

The Church

Series: These Things Never Change

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The subject and title of today's message I believe fits perfectly with this being Mother's Day today. We are talking about: **The Church** – what we believe about the Church and why it matters!

Cyprian, an early church father, who was the Bishop of Carthage in the early 200's wrote: **“No one can have God as his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.”**

As we get going today, we are going to look at the Church from two different angles – the first will be the broader angle – what we have referred to here in the past as the “Big C” Church. The “Big C” Church is the invisible Church. It represents all the believers in Jesus for all time (past, present and future).

The second angle we'll look at is from is the visible church – “little c” church – that's the biblical, local communities of believers we see gathered all over the world today. They are meeting just like we are right now at Champion Forest and worshipping the Lord in their own different expressions that glorifies and honors him.

Let's begin with a definition of the Church – “Big C”. **Wayne Grudem** in his book *Christian Belief: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* defines the Church “Big C” as:

“The community of all true believers for all time. That is, the church is made up of all men and women who have been, are, or ever will be true believers in Jesus.”

When we enter into a personal relationship with Jesus, we are baptized by His Spirit INTO the Church – it's automatic! It happens instantaneously...immediately! We become a part of what the Bible refers to as the family of God.

In fact, there are many descriptors...images...metaphors of the Church in scripture. We're going to look at three of them here in just a moment because in looking at them, we can learn a lot about the Church – what it is and how it should operate.

Two big points I want to make up front about the “Big C” Church and in these points you will see WHY the Church is so important.

First: Jesus builds the Church

The first time we see the word “church” being used as we are talking about it today is found in Matthew's gospel.

Matt. 16:13-18 – **“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them,**

“But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock (this confession of faith – of Jesus being God) I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

The word “church” is the Greek word “ekklesia”. It refers to a group of people that have been called out to a gathering...or an assembly of some kind. There would be an “ekklesia” for citizens to listen and engage in public affairs or to be a part of a political body of some sort or even to gather for religious purposes.

It wasn’t an entirely new concept, yet Jesus uses this word here and applies it to describe those that he calls to himself and that follow him.

And so, it needs to be said...we need to be reminded that the Church is not a building...it’s not an organization...it’s not even an institution...the Church is a “called out people of God” that believe in and follow Jesus.

Now, this is the “Big C” Church! And truthfully, we don’t know who is a part of the “Big C” Church because we don’t know the hearts of people.

The scripture says in **2 Tim 2:19** – **“...The Lord knows those who are his...”**

Only God knows the hearts of men and women and truly knows those who make up his Church. Only God knows those who have legitimately put their faith and trust in him and whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life (Rev. 21:27).

What we can say with confidence is that Jesus is building his Church. He has been since the pouring out of his Spirit at Pentecost and he will continue to build the Church until it is gathered around the throne of God in eternity worshipping him.

Revelation 7:9-10 – **“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”**

So, notice up front: Jesus is proactively building his Church. It WILL include people (because that’s what the Church is - people) from every tribe, nation, language and tongue – it represents all true believers for all time and it will last forever.

Secondly, note: **Jesus bought the Church**

The Church – the called-out people of God didn’t come on the cheap! Speaking of not being on the cheap!

illus. Mother's Day – I came across this article written by a man by the name of Steven Nelms. He's an HR consultant and he wrote an article entitled: *Father's You Can't Afford A Stay At Home Mom*. Listen to a bit of this article...it's worth the read this morning. **(READ ARTICLE)**

Amazing isn't it! From everything that has to be done at the house...to some who are working or going to school on top of that...to getting the children ready for their ball games, getting them ready for school. I have panic attacks when Debbie has to go out of town for a day for something!

I say all this to make the point, with everything a mom does she does it for FREE! We are getting it on the cheap! Moms, sure hope you enjoy the lunch and card we got you today!

The Church though, it didn't come on the cheap. The "called-out" people of God, came with a steep price!

Acts 20:28 – **"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (we'll talk about local church leadership here in just a moment), to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."**

1 Pet. 1:18-19 – **"knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."**

Rev. 5:9 – (This is directed toward Jesus) **"And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."**

Jesus builds the Church...and he bought the Church – with his own blood! I want you to notice how personal this is to Jesus. He said, "I will build MY church." He shed HIS blood to ransom a people far off and call them out to himself.

There is NOTHING – and this is NOT an exaggerated statement. There is NOTHING more precious...more sacred...more worthy of our allegiance AFTER Jesus and our worship of him, than His Church.

What an HONOR to be a part of his Church. What a PRIVILEGE!

Jesus loved us enough to die for us...to call us out and to himself and give us a spiritual family called, the Church - what a wonderful truth...what an incredible blessing.

And this leads to the next part of the message today and that is I want to give you several metaphors of the Church that are given to us in scripture.

We just said one, that the Church is a family – that's an image we are given...a metaphor for the Church.

While there are numerous images given to us, I'm going to focus on the three that are probably the most well-known in scripture and I think in giving these it will really help us color in the lines as to what the Church is and what the Church is to be about.

1. Bride

Is there any greater image that could be given than this? It's so illustrative. The Church as a bride. The premier passage that gives this image is in the book of Ephesians.

Here a beautiful picture is given of the covenant between a man and woman where they selflessly serve and give of themselves to one another – the man lays down his life for his wife – it's exactly what Jesus did for the Church.

There is no closer relationship...no greater intimacy than that which exists between a husband and a wife. And this is a picture of Christ and the Church.

Eph. 5:31-32 – “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Illus. Weddings – read this passage and the husband and wife standing there is a visible picture of the relationship between Jesus and his Church.

As his Bride we look forward to the day when we are presented to Jesus “bright and pure...dressed in fine linen), and we sit and enjoy him at what is called the “marriage supper of the lamb” (Rev. 19:6-8) – it's our wedding banquet where we are finally with our Savior together forever and it is a celebration!

I've been to a lot of weddings and there's two things they all have in common. The bride is wearing white, and it is a celebration!

So, think on this: as the Church, we are the bride of Christ. We enjoy an intimate relationship with God as a result of being a part of the Bride of Christ.

2. Body

It's mentioned twice in Ephesians five passage and even more than that earlier in the Paul's letter.

Eph. 4:4-6 – “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Probably the largest discourse of scripture we have illustrating the Church as a physical body is found in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth.

1 Cor. 12:12-21, 25-27 – “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”... ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

I think the illustration speaks for itself. Remember the Church is a people. And people are different. Some are big toes and some are pinky fingers. We are different and yet all have a part to play...and our part is important to the whole. God set it up this way.

Look, there is to be no lone-ranger Christians. If an organ is to function properly it must be connected to the body. More on that toward the end of the message.

The Church is illustrated as a bride...a body...and then thirdly:

3. Building

We’ve already looked at Jesus saying, “I will build my church.” Paul uses this same type of building language in:

Eph. 2:19-22 – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Listen to **1 Peter 2:4-5 – “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

Many people reading these letters were of course Jewish. And their worship for the entirety of their lives revolved around a building...a Temple!

The Temple is where the Spirit of God dwelled, and now the New Testament writers are saying, “You are the Temple...together God is building with you a place for his very presence to dwell.”

Beautiful imagery and we could make a sermon series out of each of these images...in fact, we may do that some day! These pictures that we are given though help us see and understand the wonder of the Church.

Any true believer in Christ will be a member of his Church – “big C” – it’s automatic!

Now, it is assumed in the New Testament that if you are a member of the “Big C” ...what the Apostles’ Creed refers to as the “catholic church (NOT Roman Catholic) but universal church...it’s assumed that if a part of the invisible Church, then you will be a part of his visible church that is expressed through membership in a local congregation.

Let me state it plainly. If you are a Christian, you should be actively involved in a healthy local church. What constitutes a healthy local church?

Glad you asked! I’ll share with you three marks and five purposes of a healthy local church.

Mark #1 of a healthy local church: **Sound Doctrine**

I’m not going to say a lot about this because week one of this series was called *Why Doctrine Matters*. Go back and listen, but the salvation of one’s soul is tied to it.

One of the reasons we are doing this series is to teach what sound doctrine is and why it’s important.

1 Tim. 3:15 – “...the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”

We are commanded to teach sound doctrine, to refute heresy...doctrine is what builds believers up in their faith and is the anchor that can prevent people from drifting spiritually. As members of his Church, we are told to contend for the faith once delivered (Jude 1:3)

Any true and healthy church will be a church that teaches sound doctrine about God, the Trinity, salvation – all these MAJOR doctrines we are talking about.

If it’s not teaching sound doctrine, they may refer to themselves as a church, but it’s not a healthy church and if they stray from the major doctrines we are talking about in this series they can’t even be defined as a true church.

Just because people are meeting together doesn’t mean they are a church! Remember, the Church is “called-out” ones by Jesus himself, purchased with his blood. If they are not worshipping Jesus...if he is not the “head of the body”, they are NOT a church!

Mark #2 of a healthy local church: **Localized Leadership**

A healthy local church is going to have healthy local leadership. In the New Testament there are two offices that are recognized in local church leadership. It’s the office of pastor or elder and then the office of deacon.

Now, we are a southern Baptist church. And I pointed you a couple of weeks ago to the Baptist Faith and Message. This is a confessional statement that we as Baptists affirm primarily as we work together for the sake of missions around the world.

I just pulled Article VI from *The Baptist Faith and Message* and here is what it says about the Church:

“A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.”

Illus. SBC - Now, if you have been paying attention lately to what is happening in the SBC (which I'm sorry if you have!), and I am requesting prayer – in two weeks, I'll be speaking at the Pastor's Conference giving a biblical challenge on love – I've got the first of the fruit of the Spirit. Please pray for me.

If you've been watching the news though you may have seen there are two big issues the SBC is looking at. One is how we are going to work together to eradicate sexual abuse within our convention. I don't think there is a pastor in the SBC that doesn't want to do this, “HOW” we go about it is being debated. I'd just ask prayers as I have served on this task force and we'll be bringing a report and making some recommendations for what we can do.

Secondly, there is a vote that's going to go down on whether to disfellowship churches from the SBC that have women as pastors.

Now, again this is debated and I hesitate to even bring it up because in some ways to those that don't follow these Baptist fights it's embarrassing.

I'll just say this, and it points to our belief as a church. We believe as our Baptist Faith and Message states that the office of pastor/elder/overseer/bishop (these are used interchangeably in scripture) is limited to men. Another sermon for another day on the scriptural reasons for it (articles).

This doesn't mean we don't have women on our staff...we do! They are highly capable and highly skilled. This doesn't mean that we don't have women exercising the spiritual gift of

teaching as well as using other gifts in our church – in fact, some of our largest life groups are taught or co-taught by women.

The office of elder and or elders though is male. And they are charged with providing leadership at a local church level, under the authority of Christ.

The second office is that of deacon, and the word deacon means to serve...and these are servant leaders in our church that are recommended by leadership and affirmed by our congregation.

Illus. Deacons meeting this past Wed night (Show Pic)

For those that are interested, you can check out the qualifications for overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy 2 and in Titus 1&2. We tell all of the new members that join Champion Forest that as a church, this is our governance set up:

- We are pastor-led...
- We are deacon-served...
- We are committee team/ministry team organized (finance, personnel and missions)...
- We are congregationally approved...

Mark # 3 of a healthy local church: **Practice Ordinances**

A healthy local church will practice what we call ordinances. If you came from another church background, you might have referred to this as administering the sacraments – this is the Lord's Supper and Baptism.

Both of these ordinances were commanded by Jesus. The Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-29) is taken as a reminder of the price Jesus paid for us – “do this in remembrance of me”. It's meant to cause us to reflect on Jesus, our sin, and our future with him as we await his return.

Baptism is an act of obedience that is meant to symbolize the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. When you are baptized, you are testifying outwardly to what Jesus has done inwardly in your heart. And because we are a Baptist church and believe in immersion (water baptism) AFTER conversion we require it for membership into our church.

We will participate in these two ordinances until Jesus comes.

Now, very quickly let me give you the five purposes of a local church and I'm not going to stay here long at all. These come from Acts. As I read this passage I'll have underlined the purposes of the Church.

Acts 2:42-27 – “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (discipleship is the word I would use...it's a MAJOR purpose of the Church) and the fellowship (“Koinonia” – it's the sharing of life together) , to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need (The word I'd use here is "ministry"- serving one another). **And day by day, attending the temple together** (Worship) **and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,**⁴⁷ **praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.** (that's called evangelism.

This is what a Church is to do and be about! In Rick Warren's *Purpose-Driven Church*, he writes about these purposes and puts it like this (**ALL ON ONE SCREEN**)

- 1. Churches grow deeper through Discipleship**
- 2. Churches grow warmer through Fellowship**
- 3. Churches grow broader through Ministry**
- 4. Churches grow stronger through Worship**
- 5. Churches grow larger through Evangelism**

You see each of our *Focus Priorities* in these purposes. We are advancing the Kingdom by making disciples, loving our community and strengthening the Church.

I want to end this message today with a call to action. Why does the church matter? I've got to tell you, I am so biased when it comes to the local church.

- My earliest memories is going to church with my dad and as a little guy singing, "I've got the joy, joy, joy..."
- It is the Church – VBS, Disciple Now weekends, Summer camps that I still look back on for building me up in my faith that I am just so grateful for...
- It is the Church that was there to receive me, when I trusted in Christ...came to my home and dropped off discipleship materials...encouraged me when I was sensing a call to the ministry and gave me a scholarship to help me go to Bible school.
- It is the Church that was there for my family when I went through some of the toughest times of my life as a young adult dealing with some sexual abuse from my past that I had never spoken to anyone about...
- It is the Church that gave me my first job...gave me a chance to preach...
- It is the Church where I honored my grandparents for their life and legacy after they passed away and then buried them in cemetery right next to the church.
- It is the Church where I met my wife, stood in the worship center and we committed our lives to one another...
- It is the Church, that has given me life-long friends and a mission to be a part of...

I LOVE the Church and there is NOTHING on earth like the Church, when the Church is healthy and doing what it's supposed to do. As we have seen Jesus is building the Church...he bought the Church – it is MOST sacred and precious. And so, call to action!

1. Invest in the church

Give your life to it...your time to it...your resources...invest your life in the church – as we have seen it's eternal. It will outlast you! Find a place to serve and use your spiritual gift in the church. There is NOTHING like it – “called-out” people that are a part of your spiritual family.

Join...become a member. Don't just sit and soak, but become an active part of our church. Grab on to the end of the rope with us and start pulling! We need you!

Remember that image of the Church being a body? An organ cut off from the body will shrivel and die. The same is true for a believer that is cut off from the Church. You will struggle spiritually if you don't have the Church as your mother!

2. Pray for the church (big and little c)

You know what? I wouldn't let anyone talk about my wife in a way that was demeaning or took away from her...it'd be fighting words! The best thing you can do for your church is not to criticize or to complain, but to pray.

I know the church isn't perfect, but it really is the best thing going. And we ought to champion the church! We pray against the Enemy and how we would seek to divide us destroy us. Pray for the “Big C”

Illus. India – In Manipur this week, mobs...extremists have attacked Christians – 10,000 people have been displaced. They are saying the death toll is up to 60 people. Here are some pics of the churches they have destroyed (**Show pics**)

There's something about praying for the church...praying for your church. It will grow your heart for the Kingdom while at the same time shrink selfishness in you because as you pray, you will see it's not about you – you're a part of something bigger than just you!

3. Be the church

You are the church...the church is a people. And so, when you leave our campus, those signs as you leave the campus are for you – you are entering your mission field to go and BE the church.

You are the hands and feet of Jesus, and our goal when we go to our neighborhoods, offices and schools is to show people Jesus.

Illus. Married along time – look alike...finish each other's sentences. This is how it should be for Christians. We spend so much time with Jesus, his Bride looks like him...acts like him...points others to him.

You ARE the salt of the earth. You ARE the light of the world. BE the Church to someone today, and tomorrow and the day after that and we'll see the world change. Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.