

The Church – Part 10 The Book of Acts

Thank you for joining me for a study in God's Word. Today, I'd like for us to look back at the subject of the purpose of the local church. But first, let's review some of the things we've covered in these past few lessons over the past few weeks as we've spent time together.

First, God's church is visible, as seen in the book of Acts, the New Testament church at Jerusalem. In other words, it's not an invisible thing; it's something visible, and that thing, of course, is made up of people. People are the church. And we see in particular that the New Testament local church started at Jerusalem. I believe that the Lord was setting up His church before he left here, but in essence, it was set apart or it was given the go-ahead on the Day of Pentecost to carry out what God had planned for, what Jesus Christ came to the Earth to do. And we know He came to seek and to save those who were lost. He came to set up His local church.

And then we see in the early church that people were together. They were steadfast. In other words, they were studying the Word, the apostles' doctrine; this is the teachings of God. And they had prayer together and so forth. And we, too, are to be as the early church. First Corinthians 15:58 says, *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.* In other words, we are to stay busy. We are to do the things that God has given us to do as His church.

We looked at the word "pragmatism." This means being concerned with results rather than principles. The philosophy of pragmatism, I believe, could be closely related

to situation ethics. In other words, the end justifies the means, and this philosophy is not Scriptural.

We've also looked at putting things in order in our lives, first God, then the home, then the church. We should never place the home or the local church above God. We should never place the church above God or the home, but God first and the other two will be in the proper order.

Now, let's look at the purpose of the local church. Why do I come to church? What should I expect the local church to do for me? Should the regular services of the church be primarily for reaching the lost? Or for reaching the saved? Let's compare the two concepts right now. The local church and the lost, first.

The regular services of a local church should have a ministry primarily for saints. Ephesians 4:12 says, *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

And then Colossians 1:28 says *whom we preach... speaking of Christ now... Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

Again, the keyword is "primarily." We are certainly glad if unsaved people can come into a local church and find it a place that informs them of their greatest need, which is salvation from sin. But the primary purpose of the local assembly is to proclaim the whole counsel of God so that believers are well equipped to go forth and do the work of the ministry.

Again, in Ephesians 4:12, it says, *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

The local church is to bring the Gospel to the unsaved. In Mark 16:15, it says, *And he said unto them, **Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.***

In II Corinthians 5:20: *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

Note this, God does not say, "Go into all the world and invite everyone to come to church." We are not to bring them to the Gospel, but we are to bring the Gospel to them. All believers are to be Gospel preachers, not just the pastor on Sunday morning or Sunday evening or Wednesday evening. Our Gospel emphasis should be every day of the week as we go into the world seeking the lost to win. But the hours that we spend with God's people should be rich times of being built up in the Word of God so that we can be more effective witnesses for Christ at work, at home, or wherever we are and whatever we're doing.

I also see that the pastor should preach the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In Acts 20:27 it says, *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.* Matthew 28:20 says, ***Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...*** and this is Christ speaking and He says... ***and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*** Amen.

In II Timothy 3:16, it says, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*

It's impossible to preach through the Bible systematically and not touch upon the Gospel repeatedly. There is a scarlet cord that runs throughout the Scriptures, but there are also rich gems of truth that believers need to hear and understand. John 3:16 is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, but a steady diet of John 3:16 type of messages is not what a hungry believer needs. If we aim the sword only at the unsaved, then we are going to fail to meet the spiritual needs of God's flock.

John 21:15-17 says this: ¹⁵*So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?** He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.*** ¹⁶*He saith to him again the second time, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?** He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.*** ¹⁷*He saith unto him the third time, **Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?** Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.***

We see that the local church is to reach the lost, but the prime way we do that is to go out from the local church or our local gathering place that we gather together for edifying. But notice this, the building of the saint. The local church is primarily a soul-building station. Acts 20:28 says, *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

Acts 20:32: *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are*

sanctified. In other words, unto all of them who are saved.

You know, I rejoice that every soul that is saved through the preaching ministry of a local church and every other New Testament local church that does this is certainly in the will of God, and I certainly do not want to minimize the importance of making the most of every opportunity to win a soul for Christ, but the primary purpose of the local assembly is to build up the believers in the most holy faith and to equip them for the work of the ministry. Once again, Ephesians 4:12 says, *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

The local church is here primarily to get people taught, in other words, teaching them. Matthew 28:19 says, ***19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.***

In Acts 2:42, *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

Believers are to be taught the Word of God in the local assembly. If God's Word is properly taught, the unsaved who are in attendance will certainly hear the Gospel and the believers who need to be taught will not be neglected. The local church is to preach the Word and this would include the Gospel and would not neglect all Scripture. Once again, II Timothy 4:2 says, *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

And II Timothy 3:16 says, *All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for*

doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That's what we do. That's what is to be done in the local churches is to preach the Word.

If a pastor is faithful in preaching through the Bible, verse by verse, book by book, he is going to be constantly pointing his listeners to Christ and to his so great salvation, and at the same time, he will be feeding the saints the kind of spiritual food that will nurture them and strengthen them to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The local church is here for indoctrination, in other words, to teach thoroughly.

If you have your Bible, and I trust you have a Bible handy there, I would ask you that each time we gather together to study God's Word that you would have your Bible. Turn with me to John chapter 21 and let's read a couple of verses, three verses.

John 21:15-17 says, ***15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas... Now, we've read this... lovest thou me...? And He goes on to say and He asked him three times and the third time, Peter was grieved. He said, Lovest thou me? For the third time, Jesus asked Peter this, and he said, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.***

In Acts 20:28, it says, *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God... that's the flock... that's the sheep Jesus was speaking of when He was talking to Simon.*

In I Peter 5:2, it says, *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint... In other words, don't be forced... but willingly; not for filthy*

lucre... not to simply to receive a salary... but of a ready mind. Be ready to do what God has for you to do as a pastor, as a child of God.

If you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you need to do that right now. You need to realize you're lost. You don't have a chance of going to Heaven without Jesus Christ. He said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me...* or "through me." So you need to ask Jesus, "Lord, forgive me of my sin. I receive you as my Savior. Come into my heart, because I believe the Bible when it says whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

May the Lord bless you. May you ask Jesus to save you. Let's pray. Father, I pray for those who are listening that You would do the work in their hearts, in their lives today, and I know You will for Christ's sake. Amen.

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