever need to know those facts.

Why do I need to know multiplication? Why do I need, I'll never use it. As we grow older, we understand why it's helpful to know that information.

And some of us down the road might even pursue an occupation where numbers are absolutely vital like an accountant. It becomes your livelihood.

[9 : 05] As we think about those three terms, many of you have been in your quiet times this week. And we've been going through Proverbs, the first three chapters there in Proverbs.

And there's three words that Solomon, as the wisest man who ever lived, keeps confronting us with. And those three words are knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

And lots of times we have in our minds, they kind of all mean the same thing. If they meant those same things, why in the world does Solomon spell those out repeatedly all the way through the book?

Knowledge, as you see on your outline, is the reception of information into the mind. It's stuff going in there. Now, as information goes in there, when I was in school, I had the ability for information to go in there and stay in there for a very defined short amount of time.

And then it was gone. My mind would immediately store the facts. Now, I didn't understand why in the world, except for passing a test, as to why I needed to know this stuff.

[10 : 19] But I could memorize it. Hopefully, through a good teacher, the facts are not just shared.

The knowledge. But understanding is given by the instructor as to why it's important for us to know this. Whether it's our country. Why is it important for us to know the history of this country?

We could see how it applies to lots of different things. But wisdom is that I'm going to take the knowledge of that and do something with it right now.

So Solomon says, everybody's open for knowledge. And some are open to stick around for little understanding.

But he begins and says, but wisdom cries out on the street. And nobody wants to implement wisdom. It yells on the street and everybody just walks past it.

[11 : 22] It's okay for us to know things. Okay for us to kind of understand why it's a good thing to know things. But as far as implementing what it is I know, well, maybe someday I will.

You see, wisdom means I'm going to take something today and implement it as a result of something I've been taught. That is always the way you ought to approach God's word. God's going to give us information there. And we're going to be able to understand why it's important for us to know this information. But God is looking for wisdom that I will take the information in and do something with it.

And in fact, the Holy Spirit will prick my heart and show me what to do with the information that he has given us. And so as we get into the book of Acts, we saw last week that Acts is really half of another volume.

That if you went back in time, the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were joined together in just one book.

[12:33] Both halves of the book were written to a man named Theophilus, whose name meant friend of God. We talked a little bit about him last week.

And so as we look at this volume and we're looking at those three words, what is the gospel of Luke all about?

Look with me at verse 1. The former treatise. What is he talking about there? He's talking about the gospel of Luke that he just got done penning.

Have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach. In other words, the gospel was written, O Theophilus, to teach you all about who Jesus is, what Jesus did, and why it's important to you.

That's why the gospel of Luke is there. By the way, as you're studying key ideas here, of the four gospels, Luke is the one gospel that talks more about discipleship than the other three books combined.

[13:48] And so as you think about this, I want you to think that if you were to page through the gospel of Luke, it is like looking at an album full of snapshots of the life of Christ about how he came down here, how he lived his life, why he went to the cross, why is that important, and why does this information need to get out to everybody?

Those are all snapshots that you'll find in the gospel of Luke. So right off the bat, we're thankful for the information that the gospel of Luke gives us, but how do we know they did anything with this information?

And under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke says, I'm glad you asked that question, because Luke is what they did with this information. In other words, Acts is all about wisdom.

It's all about taking knowledge, understanding why it's important to all of us, and doing something with it. And so as we get into Acts, it is going to provide for us the doing part of the information, or we call it the wisdom part.

So knowledge, understanding, the gospel of Luke, Acts, the wisdom of doing. Now as we think about how that's all going to come in the gospel of Luke, he talked often about discipleship.

[15:31] It is there that we understand what discipleship's all about. Discipleship is all about introducing people to the Lord Jesus Christ, and challenging them to make a choice to put Jesus Christ in charge of their life, seeking his forgiveness for everything that they've ever done that Christ willingly offers to pay for at the cross.

Now that's the first step of discipleship, but what's the second? The second step then is coming together in a local body of believers so that we could be taught how to obey all things whatsoever this Jesus discussed in the gospel of Luke, how we can obey what he told us to do.

And Acts is going to help us with that. But he's going to challenge us. He is going to take the second step of discipleship by getting us immersed in the word of God.

And as we come together to be immersed in the word of God, it will take place within this new idea called the church.

Now, they were never called churches prior to this time. This is a new concept. But remember that the final step is pouring lives into individuals one-on-one so that this story gets out long after you're gone.

[17:10] Once again, the avenue is all channeled through a local church. Why this is such a spectacular strategy that wherever there are people on this planet, it's the potential place for a church to be.

And from that church, what are they going to hear? Number one, how they can be right with God. Secondly, they'll go and be instructed on obedience to whatever the Lord Jesus tells us to do.

And third, they'll start caring about people to build their life one-on-one into the lives of somebody else. And it all happens wherever there are people on the face of the earth.

As you think about this thing called the church, basically, Ekklesia just means a organized, called-together people. That's all the Greek word means.

An organized, called-together people. And as you think about this term called church, it's really important that when you come to this church, that it is not Tim's church, that it is not our church, but that it is what?

[18 : 32] His church. You see, whose church it is dictates what the church will do.

Whose church it is dictates what the church will do. Why is this so important in the first chapter?

Because God is going to etch into the minds of these individuals that it's never going to be your church, Peter. It's never going to be your church, Paul. It's never going to be your church, John. It's going to be God's church.

And when it's his church, then rather there be conflict with each other, I didn't get my way, you have to understand that when you gave your life to Christ, you surrendered your rights to Jesus Christ, and you put him in charge.

So when we come together and it's his church, we want him to tell us what to do. It's not where we go to get people to do what I want to.

[19 : 49] Lots of people say, well, I want to go to this church because it's got the youth, it's got the children, it's got this, this, or that. God's church is committed from little tykes to retired folk of pointing him to Jesus Christ of all ages.

That's what Jesus said he came to do in the gospel of Luke. He came to this world to seek and to save that which was lost.

Okay, now, if that's Christ's purpose and the church belongs to Christ, then that has to be channeling what it is we do when we come together.

As I said before, we're struggling oftentimes with the importance of church. Think about it, and this just happened recently in the statistics.

The United States is now a country where less than half of the entire population goes anywhere to any kind of church.

[21 : 03] That just happened. We now are following exclusively in the tracks of England, of all of Europe.

It was interesting that some of you might have seen the coronation of the new king, and they were talking about why it would not be attended as much as other coronations in the history of England, and it was all because the coronation was supposed to be in its entirety a religious experience, and England is not religious anymore.

So then you have to have somebody explain all the way through what's going on. So as you think about churches and individuals going to church, that the numbers in this country are going way down, and it's all been in the last 20 years.

Not only are people attending church less, but denominations are fracturing and splintering in every kind of direction.

We always thought that a denomination would hold everybody together. But now, church after church breaks away from a denomination, and we're seeing this happen all across the country in every denomination, religious denomination in this country.

[22 : 32] And we ask ourselves with less than half the people going to church and with the denominations of churches fracturing, what did Jesus pray for the church?

That they might be one as we are one, as he talked to the Father. Everything that Christ prayed for isn't happening today.

So is something wrong with a model or the perception of what the church is ought to be? You know, some of you have Bible dictionaries.

I'd encourage you for any topical study to use Bible dictionaries. But as I went through several different characteristics here that are unique to a church from a biblical perspective, first of all, God goes out of his way in 1 Corinthians 3.11 It is Christ who founded the church.

Nobody else. It wasn't an apostle. It wasn't a great church leader. It wasn't Billy Graham or anybody else.

[23 : 47] The Lord Jesus Christ established the church. So any thought that we have has to begin with church is his idea and he founded it.

Now, once we know that, then we have a framework to go. So what is this church supposed to look like? And if we understand what it's supposed to look like, then we can ask the question, are we one?

Makes sense, doesn't it? So Christ is the founder. Notice that the scripture is always attached with each one so that you can look that up later.

The founder sends the Holy Spirit to activate the church. You see, we're going to church because they got this style of music or they have this kind of entertainment or they got this kind of program or the pastor preaches sermonettes.

Whatever it is, we have, we're looking for promotions, we're looking for entertainment, we're doing all kinds of things because in essence, we want the church to be about us and Christ says the church has to be about him.

[25 : 01] So right off the bat, we've got a problem with church. It is the Holy Spirit that activates the church that gives its power to do the kind of things that we're going to read about as we study the book of Acts.

Now, not only is Christ the founder, but the founder sends the Holy Spirit to activate the church. It's been said the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to create people of God.

Let me say that again. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to create people of God. In Acts and in Ephesians, Christ, the founder, is called the cornerstone.

Now, we don't know much about cornerstones anymore today either, so lots of times we struggle with understanding that. But a cornerstone was always the starting place of any structure.

It's where everything begins. It marks it out on the property. It not only sets forth the dimensions of the structure, but the depth or the height of the structure, and everything is measured from the cornerstone.

[26 : 35] Do you see why it's such a beautiful parallel of Christ? Everything goes back to Jesus. Jesus. That's what measures everything. What we do, where we go, there's lots of things that churches do that are very, very good.

The question is, is it the best thing? What does Christ think? I know what I would like, but what would Christ think since it's His? Christ says everything needs to find its way back to this.

So when Christ says, I came to seek and to save that which was lost, we need to ask big questions like this. If we have a great children's program, are children getting saved?

Or do we just count the numbers? If we have a youth program, are young people giving their life to Christ? Or do we just have the numbers?

You see, the world and oftentimes Christians are satisfied with just the numbers, and yet no new births are taking place. the same is true for young adults, the same is true for middle adults, and elderly folk.

[27 : 45] The gospel is directed toward every human being because God says, I so loved the world.

I love everybody, and 1 Peter reminds me, he's not slack concerning his promises, unwilling that any should perish. church. He wants everybody to come to know Christ, and if he's the founder of the church, then we need to look at what God is doing in the church, because nothing brings him more honor and glory than for somebody to surrender their life to Christ.

When you think about the people just this last week that gave their life to Christ, do you have any idea about the pandemonium that's happening in heaven? Why? Because the church functioned as Christ set up the church to function, and everything comes back to the cornerstone as far as measuring effectiveness.

It's interesting if you go to Hebrews 6.1. I'll turn there, but I know you're so much quicker on your phones, right?

I just want you to know I just beat you all. Hebrews 6.1. Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection or completion, not laying again the foundation of repentance.

[29 : 17] What is the foundational thing that makes me a part of an organized, called-together people? He says, it's repentance.

We go to church and we actually think that by going to church somehow, that's going to get us to heaven. That maybe the goodness will outweigh the badness, and if I give money to church, and if I attend the church, and if I even take the time to learn a few songs, then certainly I'll go to heaven

because I'm certainly better off than somebody else.

Notice what he says here. the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God. First of all, I need to put my faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to save me from my sin.

When you need to be saved, it means you're lost. Lost in Scripture does not mean that you've been misplaced somewhere.

No, we just lost it. The loss that he's talking about is something that has been forfeited. We have forfeited our standing with a holy God when we sin and go our own way, and we've been doing it since birth.

[30 : 43] So no amount of good works can save me. I have got to put faith that Jesus paid it as almighty God at the cross and invite him in verbally making a commitment with the understanding that I'm inviting Jesus in, and Jesus is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He has to be in charge. And he says, if that understanding isn't there, then you don't even have the foundation of a church on the inside.

It's the absolute bedrock. Great ministers of today have claimed that they firmly believe that a third to half of their congregation that come every week to church have never surrendered their life to Christ.

As we look at this whole idea here, Christ is spelling out for us that repentance is the bottom line. In fact, again, in the gospel of Luke, we find in chapter 13, without repentance, there is no salvation. Turns right around two verses later and says the same thing all over again.

[32 : 06] The Lord isn't wasting print. God's He's reinforcing how important that is for a called-together people to be a called-together people where each one has placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, turning from being in charge of their life and putting Christ in charge.

Now, not only as we look at Christ being the founder having repentance as his foundation, notice also with Matthew 16, 18, remember Jesus is talking to Peter and he says, Peter, upon Petros or Petra.

You see, Peter means Petros and that means rock. But you know what Petra means?

Big rock. Peter, you've stepped forward and you've been in leadership already and you're a nice stone. That's wonderful, Peter.

But the church is going to be built on the rock. And who alone claims to be the rock? Christ alone.

[33 : 37] Remember, he tells the little story about those who build in the sand versus those who build on the rock. And so those that go back, just knowing how the word ends tells us and clears up for us a myth that has been practiced for centuries.

Peter, you are a stone. But the church will be built on the rocks, the rock, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Wow. What a statement. Well, it goes on. The founder dictates the requirements for leadership. It's not a popularity contest. It's not about somebody who gives a lot of money to church.

It's not somebody who was a charter member or something. Leadership requires godliness, faithfulness, and servanthood.

Now, the nice thing about that is that any man can meet those three. People say, well, you know, being an elder or something like that, that's just for a few people.

[34 : 50] No, no, no. The requirements for being an elder are the same requirements for being a godly man. God makes it available for anybody to step up, in his leadership, and he provides the checklist in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3.

And then the founder also grows the church. By the way, he doesn't grow it by stealing other sheep from someplace else. It says in Acts chapter 2 and then Acts chapter 5 and then Acts chapter 6, and God added to the church daily those who are coming to know Christ.

God grew the church. How big? Well, this church starts out with 120 people, and when Peter gets done, there's 3,000.

Can you imagine? Let's see, we need a planning meeting here. We've got some real big problems on our hands because we had 120 and we knew everybody. I've had people say, Tim, you know, I want to go to a little church where I know everybody.

Unfortunately, God didn't set out for you to know everybody. He did count out for you to know some people, but in the very first church, they had 3,000 dropped on them.

[36 : 13] And then you read later and it says 5,000 men. How about their wives and kids? We're talking a huge church.

And guess what happens with this church? The gates of hell are not prevailing against it. It's exploding out of the block. It's not going downhill. It's not fracturing or anything else. It's taking off. And that's what God calls his church to look like. He even tells you when you come to church, you're going to get fed. So let's look at several things that come to a head as we go through these verses together. Remember, he's giving us knowledge so that we understand why this is important with the outcome being we'll wisely plug in and act upon this information. So what do we see? If you're in Hebrews, find your way back to Acts. If you stayed in Acts, wait till I get back there. Several things stand out about what they, the church, needed to believe that are spelled out here.

[37 : 40] Notice with me in verse 3, to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

Do you know what they needed to understand right off the bat? That the gospel includes not only the death, burial, but the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He proved, Theophilus, to everybody that he arose from the grave and if he arose from the grave, so are we going to rise from the dead. So the first thing they had to buy into is that's why Christ went to the cross. And then later on in that same verse pertaining to the kingdom of God, that Christ wasn't at that particular time building a physical kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom, where Christ isn't going to rule over a geographical region, he's going to rule over our hearts.

That was a major revelation to the disciples and they're grasping that as this little congregation of 120 people are coming together. They also look with me at verse 8, the eminent power that soon would be available to them, the Holy Spirit.

You see, left to themselves, the church is going to fall flat on its face as any other organization would. But he says this is going to be energized, equipped by the Holy Spirit.

[39 : 26] There will be when you give your life to Christ an eternal mechanism that takes place because the Holy Spirit will dwell inside you and what he's going to teach you is what you need to know about Jesus.

And then the assurance of Christ come again in verses 9 through 11. The same way you saw him leave is exactly how he's going to come back.

You've got to believe that Jesus is coming back. what a powerful thing. Gives us a sense of urgency not only of how we're living our lives but a sense of urgency of the network of people we know who have yet to put their faith and trust in Christ.

Time is running out. Now there's another thing that emerges in verses 12 through 14 to draw your attention to. They had to believe and then act.

in each other. As we think about what verse 15 says that there are 120 men and women and when you go and look at verse 14 and you see who they are the apostles are there that's nice.

[40 : 46] The commoner who had put their faith and trust in Christ that's nice. Women were there people say the Bible is against women. God mentions the very first church and tells us and Jesus' mother is attending this church.

So are other women. And then it says and his brethren. This was the group of people that thought Jesus was nuts. His brothers like James and Jude now have come to know Christ and they're meeting there.

Now look at the potential conflict you have. Blood relationship over here. Apostles over there. Who's going to tell who what to do? You see if it is his church we come together and ask what he wants done rather than what we want done.

So they came together in the first church. As we look at that six different times he talks about them coming together. it's almost like he knew what was going to happen today doesn't it?

See we believe today that you don't need to go to church. How many times do you run up and be like well I don't need to go to church at least not every week or anything. If it's really important I catch it on you know whatever it is we yeah phone or internet or something any of your tech devices of which I'm very familiar with that I can always catch it on that and I even have people say and God never said command us to go to church wrong again but if I don't know the scripture see I don't know that my friend in Hebrews 10 25 he not only commands you to church but he tells you why to come to church because time's running out and you need to be further equipped to make Jesus known to your circle of friends but secondly a body of believers are all made up just like you they

have faults they have cracks

[43 : 03] Vulcans and they need to be encouraged in the midst of conflict you you are not going to know who needs to be encouraged by staying home you don't even know who they are it is in when we come together that's why coming together say well church didn't start for another two minutes I got two more minutes no come early and dare take the risk to talk somebody and then dare we say stay afterwards a few minutes so you can talk to some people and get past hi how are you and walk away you know when we say hi how are you we don't even stick around to hear what their answer is we're already on somebody else God says I want you to come together you need to encourage each other and you can't do it from your living room church is not a spectator's board it requires participants and say well I'm not really important

I don't teach anything or anything else my friend your great ministry for each and every one of us here no matter where your giftedness lies is to be a blessing and encourage how can I serve somebody around me and they are all around you all the time but you're not going to hear if you're not rubbing shoulders with them and then look at verse 14 and they all continued with one accord here's that word again all of them and what are they doing praying how many times do we hear the importance of coming together as a church family corporately to pray together just a fragment a tiny fragment of our church comes together to pray people sit back and they say you know Tim I'd really come around if I saw 3,000 people get saved some

Sunday when we pray we ask God to do down here what he's already doing up there when we don't see God doing down here what he's doing up there it's because we are acting in our own strength trying to accomplish church and everything else in our own strength and so God backs away and lets us flounder always willing to step back into the equation when we gather together to pray people say well if I had known something like that happened why doesn't somebody tell me you know what it's shared openly in every prayer meeting that's how we find out how to draw alongside other people Sunday school is another great format a small group setting where you get to hear but the key that are saying here is prayer and when my friend when you acknowledge your dependence on the

Lord which is what prayer is then God does things people can't do and that's our hope for his church that meets on 851 South Minor we are not interested in what we can do we are interested in what he can do it's his church and we want to acknowledge our total dependence on him to pull it off because God says notice that right off the bat there's!

to God to God to God to God to to God to God to■■■■ want to.

[48 : 16] But God prioritizes because every one of us are special to him. And God wants to use each and every one of us to work through, to draw alongside somebody else. To be a blessing to it. Do you know when they start telling us their problems, you know what we tend to do?

We tell them bigger problems that we have. That's really an encouragement to them, isn't it? You had this one. That's nothing compared to what I went through. And they walk around, why in the world did I even open my mouth?

Encourage just simply means giving somebody else courage. Sometimes it's just putting your arm around an old child and reminding that old child what it means to you to hear them hide God's word in their heart.

It could be a little child with tears rolling down his face and letting him know how special that child is to you. When we grow older, we have the same aches and pains that a little child has, only we've learned to cover them.

And God says the body of Christ is absolutely vital to every one of us, and we've got to come together so that we can be the encouragement to move forward.

[49 : 38] Secondly, do you understand, which is the second word Solomon keeps pointing to, why the local church is God's only provision for saving the world? Some of you might say, well, Tim, you know, that's kind of radical.

Show me one scenario where anybody has come to know Christ after Christ left this world. Show me one case case where anybody has come to Christ apart from the local church.

When you think about it, it may not have been at a church youth group, it may not have been at VBS, it may not have been in some of the structure of a local church, but where do you think people go to be equipped to tell somebody else about Jesus?

A local church. Where do they hear about the importance of praying for somebody who has not given their life to Christ? The local church. You know, it's really special just because I've been here

so long.

I remember the prayer group was meeting here. And there was an individual in the prayer group was praying for parents and for siblings that were lost.

[51 : 01] And I, at that particular time, would rotate and go from one prayer group to the other. And I so looked forward to, and this went on for years. I don't know, maybe they ought to give up on that one.

The dad of that family is now an elder of this church. As you think about the faithfulness of coming together to pray, God equips us and challenges us that if he is long-suffering, not willing, that any should perish, that needs to be my heart too.

That I am not willing for anybody to be separated from a holy God for eternity. I long for them to come to know Jesus. You know, we say, so, what about a missionary?

He goes over there. No, a church sent the missionary. What about Paul? Do you realize that every one of Paul's missionary journeys he was sent by a local church? church? No matter where you look at it, it is a local church that becomes the spirit.

That's God's idea. And it's a network that can change the world even today.

[52 : 30] Last, are you ready to wisely embrace and prioritize the local church starting with its foundation this morning? Start with this little statement that I made.

whose we are dictates what we do. If you have never surrendered your life to Christ, then everything you've heard this morning, who cares?

But if I sincerely belong to Jesus, then it should reshape what it is I do.

You see, I don't want to be like the book of Proverbs where I'm being challenged to do something, but I walk away and I let somebody else do it. Where wisdom cries out on the street, but nobody's ready to implement.

Maybe you've sat back and never really been a part of a local church before. We don't have a whole bunch of grid here to have you go through hoops to become a member here.

[53 : 45] You know, we care about the same thing Jesus cares about. Have you surrendered your life to Christ? Are you willing to obey him? Then hop on board. Because we can do things together more than what we can do by ourself.

But in order to hop on board, it's not filling out just a little membership application, because it's not this church that matters. This is his.

And what does he say the foundation of it is? Repentance. I've got to be willing to invite the Lord Jesus into my heart and say, Lord, you take charge of my life. You take the penalty that I deserve. With my mouth, I'm inviting you in. You see the prayer as it props up there at the end? words similar to that. Those aren't holy words, but they convey the idea that God's word teaches in a simplified form.

[54 : 55] I was incredibly blessed this last week. You know the way I put that information up there, it goes out on our online services and everything else.

I wonder sometimes, is it just extra words that get tacked on to the end of a message? I had the privilege of meeting with a couple.

This is what they said. After church, they went home as a couple and invited Jesus into their heart. and I asked this question, how in the world did you know what to do?

You have it up there on the screen every Sunday. I don't know where you are at, but I know that everything you long for in life is completely found in Jesus.

Jesus. And if you have never made that choice, we have our leadership right up here. I realize it might be a little embarrassing to come up here. They'd love to open up the Bible and show you exactly what it means.

[56 : 17] We don't have something with grace, evangelical, free church. It's just a name on a sign. we want to promote his church.

We want you to be part of it because we want you to be with him for all of eternity. So we do everything we can to make that happen. If you don't know without a shadow of a doubt where you'd spend eternity, you come.

We'd love to show you. And for others of you that might have just gotten derailed because you've had bad church experiences, just remember that everybody in any church you go into is a cracked pot.

It leaks. Doesn't hold water. Runs out all over the floor. That's all of us. You think, well, I'm going to look for a pastor. My friend, if you become part of this fellowship, you have got a cracked pot for a pastor.

Don't put much stock in that. put stock here. That's where your faith has got to find a resting place.

[57 : 35] Father, we do our best to help us understand what it is that becomes your means for introducing the world to what only you can provide eternal life in heaven.

and not just for this generation, but Father, that it would perpetuate generation after generation.

And so we can't help but feel there are individuals here who are struggling even right now that if something were to happen to them, they don't know where they'd spend eternity.

I pray that they would recognize that as the Holy Spirit pricking their hearts. And that Father, even today, they would step out and have a member of our leadership show them how to make the greatest choice they can ever make with their life.

Please, Lord, move in our hearts so that this message is not just knowledge and understanding, but it's something that we did something with after we heard it.

In Jesus' name, amen. If God has spoken to you, won't you come?