

The Importance of Showing Up

[Proposition: The Gathering of Christians is a gift from God that he uses to minister to his children and keep us in the faith, therefore we should show up!]

Why do we go/come to church?

I asked my kids that question this week. It is something we've always done, a spiritual habit. But I wondered what they had picked up along the way about why gathering with others Christians is important.

They said things like: to worship and praise God...yes. To learn...yes. My six year old Eva is the only one in the family who has figured out that when Dad asks a question she can usually say, "Jesus?" and almost always be at least sort of right. Those answers are all true, but when I asked them follow up questions, "So does that mean we can't worship God on our own? Does that mean we can't learn on our own?" it revealed that we hadn't really gotten to the heart of the matter. If we can also do everything on our own that we normally do when we gather— then why do we go/come to church? What is the importance of showing up?

Ironically, I think Eva's half answer half question, "Jesus?" was closer to the real reason than anything else that was offered. The Scriptures tell us that there is a special way that Jesus relates to and works in the church that he doesn't work when you try to fly solo as a Christian. **The church is a gift from God that he uses to minister to his children and keep us in the faith, therefore we should show up!**

I. We should show up because building the church is what Jesus is doing in the World.

A. Jesus is building his church.

The thing God is doing in the world is building the church. Of course he is doing other things too, but over and over in Scripture we see God's focus is the redemption of a people for his glory. He promised to make Abraham's offspring as numerous as the stars, he rescues the people Israel out of Egypt, he constantly disciplines and rescues Israel from her enemies, and ultimately in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection God fulfills the plan of redemption and saves a people, the church. John Stott the great evangelical Anglican once wrote:

The church is at the centre of the eternal and historical purpose of God.¹

This is what the author of Hebrews reminds us of in Verse 21:

²¹ and since we have **a great priest over the house of God**

¹ John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Statement* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 119.

If we follow the argument of Hebrews, we know that Jesus is “over the house of God,” but is also the builder of the house. Earlier in chapter 3:3-6, Hebrews tells us that Moses was a servant in God’s house, Jesus is worthy of more glory. Verse 3 reads:

³ For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.

There are some subtle OT allusions happening here, but the comparison comes across: Jesus is the builder of the house. And we find in Verse 6, it’s not a physical house that Jesus is building, but “*we* are his house.”

So, when we read in chapter 10 that Jesus is a “great priest over the house of God” we are reminded that he is building God’s house, which is his people, the church.

And it is as the “Great high priest” that Jesus builds the church. Verses 19-21 summarize this work. We are a people who have access to God the Father through him—specifically through his “blood.” His blood signifies that Jesus lived a sinless life, and offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross for his people to forgive our sin and cleanse our spiritual impurity. For anyone who trusts him—regardless of where you come from, what you have or haven’t done—for anyone who trusts him, Jesus’s crucified and risen body is now, like the curtain in the Temple, the entrance for us into God’s presence.

This is what God is doing in the world, calling sinners out of darkness into his marvelous light, making them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, those called “not a people” now called God’s own people. If this is what God is doing in the world, and we love and trust him, we need to show up, be part his work of building the church.

Illustration:

My wife is currently working to build a business republishing nature journals by the famous educator Anna Comstock. The journals help students learn about nature by helping closely observe plants and animals. Nature is cool, but this isn’t the sort of project that I would have envisioned or initiated, but I’m invested because I love my wife, I trust her and whatever she’s building I want to be part of and support the work.

A lot of us have our hearts invested in what politicians, or talking heads, or celebrities tell us is the most important thing right now—I’m not saying none of that is important, but I am saying that what matters to Jesus, what he’s doing in the world, is building his church.

It’s good news for us that we are part of the church, because

B. Jesus’s reign and blessing are experienced in the church

Verse 21 tells us that Jesus is “over the house of God.” In this context “over” means he has authority over the church—don’t you want to be part of the family where Jesus is in charge? No local church is perfect, but when the people of God are transformed by the Gospel and obey their Lord, the church becomes a place where people new and old can truly experience the loving reign of King Jesus

Illustration:

I've shared before how in Sept 2002 my mom had tachycardia and cardiac arrest, went into a coma, but ultimately suffered brain damage and the loss of motor functions. Needless to say, this threw my life into massive upheaval. In May 2003, on the first Mother's Day after all this happened, I got pulled over on my way to church to lead worship and that was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. When it was time for our service to begin I was basically having a breakdown just off stage. The mother of one of my friends came over and talked with me and calmed me down. And though we started late and musically it was probably not great, I remember feeling I had experienced the love of Christ that day—like I had been in a house where Jesus is in charge.

Moreover, the “house of God,” is where Jesus pours out his blessings on his people. Blessings like becoming part of a new family that is built on the cross and resurrection, and not on social or ethnic or economic similarities. Blessings like spiritual authority: pastors, elders, and deacons who preach the Gospel, shepherd the flock, equip, and care for the people of the church. Blessings like the Sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper where God ministers grace to us to strengthen our faith and obedience.

Illustration:

When I was a kid, my family would always go to my grandmother's for Thanksgiving. When you went to grandma's house you could always expect to eat, but there were certain things she would only make on Thanksgiving: from scratch egg-noodles, cherry and apple pie. These were everyone's favorites, but it was only at that time and place, with the whole family gathered that those blessings were prepared and provided.

Jesus meets us and blesses us in special ways as we gather with other Christians week after week, so we have to show up!

For some, you've already taken that step by rejoining us on the weekend here on campus.

For those who are higher risk, utilize the outdoor and/or smaller gatherings we offer, create our own “pods” of individuals or families, find some way to be with other Christians.

For others—and this message is mostly for people in danger of falling into this way of thinking—church online is just to comfortable and convenient. You might be getting so used to watching the online stream that you're in no hurry to return to the church and Christian community. If that's you, and you're life is returning to normal but you're opting out of church, you need to show up.

We all need to show up, because Jesus is building and blessing his church.

II. We should show up because Christian community helps us grow and guards us from falling away.

First, you can see that

A. Christian community helps us grow

Hebrews say in verse 24-25:

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

One of the reasons we are to “not neglect” meeting together is to stir up one another to love and good works. Earlier in the letter at 6:10, the author speaks of the “works [this church] has done, and the love that [they] have shown for God’s name in serving the saints.” The gathering of the community is essential to help Christians grow in love for God that is expressed in good works.

It is in relationship with one another that we “stir up” or provoke one another to kindness. We when we gather we hear of opportunities to love and serve our brothers and sisters, we talk with one another and think together how to demonstrate and declare the Gospel in our communities. In community other Christians encourage us to draw near to God and hold fast our confession. We are mutually responsible for stirring one another up and encouraging one another, and if you aren’t here (or regularly gathering with other Christians) you won’t receive encouragement, but you also won’t be there to give it.

Illustration:

It’s very hard to encourage yourself when you’re discouraged. This is one of the things I was talking about with my kids when we were talking about why we go to church. I gave them the analogy of when they’re doing their math work for school. Fairly often I hear a child exclaim, “I don’t know how to do it! This is impossible!” and so on. So I asked them, when that happens to you is it easy to just snap out of it and say, “Hey look you’ve already done 5 problems like this, I know you can figure this one out too. What if we look at this problem a different way?” Of course they said “No.” because it’s hard to encourage yourself with something is really hard or confusing. Our souls are so much more valuable than our math skills, so how much more do we need to show to be encouraged and to be there to encourage others?

B. Christian community guards us from falling away.

This is why I wanted us to read all the way to verse 31. Hebrews makes a connection between the “neglecting of meeting together” and falling away from faith. So, let’s read these verses again from 24-27 so we can get the full effect of this warning.

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

In other words, community helps us fight against sin, which we need to do because the day of judgment is coming. But if we neglect the gathering of believers, we may fall into deliberate sin, and in so doing face God's wrath. It's the same thing Hebrews has said earlier in chapter 3:

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Surely God keeps all his elect, and Christian community is a gift God gives to us, and a means he uses to keep us in the faith.

Illustration:

Multiple media outlets have reported on how isolation during COVID has caused an increase in depression, addiction, pornography use, and suicide. Humans are made for relationship, and when we are alone we are more susceptible to the sin and the brokenness in us and our world. Christian community, the church, is a great gift from God that helps us resist that sin and brokenness and guards us from falling away.

So we have to show up and take hold of this gift God has given us in the church.

If you're here and you're ready, praise God—help us by continuing to love your brothers and sisters who are still working things through. Keep showing up and helping us make our gatherings as safe and welcoming as we can for others.

If you're in a higher risk category or other factors keeping you back, don't be motivated by fear, continue to use wisdom, but find a way—let us help you find a way—to continue to gather with other Christians. Consider joining us for Church in the Park on October 11, consider joining (or even starting a group for folks in a similar place).

If what is keeping you away is just the comfort and convenience of watching online, let me exhort you brothers and sisters. Don't neglect meeting together. Don't risk getting entangled in sin. Don't risk falling away. Show up. We need you and you need us.

Conclusion:

Jesus Christ is building his church, his people. It's where he pours out his blessings of grace. He wants that church to continue to grow, for more and more people to become living stones in this temple he is building. We become members of his house through faith, look at v. 22:

²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

We don't draw near to God because of how good we are, or what we have or haven't done. But, through faith in Christ our great high priest who gave himself as a sacrifice for sin—we have our hearts cleansed and our sins washed away. He gives us access to God, and God the Father makes us members of his house, where ministers to us as his children and keep us in the faith. Amen.