

# The Glory of the Church

With all the uncertainty in our world today about the individual need for “the church” as compared to a person simply “believing at home,” I want to begin with a statement of conviction that I hope can receive a hearty “Amen” from most here today.

**What is needed is a ringing affirmation that the church is God’s idea, that it is the living incarnation of Christ in the world, that – for all its flaws and faults – it is now God’s instrument to reconcile the world to Himself.**

There is a serious need for those of us who call ourselves Christians “according to the New Testament pattern” to reaffirm the church’s place in the plan of God and in our own lives.

1. There is no doubt that many congregations have lost their calling and sense of mission. But if that has occurred, we have allowed it to occur and we are partly to blame. At least, it is something we can change.
2. We should respond to the leadership of Jesus Christ, and keep our attention on people’s hearts and souls and away from brick/mortar, and personalities and politics.
3. While every member is part of the universal church, failure to be part of a *particular congregation* is failure to obey Christ as a member of a local body that carries out the work of the church in the world.

It’s in the context of a congregation that we commit ourselves to intimate relationships with fellow Christians and submit ourselves to accountability, duties, and responsibilities. We must remember that the one talent man, who viewed God as a demanding, angry God, was condemned to eternal damnation because he did not use that one talent.

(I submit this request now: if you are a member of the body of Christ and have been ‘visiting’ here for weeks and perhaps months...make the decision to work and worship under the direction of the shepherds here...mark that desire on an attendance card and the shepherds will personally respond immediately...they will assign deacons to help find your spiritual gift and help you get to work in the greatest cause upon earth!).

When you look at the book of *Acts*:

1. Individuals confessed faith in Jesus, were immersed in water for remission of sins, and became part of a local congregation.
2. It is at the very heart of what it meant to be part of God’s kingdom.

Christ is the center of the Christian religion and everything about Christianity is important because of its relationship to Christ.

Apart from Christ the Lord’s Supper would mean nothing. Baptism would have no significance whatever. The important work of evangelism would be an empty exercise. In short, the church would be unimportant.

## **My church?!#**

“Faulty people, flawed preacher, flailing leadership, sinning saints. We can’t get people to participate in ministry. I often feel lonely and isolated when I come to church. I always have a hard time finding a good parking place. Decisions are made I don’t agree with....”

There is a great tension between the church of *faith* and the church of *fact*.

There is a cantankerous bunch of stubborn, non-working people who attend some of our congregations. There are people who don’t live as they should. Some ministries need some talent and enthusiasm added to them...

...there is the shining, pure, beautiful, faithful bride of Jesus...loving, harmonious, humble, and hard working! And then there is all of us!

*To live above with those we love, O that will be glory!  
But to dwell below with those we know.....well, that's another story.*

One writer suggested that "some churches are like Noah's ark. The stench inside is sometimes unbearable except for the storm that is always outside."

God gave a *person*, then a *proclamation*, and then a *people*. This is both the historical and the theological order.

**God gave first a *person*, Jesus Christ.** He gave a person and not a creed as the object of faith and basis of salvation. God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is always a God of personal presence and a God who expects a personal response.

**The *proclamation* centers in the person.** He is the content of the message preached. The early church proclaimed "*this Jesus*" and declared what God had done through him. This proclamation (found in our Bible today) calls for a response.

**The proclaimed word calls and gathers a *people*.** The people respond to the proclamation of the person. The church is derived from the word of the gospel and from the Christ, who is the Word.

The oral message about Jesus Christ gathered a people and so created the church. That message was put in written form for the use of the people and to aid them in their proclamation.

In America, there are thousands of people who would classify themselves as Christians and yet they are not members of any religious body. To them, Christianity is something that you believe, something that you try to live at home and in business, but it does not entail being a member of a church.

Why is that the case?

**1. Because of divisions which have fractioned the religious world.** There are more than 250 different religious bodies in the U. S. It is completely foreign to the please of unity, as prayed by Jesus in John 17.

**2. Disparity.** The practice gap (how Christians live as compared to the way Christ lived). People look at Christ and are drawn to Him...they look at the church and it is unappealing. There is a great struggle even in our fellowship between "the church of faith and the church of fact."

**The church is the grandest and most glorious institution on earth!! 8 Reasons:**

**1. It's origin.**

The church began in the mind of God rather than in the minds of men. It was not an afterthought!

*Ephesians 3:8-11: "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, {9} and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. {10} His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, {11} according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

**2. It's foundation.**

*1 Corinthians 3:11: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

**3. It's wonderful beginning.**

Spent even 10 minutes reading from the book of *Acts*: Prophecies that it would begin in Jerusalem...great day of Pentecost...great sermon by Peter...thousands heard him...3,000 souls added to the church that day.

**4. Its relationship to God and to Christ.**

The church is the people, not a building. Part of its glory lies in the relationship which Christians sustain to God and to Christ.

*1 Timothy 3:15: "...if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."*

The scriptures describe Christ as the bridegroom and Christians as his bride. A wedding is a special event...to see two people who love each other promise their love for life!

That's the picture Christ has with the church:

*Ephesians 5:32: "This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church."*

### **5. Its universal nature.**

There is no one on earth excluded from the church.

*John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

*Acts 10:34-35: "Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism {35} but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."*

*Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

### **6. Its work.**

The church has three main functions, and each is vital for the individuals reached: evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

### **7. Its simplicity.**

It's wonderful to know that the organization of the church and the plan of worship are so simple that people can become Christians and serve God anywhere on earth — on ships, on far-off military posts, as well as home in small towns and large cities.

### **8. Its destiny.**

*John 14:1-3: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me. {2} In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. {3} And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*

Christians are on a journey. Earth is not our home. Sometimes it's frightening to read in those last chapters of Revelation of the books which will be opened at the judgment. No one will enter into heaven except those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. It need not be frightening, for it's within our power to accept God's grace and be certain that our names are written there. A response of faith that leads to baptism...and we become part of his church. May we never lose sight of its glory!!!