

To Treasure Jesus Together (Membership)

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[0 : 00] Jack and Grace met through a mutual friend. From day one, they just seemed to be perfect for each other. Grace was everything Jack had always wanted.

She was beautiful and she was outgoing and she was caring. She was always there whenever Jack needed her. For the first five months, they were inseparable.

Jack could hardly think of anything else but Grace. He didn't need to look further. He, in fact, told his friends, she's the one for sure.

But now almost three years have passed. Jack still enjoys the comfort and the familiarity of being with Grace. But that sort of initial spark is gone.

Grace's flaws seem a little more obvious to him now. He's not sure he finds her as attractive as he once did.

[1 : 04] And he's beginning to resent all the time that she wants to spend with him. And so one day when she asks if she can define the nature of their relationship, Jack blows up.

We're together, aren't we? He asks angrily. Why isn't that enough for you? Obviously, Jack isn't quite ready for commitment.

He's not sure he, in fact, ever will be ready for commitment or, in fact, ever really needs to be ready for commitment. Have you ever been in a relationship like that?

Do you know people who are in a relationship like that? I do. Let me say, if that is you, if you're in a relationship like that, this is not God's purpose for your life.

God wants you to be in a relationship that is defined by both passion and commitment. The reality is there are millions of Jacks walking around today.

[2 : 21] But there is something more you should know. Grace isn't a girl. Grace is a church. And this is the let's define the nature of the relationship talk.

Three things I want us to explore this morning. Number one, what is the church? Number two, what is the purpose of the church? And number three, how to be a church member on purpose.

So what is the church? It's really hard to get clarity on the word when there are so many different uses of the word church running around today.

In fact, as I was writing this message, it was Melbourne Cup Day, Tuesday. I was sitting on the balcony over at the rectory, just having a quiet moment writing this.

And as I was writing this message, there was someone walking through the car park on the other end of their phone. And they said to whoever was on the other end of their phone, hey, you could park in the church.

[3 : 30] There's plenty of room here. Well, actually, no. I've got two problems with that. Number one, your definition of church, because I'm writing in this space right now.

But I won't go there in this moment. But secondly, no, you can't just park here whenever you choose to. So other views of church is that church is a set of a system of beliefs, or it's a program that you attend for an hour and a half, two hours on a Sunday, or it's a denomination that you belong to, or it's an institution.

That exists in society. The word that is translated as church in our Bible, in our New Testament, comes from the Greek word ecclesia.

It's used just under 80 times in the New Testament. And all but three of them in the New Testament, it is translated into the English word church.

Now, if we look at one of the places where it isn't translated into the English word church, you actually get an idea of what the New Testament meaning is behind, but what is the meaning behind the original word for ecclesia?

[4 : 50] So it's Acts chapter 19. And a silversmith named Demetrius used to make a great living out of making idols until the apostle Paul arrives.

He preaches and all these people start to become Christians. So that's great for the church, not so great for the idol business. And so what Demetrius does, realising that his income's dropping, he decides to whip the city up into a riot.

And next thing you know, there's this large gathering in this amphitheatre, and it says this in Acts 19.32. Now, that's not the description of the church, but let me just pick up the word assembly there, is the Greek word ecclesia.

It's translated elsewhere in the New Testament as church. So you could literally read this, the church was in confusion. It's just a gathering. The word church, at its core, simply refers to a crowd of people gathered together.

It's a mob. Sometimes in the New Testament, church is used to refer to the gathering of Christians around God in heaven from all time and places.

[6 : 25] Theologians refer to this as the invisible church. Everyone who knows Jesus from every time and place, both alive and dead, are gathered spiritually in God's presence and magnifying him.

And what we are waiting for is the end of all things when we will physically, everyone be in his presence, magnifying him. Mostly, the word refers to the local church, the local gathering in a particular place, like the church at the corner of Fuller's Road and View Street in Chatswood.

This is the church visible. But it's not just any mob. It's not just any crowd that has gathered. The Greek word ecclesia is made from two other words, two other Greek words which are joined together.

And these words mean to call out. Two words, to call and out. To call out. And so the word church really refers to those who were called out by God from the world to join together as his people, the followers of his son, the Lord Jesus.

Now this is crucial for us to, in understanding what the church is. But also, what the purpose of the church is.

[7 : 57] Last week, we looked at the much broader question of what is the purpose of life? And we saw that God created us and saved us to magnify him because he is magnus.

He is great. We saw that God is worthy to be magnified because he is great and he is good. And this great and good God has a great and good plan.

So let's have a look at what that plan is. And we're going to begin in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 8. I've given you a list of references so you can go back and check them later on or scribble them down if you like.

So Ephesians chapter 1 verse 8, with all wisdom and understanding, he, that's God, made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Christ. So that's where everything's going. That's the plan.

[9 : 22] That's the goal. This big God has a big plan and the big plan is everything gathered together under Jesus.

Jesus supreme and Lord over everything. So that's the end. So let's go back to the beginning and let's see that this is in fact been God's plan all along.

It's the reason why you and I were created and saved. So back in the beginning it's the Garden of Eden and in the Garden of Eden you're not going to read it but there's a real sense in Genesis 1 and 2 where all things are gathered to God.

He's made it. Everything's at peace. Everything is ordered. Everything is perfect in relationship with Him. And then the first people make the decision to instead of magnifying God they decide to magnify themselves.

They decide to live life their way and to make everything about them rather than about God. The Bible calls this attitude in this action sin. And the consequence of sin is everything that is ordered now becomes disordered.

[10 : 41] There's no more harmony. There's no more peace. Everything's turned upside down and relationships with God is broken. Where there used to be unity and closeness with God now because of sin there is just distance and disunity.

And then God what He does is He removes people from His presence. He judges their sin by it's a theological word scattering them.

He scatters them from Himself. And this is the principle that you see right throughout the entire Bible. You can trace it right to the Bible.

Wherever humanity sets itself up against God He scatters them. But when He saves them He gathers them to Himself.

You see it not far into Genesis where the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and where He scatters people from Himself and from each other and yet in Genesis 12 He calls Abraham to Himself.

[12 : 00] It's a theme that runs right through the Bible. When God saves He gathers people to Himself but when they rebel against Him He scatters them from His presence. Which is the ultimate thing that happens.

The goal of all things God will gather those to Himself who are His for eternity in His presence and those who are not His He will cast them from His presence for all eternity. In Isaiah 11 several hundred years before Jesus Isaiah is looking forward to this day when everything is finally ordered and harmonious and peaceful and in right relationship like it was in Genesis 1 and 2 and he refers to a particular person who will accomplish God's great plan and in Isaiah 11 this person is called the root of Jesse this person is the Messiah he is historically known as the son of great King David and in verse 12 it says this he will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth then as

Isaiah keeps going you get to Isaiah 56 8 and God himself declares there that he will expand his plan beyond his historic people Israel and this is what God says he says I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered and the climax of God's plans is revealed at the end of the book of Isaiah in Isaiah 66 18 we read and I this is God again and I because of what they have planned and done am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages and they will come and see my glory see God's plan is to gather people from all nations and tribes and peoples and cultures to himself that they might see his glory that they might magnify his magnus it's a plan that starts to get worked out in history with the creation of the church by the

Lord Jesus Christ and you see that in Ephesians 2 11 the passage that was read out to us therefore formally remember that formally you who are Gentiles by birth and court uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision which is done in the body by human hands remember that at that time you were separated you were scattered from Christ excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in this world see what Paul does here in Ephesians is he highlights the massive division between Jews and Gentiles but also between them all both Jews and Gentiles and God there is deep deep hostility which is hard for us to understand and what

Paul does in verse 13 is he shows us how God brings about the end of this hostility and gathers these people to each other and to himself so Ephesians 2 verse 13 now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away you who once were scattered have been brought near been gathered by the blood of Christ for he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations his purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility sin death hostility between

[16 : 57] Jew and Gentile is finally dealt with by Jesus at the cross Jesus is the one who gathers these diverse people together and he calls them a new people a new humanity and we will talk a little bit more about that next week a new people gathered to God in relationship with God so what's God's purpose in all of this we're still asking that question what is the purpose of the church why do this why gather like this Ephesians 3 10 his intent God's intent was that now right now here through the church the manifold wisdom wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ

Jesus our Lord the manifold wisdom the multi colored spectacular wisdom of God should be made known through the church the great and glorious God's great and glorious plan is to gather a very diverse people to each other in unity with each other and to himself in such a way that his greatness and his glory is made known to all the heavenly realms God does this work so that his magnus might be seen there is a sense here where right now God calls over the rulers and the authorities and the heavenly realms and he says hey

Gabriel Michael have a look at that have a look at that look at St. Paul's Chatswood that is what I've been doing for all of history working this out my son made that possible he brought these diverse people together he broke down the dividing walls and he says to the demons hey Satan get over here and take a look at this not even the gates of hell are going to stop my son doing that until I call them all to myself you can't stop that every every tribe every tribe and language and peoples gathered together unified in my son that displays the magnificence of God

United Nations can't do this it can't achieve this God you see what did you say that you what is church about what did you say this morning you see before church is about serving one another before it is about learning more about God before it's about whatever other things you came up with it's about us being gathered together to God so that God looks magnificent that's what it's about this is so fundamental for us to grasp in fact I'd say it's critical for us to grasp before church is about me before it's about you before it's about us it's about

God this is his design this is his grand plan for all time and eternity dare I say it transcultural church is his grand plan transcultural church is his grand plan and I think this is again captured in our purpose statement here at St.

[21 : 42] Paul's treasuring Jesus together for God's glory and the joy of all peoples so let's move on how to be a church member on purpose how do we as individuals be members of a church on purpose let me say first of all first of all that you become a member of God's church not by completing a membership course church or by attending a church for a very long time that's not how you become a member of a church you become a member of God's church by repenting of living independent of God by putting your trust in the Lord Jesus by receiving the Holy Spirit who unites you with God and with other believers that's how you become a member of the church that's the fundamental first step so you could be sitting in church for decades and not taking that fundamental first step there will be plenty of people in heaven who haven't done the St.

Paul's Chatswood pathways course plenty of people but there won't be anyone who hasn't repented of sins and trusted in Jesus not a single one and maybe today this is the first fundamental step that you need to take maybe you've come along you got involved in the local expression of the church and you're doing a bunch of stuff maybe doing a bunch of stuff for ages but you've got confused you're doing step two before you even got to step one maybe today's the day you need to take step one if you've taken step one then the most important way you can be a member on purpose at St.

Paul's is to embrace the vision the values that we have as a church our mission statement and live out our core values our shared values which are driven by God's grand plan one of the key values that helps us think about the sort of gathering that we are and the sort of gathering that we aspire to be at St.

Paul's is treasuring Jesus together and it was written specifically to enforce if you like to highlight the need to gather and how we gather let me read it to you having been led individually by the spirit of God to receive Jesus Christ as the Lord Saviour and supreme treasure of our lives we now most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ we believe the people whom Jesus has called into relationship with himself are his church and not an institution or a building in an age of individualism we value vigilance and accountability in treasuring

Jesus together together now in Ephesians Paul goes on to spend extensive time on what God's new humanity his gathering his church looks like in their life together and treasuring Jesus together is a value that tries to capture things like the rest of Ephesians and a whole heap of New Testament language it's all about life together it's about relationships it's about our togetherness and like all our values this one is highly practical like all our values it is highly practical it says things like as a church we are committed to and then there's a bunch of statements one of them is making corporate worship a weekly priority in other words if God's purpose is for all the time and eternity to gather to himself people under the lordship of Christ then we express

[26 : 11] God's ultimate goal by gathering really simple we gather is what we do in the Bible to magnify God always requires the regular gathering of God's people so I'm not going to throw around too many statistics here but have you ever calculated how many gatherings you miss a year did you know that in our culture regular nowadays has become somewhere between 30 and 40 percent attendance I'll just let that sit we don't need a rule here I'm not looking for rule what we need is to see the great and the gracious plan of a great and a gracious

God I said it last week how do we grow in magnifying God by gazing on him and being blown away by him we need to see what it cost him to gather us together and to gather us to himself nothing else will motivate us to gather no rule will motivate us to gather that's for sure treasuring Jesus together not only says that we value being together but how we value being together we're committed to meeting together in small groups for more intimate opportunities for nurture for growth accountability and service we are committed to engaging to watch over one another in brotherly love committed to remembering one another in prayer committing to aiding one another in sickness and distress committed to cultivating Christian sympathy and joy committed to being slow to take offense but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the command of our savior to secure without delay we are committed to welcoming people from every background we are committed to openness towards new people and the avoidance of clickiness we are committed to purging our lives of the sin that causes division we are committed to pursuing increasingly visible authentic and practical ways of loving each other and patriarchy so i am want to the beach sort of stuff.

So get ready for this. Jesus started it with these words. A new commandment I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people know that you're my disciples if you love one another.

John 13, 34, 35. Paul states the commandment to love each other in more than a dozen ways. Romans 12, 5. In Christ, we who are many for one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12, 10. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Again in 12, 10. Honour one another above yourselves. Romans 14, 19. Make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

[29 : 45] Romans 15, 14. Instruct one another. 1 Corinthians 12, 25. There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

Galatians 5, 13. Serve one another in love. Galatians 6, 2. Carry each other's burdens. Ephesians 4, 2. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4, 32.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other. Ephesians 5, 21. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Philippians 2, 3. In humility, consider others better than yourselves.

Colossians 3, 9. Do not lie to one another. 1 Thessalonians 4, 18. Encourage one another. 1 Thessalonians 5, 15. Always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

That's Paul. Okay. And then the book of Hebrews joins in the chorus. Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

[30 : 43] And do not forget to meet together. Then James pipes in, in chapter 4, verse 11. Do not slander one another. 5, 9. Don't grumble against each other.

5, 16. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. And then Peter jumps in, in 1 Peter 4, 9. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

5, 5. Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another. And that doesn't even get into John. Revelation. We'll just leave it at that.

What is obvious from all of this is the prominence of loving, Christ-exalting, other person-centered personal relationships.

So let me say it. There is no such thing as isolated, individualistic, meet-my-needs consumer Christianity in the Bible.

[31 : 50] It doesn't exist. And it works against all of God's purposes. You see, a church dater has an attitude towards church that is me-centered.

What can church do for me? How are my needs and personal preferences going to be met? Church daters are independent. They're disconnected.

And they're minimally involved in people's lives. And don't at all like the idea of accountability to one another. Essentially, however, a church dater is critical.

They're short on allegiance. And they are quick to find faults. They're looking, if you like, for the best product for their price of two hours on a Sunday.

They are, if you like, they're like the lover with a wandering eye, always looking for something better.

[33 : 00] The sad thing is, what the church dater is thinking, is working in their favor, is actually working against them. It results in a serious loss for them and a loss for others.

You cannot fulfill the command to love and to serve and to give by yourself. Normal, essential Christianity is loving, Christ-exalting, other person-centered, personal relationships in the local church.

And so what we're seeking to do here at St. Paul's is to build a gospel community. Another way of putting that is what we're seeking to do is to build a supernatural community, rather than simply a natural community.

A natural community is where people feel connected because of a demographic phenomenon. That is, people who would normally gravitate to each other and find a sense of belonging with each other because of similarities, irrespective of whether gospel is true or not.

That's natural community. Like, gathering together with like, with similarities. Now, that's not entirely a bad thing. I share common interests with basically all of my friends.

[34 : 28] In fact, all of my friends. I can't imagine not having any common interests with any of you. I think all of my friends have got common interests of mine. And so it's not a bad thing to have those connections and affinities here at St. Paul's.

What I want to caution us about is not to think it is the sum total of gospel community and what gospel community is about. In fact, we do church the way we do church.

With a shared discomfort in order that many more people who are diverse might find affinity in a congregation like this.

But at the end of the day, you can have natural community without Jesus. And when Jesus becomes dominant and we start sacrificing for the sake of Jesus being dominant so that more people might come to know Jesus, that natural community gets fractured.

That's what happens. The heavenly realms look on and see the wisdom of God when they gaze on supernatural community.

[35 : 47] When they see gospel community. It's the kind of community that could really only exist because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

This is when people who would not gravitate to each other normally or people groups who have open hostility towards each other historically are drawn together in peace and in love through the unifying work of the Holy Spirit and Christ's work on the cross.

So how do we be church members on purpose? Number one, gather. Really simple. That's what God has saved you for together. Number two, by building supernatural community.

And lastly, by being willing to purposefully fracture the community. It is awesome to be part of a gospel community that God is growing.

But one of the painful realities is the need to keep fracturing it in order to make space for others to be welcomed into it.

[37 : 06] One of our principles is we must fracture in order to welcome and to gather more people in. When we're comfortable and we're comfortable and we're comfortable and we're settled, we don't want to fracture what we have.

And we start moving from gospel community into natural community and affinities. It is wonderful to form and to build deep relationships.

Deep relationships. Deep relationships. But let me say, you can do that naturally. You can do that naturally. Deep relationships.

You don't need the gospel for deep relationships. What is supernatural is the willingness to fracture community groups, to fracture congregations and time with people I love in order that others might be part of what we have in gospel community.

We must never forget that community is not the goal of the church. As great as it is, the glory of God is the goal of the church and he is magnified as he gathers more and more people to himself.

[38 : 26] That they might see his glory. And so our core value, treasuring Jesus together, living in unity with one another, accepting and loving each other, is valuable finally because it makes God look good.

It displays to the world the greatness and the glory and the value of the Lord Jesus and his love towards us. It is from God.

It is through God. And it is to God. And we can practice it this morning very simply, very simply by not rushing off.

By engaging with someone totally different this morning. Rather than just, you know, walk out of here and... By sitting somewhere different in the... By going deeper in a relationship. Now there are a few metaphors that the Bible uses to describe the intimate way that the Lord Jesus views his church.

He calls it his family. He calls it his body. He calls it his bride. He loves his church and he gave himself over to death for his church.

[39 : 37] And he looks forward to the day when his bride, in all its perfection, will be presented to him and will be with him forever in delight.

As I said at the beginning, today is the commitment conversation. Are you still dating his church?

If so, you're still dating him. You haven't fully surrendered to Jesus.

The church matters because God chose it to show and to tell the universe his wisdom and his love. This message is the world's only hope.

And if you're a Christian, you have a crucial part in God's eternal plan. Your life... Can I just push this a little bit harder? Your life is so much bigger than a good job.

[40 : 45] It's so much bigger than an understanding spouse. It's so much more important than non-delinquent kids. Good friends and an active social life.

It's so much bigger than beautiful gardens and nice holidays and fashionable clothes. You are part of something immense.

Something that began before you were born and will continue long after you are dead. God is rescuing fallen, scattered humanity, gathering to himself and progressively shaping them into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He gathers you to himself so that you might be taking part in his grand and glorious plan. Does your life reflect it?

Does your life reflect it?