

Topic	The Purpose Of The Church
Reference	Isaiah 40: 1-11
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To some people the church is traditional, its sacred, its holy, you come to the church so be quiet. For some the church is like a place to enjoy in your own style.

***Is our church God's church?***

The church is defined in a dictionary as a place, but church actually biblically doesn't refer to a building, it refers to people. The Greek word 'Ecclesia' means 'the called out people'. It doesn't mean that just because you put a bunch of guys into a building, it doesn't make them church, so just because people come and sit in the church doesn't make it a church.

This morning as you and I meet here, many other churches meet and you would love to believe that churches are together, strong, but one church will accuse another church, saying this church is not Bible base, this church doesn't move in the spirit, this church is selling itself out to tender to the needs of others, this church is very judgmental. The truth is churches are not united. So people say, churches should be big, other people say churches should be small. Some say churches should use music, band, guitar, some say you must only use your voices and this is something that I really struggle with. So this morning we are going to look at a general view of this very complex topic and perhaps get some sense of it. I want you to go you three points.

- *The church as the People of God*
- *The church as the Body of Christ*
- *The church as the Worshipping Community*

**THE CHURCH AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD:**

We find this in Revelations. People think of Revelations, they think of all these images, prophecy, they forget that revelation starts off with a letter to seven churches and it ends with the church. We call this the universal church and we are going to look at the universal church as the people of God and then we are going to look at the local church as the body of Christ and the church universal at the end of time, this is how it says

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them." Revelations 21:3*

It is God and his people and he will wipe away every tear and he will be their God and they will be his people. Now when you see and hear these words, you would realize they are Old Testament language. So here is the first common wrong assumption people make. The first is, the assume the church began in the book of Acts or with the great commission,

*Acts 2, the believers met together daily.*

It is great, but you are going to take it further back. First, it tells us the foundation of the church is at creation and this is what we find in Ephesians 1:4, God says that he predestined all of us

*4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.*

People read ‘chose us’ as individual, but the context doesn’t say that. If you read the end of the chapter of Ephesians 1, he says this

*22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

The church is God’s plan from creation. Here is a second mistake a lot of people who write books about churches say. They say the template for the church is Israel. That doesn’t go far enough. Acts doesn’t go far enough. Israel doesn’t go far enough. If you take this language, it goes back to the Abrahamic Covenant. This is your building block and the root of the church and a lot of people miss this.

***Why is it the Abrahamic Covenant?***

Because this is after sin, after the flood and after man tries to do his own church, ‘the tower of Babel’ and God says, this is the people trying to do it, now the people of God will do it and God says,

*“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing, I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Genesis 12:2-3*

That’s why Paul brings this up again in Romans as seed of Abraham. The building block, the church is the Abrahamic Covenant, not Israel, not Acts. The pattern is like that:

- *God called one man – Abraham.*
- *God called one family – Jacob.*
- *God called one nation – Israel.*

- *God called the church.*

To understand the church, you need to see the patterns in all of this. This is where we start to build the church. So here is the big picture, church isn't just us, church is many churches and the vision for us is to bless the nations; the great commission reads into this, Acts read into this, the history of Israel reads into this. So here is the first point, ***the church exists to glorify God, not to serve our needs.***

We all came to church with needs, some of us were just lonely so we came to church, hopefully we find friends. Some of us came because we want to have a place for our kids. Some of us it is just habit, every Sunday use to go to church. So we all came with needs, but if you take the Abrahamic Covenant, what it says that God's view is to take man who is individual and transform him into a spiritual family and here is the first indictment of the church, they call this the church of the revolving door. I come to church because I have needs, after a while my needs are met, so I centre the church on myself, after a while I fight with somebody or my children get into an argument or I don't like the elders, so what I do I go shopping for church.

Simon Chun from Singapore says, the church operates in what we call a free market, capitalism. We are cannibalizing and competing for members, so therefore we brand the church. He called it, the church has become a service provider. So you come to church,

- This church got something for our kids
- How is the worship, worship fits my style of music
- Sermon, not so good, but still I tick.

That is not church. The Abraham Covenant tells you, you are here to bless the nations. You come here because God wants to change you and I to impact the community, to repent of our sins, to make us love people we don't like, that is the purpose of the church. It exists to glorify God.

### ***The church is a Sunday and everyday community***

If you take the great commission and you take the Abraham covenant and you line them both up, you find the language is very similar

<p><i>“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing, I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”</i> <b>Genesis 12:2-3</b></p>	<p><i>“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”</i> <b>Matthew 28:18-20</b></p>
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It means, the church doesn't exist just on Sunday, tomorrow the church is going to go to work, the church is going to go home, the church is going to go jogging in the park, because you and I are ambassadors and you power up on Sunday, so that God sends you out on Monday to Saturday to reach the nations and bless the nations. We find this in many parts of the text, Jeremiah, go and settle down in a country you really don't like, have children and prosper, but that is not the main aim. Jeremiah tells them in exile, *and when you prosper the nation will prosper*. We see this in the work of Paul with the church. It was always in places of influence, Corinth the port city, Rome and he used his own influence in Ephesus to know the top officials and we have to have a big picture of the church, either that the church becomes a holy huddle and Daniel Ho says it very well. He says,

*It is crucial for Christians to get involved in nation building because of the theological understanding of who God is. Christians should speak out and work to maintain truth, righteousness and justice for all – values which reflect God's heart. Christians should also be concerned about how this world is run and care for the things in it, having been given the responsibility of its stewardship. We must get involved at every level of society as much as possible, as far as possible, as deep as possible.*

This is how you and I are a blessing to the nations and this is the big picture of the mandate of the church. When we build disciples, do evangelism, do church live, we don't do this to form our own little club, we do this to reach out.

### ***The Church is a Pilgrim Church:***

This is where the entire history is important. God called out Abraham, but he screwed up, so he decided to help God with his wife, had a son called Ishmael. So God called out Jacob, he was dysfunctional as a father, his son like to brag, he was not very perfect then God called out Israel not because they were the best, but they screwed up, so when God called out the church, the church is going to be screwed up, so here sometimes some people tell you, I am looking for a church which is pure, I am looking for a Godly church, I am looking for a church where people are morally upright. I tell you, don't go to that church, you are going to spoil that church. All of us are sinners. We all have our fair share of struggles in life.

God wants to use us, sinners and God tells us to change a bit every day. The church is a pilgrim church.

- *God used Abraham because he was on a journey to righteousness.*
- *God used Jacob's family, he was on journey to righteousness.*
- *God used Israel through the wilderness, through exile as a journey to righteousness*
- *God will use us, you and I, imperfect on a journey to righteousness.*

## How do we do that?

In the words of Martin Luther King,

*If you can't fly, then run.  
If you can't run, then walk.  
If you can't walk, then crawl.  
But whatever you do  
You have to keep moving forward*

You sit there and you have been doing that for the last 15 years, you are just moving backwards every day, but you say every day God I will try to be bit more righteous and I can do that because of the grace given to me because Jesus wash away my sins, his love so fills me lord that God this is your church and I together with brothers and sisters who will help me and together we will move forward and this is why Paul said,

*This one thing I do forgetting those things, which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus - Philippians 3:13-14*

By saying this he addresses the church. So I challenge you in this new year, don't make this like any other year, start off the year by asking yourself why are you here in the church. There is no such thing as PR status in the church. You are either citizen of the kingdom or you are not. There is no such term as a long-term visitor, the church doesn't provide visa. You are either in or you are out and here again why the whole Abrahamic Covenant is interesting because every time out of a group he calls, he will call a smaller remnant, out of Israel, out of exile a smaller remnant, out of Jacob's family Joseph pulls out, not all the other brothers and out of the church there will be a smaller remnant. Just because you come to church, it doesn't mean that you are going to go up there, you are either a citizen of the kingdom of God or you are not.

If you are just sitting in the church, again learn to crawl because when you crawl, you will walk and when you walk you will run and when you run one day you will fly.

### **THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

*For we were all baptized by same spirit so as to form one body - whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one spirit to drink. 1-cor 12:13*

The context is the Holy Spirit. Paul uses two extreme groups, Jews or Gentiles, both cannot jive with each other, slave or free, the slave was the poorest, he had no assets. During those time you have to buy your citizenship, one is very rich, one is very poor then the other two is two groups

of people who cannot mix with each other. Now take that in mind and he calls them the body of Christ. Now let me tell you why people go to church? Because psychologically, you and I are wired to be tribal. We all have gangs and friends, we are not wired to be alone, so what is happening, why are so many churches filled, because simply the church is part of my tribe. The moment you put yourself centre of anything, you expect the church to fit your needs and this is where the trouble starts. Now you can then start to see this in church. Some people come, they stay, they are very involved in a certain ministry, they feel very empowered, they feel very contributing but church is my ministry, you don't come after me, the other ministry I don't want to know. That is not the kingdom of God. The church is supposed to reflect heaven a bit, so people come in there, they must see diverse groups of people working together.

So here is the first to all ministry leaders, ministries must work together. The moment you make your ministry the only little thing you do, you are doing self-actualization, you just don't realize it. The church is fulfilling your basic need for respect and meaning but you are not being in the kingdom of God.

Christ ascended in the book of Acts, he will come again. In the meantime, you are I are telling everybody come and know Jesus, the world is saying I don't see Jesus, you are telling everyone God loved you, died for your sins, I can't see God, I can't see Jesus, the outside people will only see the church. Unless the church demonstrates heaven, unless the church demonstrates Christ, you will never reach out to people that's why you always start with the gospel. The gospel shows us that God loved you and I so much that is your power. So here is the starting point, you put 800 people here, some are thick skin, some are sensitive, some brag, some stay quiet, we are all different. You put everybody together here, sure got problem, sure got issues, so how do you get people to move, you fill them with the gospel and you remind them to forgive one another, you remind them to love each other deeply, remind them how Jesus died for them, when they do that they become community and when they learn to love each other deeply, they learn not to be so annoying, fighting over small things, they learn to look beyond their needs, what do they do, they then become missionaries.

***There is a big debate out there, should the church be big or small?***

Book of Acts, the first time Peter spoke 3000 people came to Christ, that's a mega church, then the chapters shifts and the text says, they met together daily at the temple courts, that's a mini church. What it tells us is that, God doesn't care whether your church is big or your church is small, it can be all size, all people, all generation, it is intergenerational. Now here is an indictment to us in love. If you take that and this is how heaven is going to be like, church should be populated by people that are not accepted by this world.

Until we have it in our heart that church is this, we are not showing the kingdom of God and at this point I would like to thank those who work with others. If year in and year out, the church is just made out of upper middle class Chinese speaking folk and we cannot get more Indians in our church, poorer people in our church, more people like that, we are not showing the kingdom of God and may be if we are honest with ourselves, in our deepest heart, we don't want them hear.

It is not easy to love the poor or the disabled, or people who have different colour skin, it is not easy for 50 year old people to love young people, it is very hard for young people to love older people, we rather go with our own gang and be our own tribe and that's why again Acts is such an important model because when you look at Acts 2 when we say that believers had everything in common, they love one another, God is beginning from Pentecost, you can only do it if the Holy Spirit comes upon us, because naturally I don't want to love a lot of some people, we are all human, very easy to talk to you but it is not easy to do this. We need the spirit and in this case I think we call favor to the Charismatic church, because word based churches miss this.

### **THE CHURCH AS WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY**

The most important point we are going to pick up today is that the church is the worshipping community. Some younger people they like that rock kind of worship, the older people like the slow worship, now the function of the church in its fundamental identity is worship, you miss that, we miss everything because worship is where the Holy Spirit flows, is where empowerment happens. When we as a church worship, the spirit anoints and then when the church goes out to Monday to Saturday in the world that hates you, in the job where your boss is going to say things about you people, backstab you, in your family where you have problem, in broken marriages and all of that, when the spirit goes upon us as a church, the spirit anoints that is what Pentecost is teaching you and when Pentecost came upon them that's why in Acts 2, the church could meet together, love another and that's why their numbers grew daily, you miss this you miss why you sing and I say this before then you are just doing Christian karaoke.

How do we find that?

*Hebrews 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

'Sacrifice' is the key word in verse 15 and verse 16, which is repeated. The Hebrew writer is telling you, if you come to church and you worship like that, you can forget about the Holy Spirit coming in and you can forget about being a blessing to the nations on Monday to Saturday. How you worship on Sunday affects how you worship the rest of the week, now we can take worship beyond just singing, it is about prayer and sermons everything but this morning I want to

concentrate on singing. The scripture tells us to worship in spirit and truth. That's why worship must take you back to the cross.

When we sing together, focusing on God you are great because Christ died for me and your love so overflows me, I am going to go out there and I am going to be your ambassador and I will bless the nations, I will look for opportunities to share the good news and we will then make disciples of the whole world.

*Would you start off your New Year resolution by taking a small step to be part of the church?*