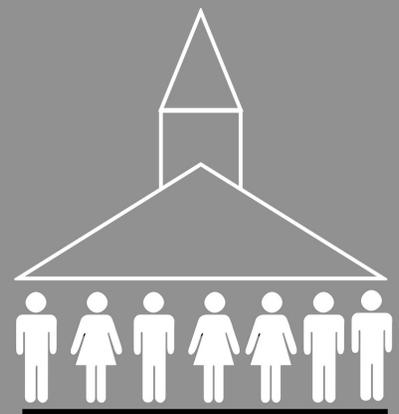




sacred ASSEMBLY

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SACRED ASSEMBLY

what is the church
why we must preach
who is leading His people
when we know Jesus
how I identify with Jesus

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recommended resources

The Church, Edmund Clowney

Deliberate Church, Mark Dever

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church, Mark Dever

Vintage Church, Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshears

Why we love the Church, Kevin DeYoung & Ted Kluck

Believer's Baptism, Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn Wright

Biblical Eldership, Alexander Strauch

Elders and Leaders, Gene Getz

Church History in Plain Language, Bruce Shelley

Kingdom of the Cults, Walter Martin

The Challenge of the Cults and the New Religions, Ron Rhodes



10. Invisible Church: The church as God sees it.

11. Missional Church: This church has a biblical mission. This is the church that God first founded in Acts. The missional church focuses on fulfilling the Great Commission to grow the church, the Great Commandment to ensure health, and mission Dei to preach the gospel to the world. Driven by a firm theological understanding of Christ (Christology) and His Church (Ecclesiology), this church lives out its mission by actively contextualizing the truth in the most effective forms and strategies to reach the place God has sent them. Sanctified by truth of Scripture, this process requires self-denial, and sacrifice, as we seek to live like Jesus and dwell in the world. The focus is on communicating the Gospel in word and deed to the community and the world. A missional church is an Acts 1:8 church; it's a church that seeks to become like the church in Acts 2.

12. Non-Denominational Church: An autonomous church that is not affiliated with a particular organization or governing body with agreed identity, theology, and traditions. These churches are often, but not always, identified as "Community" Churches, "Bible Churches" or the like.

13. Prosperity Church: A prosperity church is a church that preaches a false gospel of prosperity. Prosperity theology falsely teaches that God intends to bless those he "favors" through wealth, health, or other material success. The prosperity gospel is often used by its false teachers to elicit donations, on the premise that donations (sow a seed) will be materially repaid and rewarded through divine intervention. Not only does it create a false hope for those who adhere to the teachers, but perpetuates a way of living for which Jesus himself did not qualify.

14. Reformed Church: Theologically, a reformed church is a church that is characterized by a belief in biblical doctrine best expressed by the system of doctrine called Calvinism as well as confessions like the Westminster Confession of Faith. Additionally reformed churches are committed to "semper reformanda", or always reforming what we do in accordance with Scripture.

15. Visible Church: The church as Christians on earth see it.

read this first

This study is about the bride of Jesus Christ, the church. Jesus died and rose again to reconcile sinners to God and to gather them together as the church. Jesus loves his church. Jesus died for the church. Jesus cares for the church; builds the church; is the foundation of the church; and rules the church as its Husband and Head. As the church, the people of God have a unique, living, and active relationship with Jesus as He empowers us, through the Holy Spirit, to continue that same mission as the church.

Sadly, a growing number of people don't love the Church like Jesus. Many don't know what to think or feel about the church while others are convinced the church is dying and/or lost its mission. With new titles flooding the marketplace like: They Like Jesus but Not the Church, Life after Church, Pagan Christianity, Divine Nobodies, Quitting Church, it is no wonder that we hear professing Christians talk about a "Churchless Christianity." More and more disgruntled, disillusioned, and the disconnected believers are fleeing the local church, searching for a new version of "church" hoping to find a more fulfilling spiritual experience. Though many can identify what they feel is wrong with the church, few can actually explain what the Bible says is right about it. All they know is that, in their view, the institution of church is broken, the preaching in the church is irrelevant, the leadership of the church is corrupt, and the traditions for church are ritualistic and meaningless.

This is why our study is so important. Instead of listening to the loudest voices of culture, we will seek to understand what Jesus says the church he died for and built is all about. Week one seeks to clarify what is the church and what is not the church. Week two will address why we preach instead of having spiritual "conversations". Week three will identify who our Senior Pastor, Jesus, uses to care for His bride. Finally, week four and five will explain what traditions Jesus charged His Church to practice and why they're more than just routines.

Our prayer for this study is that God will awaken in all of us a renewed love for His bride, the church.

Because the tomb is empty,

Sam Ford, Lead Pastor

On behalf of the Elders of Damascus Road Church

the format

Each study begins with a key verse that summarizes the heart of the sermon being preached. Each sermon will make use of selected texts that help flesh out the truth being proclaimed. Memorizing the key verse in addition to the references for the other texts will help equip you to learn and discuss these important ideas with others. Following the verse, there is a basic summary referencing various passages that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, will help you follow along with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for personal reflection or group discussion, as well as an application scenario to consider. Finally, each section concludes with space for sermon notes in case you want to write things down from the preaching time on Sunday to reference at a later time.

suggestions for individuals

- **PRAY:** Before you begin, pray that God would open your mind to understand and your heart to accept His Word. Pray that, as you see the truth, the Holy Spirit will give you strength to act in accordance with what you have learned.
- **STUDY:** Work through the study and write out answers to the questions. Resist any temptation to skip over questions in the section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your understanding of God, yourself, and others.
- **SHARE:** Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you've learned and how you'd like your life to change as a result.

suggestions for Road Groups

- **REVIEW:** It is recommended that you take some time to meditate on some or all of the passages preached. Review the sermon but, more importantly, the verses and their surrounding contexts. Try to spend

most in the Emergent movement to a denial of truth, or some as far agnosticism. They often abandon orthodox theological positions such as the authority of Scripture, a literal hell, or even the sin of homosexuality. Often these churches will behave deeply missional in their approach to culture, specifically the arts. Additionally, they usually fashion a new, and unbiblical, ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) while remaining suspicious of most things institutional, authoritative, or organized.

6. **Emerging Church:** Many have used Emerging and Emergent as synonyms—both terms are probably overused. Some, however, have noted a difference between the terms identifying *emerging* is a wider, informal, church-based, global movement. There are many forms these churches take. While it is often difficult to distinguish what is what, the positive connotations of this unofficial movement describe churches that believe church cannot pretend like it is 1950 anymore. While holding firmly to orthodox theology, including ecclesiological forms, they walk the line between sectarianism (separated to far from culture) and syncretism (immersed too far into culture) in an effort to contextualize the gospel and reach today's culture without compromising the truth.
7. **Evangelical Church:** The term evangelical has its historical roots in the Greek word for "gospel" or "good news". An evangelical church, therefore, is a church that believes and proclaims the truth of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Historically, evangelicalism has been viewed as the middle ground between fundamentalists and liberals. At the core, an evangelical church believes transformation and continued reformation comes through the message of the gospel.
8. **Heretical Church:** A church that, though it identifies itself as Christian, has abandoned historical orthodox theology. Typically, such a church becomes polarized around an individual and the authority of Scripture no longer governs the church.
9. **House/Home Church:** A house or home church is an independent assembly of Christians who gather in a home. Such churches were present in the New Testament and are especially effective in contexts where the Christian faith is persecuted. There has been a recent growth in the number of home churches in North America and elsewhere. Some contemporary writers have argued that the home is the "right" place to meet and that it is more effective in engaging our current culture and building authentic community. In truth, house churches work effectively, or not, in various contexts. Depending on what occurs at the specific houses, there are those that are *biblical churches* and those that are *unbiblical groups* that pretend they are.

different kinds of churches

15 important definitions

1. **“Catholic” Church:** The phrase “catholic” church is different than the phrase the “Roman Catholic” Church. The Roman Catholic Church is characterized by an episcopal hierarchy with the pope as its head and belief in seven sacraments and the authority of tradition which came to prominence under Rome (esp. under Constantine). The term “catholic”, however, was first used by Iganitius of Antioch who died in 110 AD. It also appears in the historical Nicene Creed, which identifies the church as catholic (325 AD). Rooted in the Greek term *katholikos*, the word meant that which is universal or general. It was a term used to not only defend orthodoxy, but also as a means of expressing the international and cross-cultural nature of the church.
2. **Charismatic Church:** A charismatic church is often used synonymously with the Pentecostal movement of the 20th century. Such self-described churches typically emphasize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit as exemplified in the New Testament church (tongues, gifts of healing miracles, prophecy, etc.). Some churches over-emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit at the expense of Jesus. Some non-charismatic churches avoid talking about the Holy Spirit altogether. The term “charismatic” can carry both positive and negative connotations depending on its usage in context.
3. **Church Planting Church:** The book of Acts records the growth of the church through church planting. A church planting church is a church that holds church planting as a value in that it is a powerful and effective way to reach the lost. Genuine church planting churches have actions that accompany the value either by planting churches or partnering with those who do.
4. **Denominational Church:** A church that is governed by one of many organized subgroups in the Christian faith. Usually such churches are not autonomous but administered by a larger body. Though many of these groups share in essential theology, each of them possess a unique name, identity, and traditions.
5. **Emergent Church:** Emergent is an official organization in the U.S. and the U.K. “Emergent Village”, the organization, is directed by Tony Jones, a Ph.D. student at Princeton Theological Seminary. Several teachers affiliated with this group include Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay, Tim Keel, Karen Ward, Ivy Beckwith, and Brian McLaren. Often these groups emphasize culture over church and thus allow culture to redefine what their community and even their gospel looks like. They emphasize a lifestyle of worship where how they live is MORE important than what they believe. This perspective has led



more time dialoguing about God’s Word and the truth therein, rather than focusing on the strengths or weaknesses of the sermon itself.

- **DISCUSS:** In your time together as a community, discuss what you have learned. Present new questions or verses that have come to mind as you have studied. Focus on the implications for your lives individually and as a group.
- **REVEAL:** Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- **PRAY:** In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and genuine care for one another. Resist the urge to have to discuss every question or “get through the material.” Listen to one another’s hearts beyond the words of the answer so that you might minister to one another effectively.

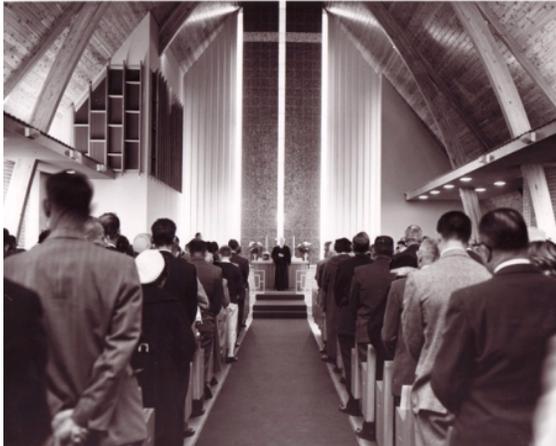
questions or comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to life@damascusroadchurch.org.



Sacred

The series title, “Sacred Assembly” represents an attitude we’d like to recapture in our people. The word “Sacred” can mean a great many things. That which is “Sacred” is often contrasted against that which is “Secular.” Narrowly defined, sacredness has caused many in history to venerate books, music, and other objects dedicated to a deity or intended for a religious purpose. Taken to the broadest of irreligious definitions, the term sacred can describe anything someone reveres (in truth or jest) from memories, restaurants, or even days of the week. Our hope is to redeem this word and recapture its original meaning relative to our gathering as the church.



You’ve probably heard it asked, “Is there nothing sacred anymore?” Usually this comes in response to hearing coworkers vomit out profanity, watching Hollywood make movies about topics once taboo, or seeing young adults “looking like fools with their pants on the ground”. When

speaking of the church, the use of the term “Sacred” has less to do with what we might see or even do as an organization, and more about an attitude we should be holding—which invariably impacts what we do. The term sacred comes from the word “Sacren” meaning “to consecrate” or, in biblical terms, to set apart as Holy and special for God. In other words, our gatherings are more than just compulsory get-togethers where kids are babysat, songs are sung, a guy yells for 45 minutes, and we eat small wafers that get stuck in our teeth while sipping from a cup small enough for a smurf.

Viewing a church gathering as a consecrated corporate spiritual experience is foreign to our culture of consumerism. My fear is that we

4. Read Acts 19.1-5. How many baptisms are there? When, if ever, should someone be rebaptized? (See also Ephesians 4.5; Romans 6.3-4; Galatians 3.26-28.)
5. When baptisms occur in your church, are they a time of rejoicing and praise to God? What do you think is happening to the person being baptized at that moment (if anything)? What do you think should be happening?
6. What practical suggestions can you make for helping to overcome the differences among Christians on the question of baptism?
7. How can baptism be an effective help to evangelism in your church? Have you seen it function in this way?

scenario:

A friend of yours has confessed to being a Christian for many years, yet, they have never been baptized. When you inquire as to why, they explain that they never thought it was important. They argue that they don't need to "prove" their faith to anyone publicly—Jesus knows. How would you respond?

approach our Sunday morning worship with a pragmatic spirit as opposed to seeking to worship God by the power and in the presence of the Holy Spirit. **This series is not a call for more charismata but a reformation of our view of our time of worship on Sunday.**

Assembly

The word 'church' in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word 'ekklesia' which comes from two words 'ek' meaning 'out' and 'kaleo' meaning to 'call.' An ekklesia or 'calling out' is a unique kind of assembly. The word ekklesia was a political term, not a religious one. In classical Greek "ekklesia" meant "an assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly. Relative to Jesus and His Church, it is an intentional, organized gathering of God's people, assembled for specific purposes—in this case worship of the King to whom we declare our allegiance.

But the church isn't called an "assembly" simply because they gather together. When Jesus speaks of the church, He uses a term that is rich with Old Testament meaning. In Exodus, God assembled Israel before Him at Mount Sinai to make his covenant with them (Ex. 19). The Exodus redemption from Egypt culminates at this moment as Israel is identified as an assembly because they gather in the presence of God (Deut. 4.10; 9.10; 10.4; 18.16). Later Israel regularly assembles, always remembering the "great assembly" of Sinai. Three times a year Israel assembled for the feasts of the sacred calendar (Lev. 23) and the prophets described the future and complete blessing of God's presence in a great assembly which included Gentiles (Isaiah 2.2-4; 56/6-8; Joel 2.15-17).



To worship in that assembly is to gather in God's "ekklesia". Just as Israel before us, our assemblies are unique gatherings in the presence of God. Sadly, today the Sunday morning assembly is at the center of conflict. Many well meaning believers argue that not only does the church not need order, but that it does not need regular worship services. They condemn the church for its performance-driven experiences full of passive spectators and an inspired, but irrelevant lecture. Their new mantras are things like, "We need to stop going to church and start being the church." It's not that they don't think we need worship, rather, they believe that it is never an event but "a lifestyle". In their pursuit of a more "genuine" worship experience, they create communities of all shapes and sizes unified by their belief that, regardless of form, "wherever two are gathered" God is there. More than that, they claim that not only that God is uniquely present, but His church is made manifest.

While there is some truth in their criticisms, their responses are often unbiblical. Without question, the church is more than a worship service BUT, the worship services, the gatherings, the corporate assembly is essential to the very identity and life of the church. Our hope is not to argue against every "new" model of church being offered, or answer every critique of every author who thinks they know the disease and antidote. What we want is to recapture a deeper and wider vision for what we do on Sunday morning. Our hope is that all who attend Damascus Road will realize that we are doing more than coming together to sing songs and find ways to ignore what the guy up front is saying to everyone else.

Our assembly is a sacred experience where, as one body, one people, and one family, we publicly celebrate our shared identity in the one God's covenant with us through the life, death, resurrection, and return of the Lord Jesus Christ.



the debt for their sins, declared us innocent, redeemed us from slavery, appeased the wrath of God, and, ultimately, brought us back into right relationship with our Creator.

Romans 6.3-4 teaches us about the deeper significance of baptism. The baptism of a believer is in many ways a public funeral. Our baptism not only marks our union with Christ, it symbolizes the spiritual burial of our old self, clothed in sin, and the rising of a new man clothed with Jesus. It is a ceremony like no other, giving us a new identity and new name—the name of Jesus. Through this action we declare that we are not of Paul, Apollos, Peter, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or some sect: we are Christians, bearing the name of and governed by the Lordship of Jesus.



As with the Lord's Supper, Baptism also expresses unity in our identity. Just as in one body we share in the one bread, so we share in the symbolic sacrament of burial and resurrection with Jesus. While communion reminds us of our continued participation as we are conformed to the image of Jesus, baptism is the sign of our initial identification with Jesus. As part of the Great Commission, it is more than a ritual but a visible sign of our continued fulfillment of that Commission.

discussion questions:

1. What has been your experience or knowledge of baptism before this study? What aspects of the meaning of baptism have you come to appreciate more as a result of studying this (if any)?
2. Have you been baptized? When? If you were baptized as a believer, what was the effect of the baptism on your Christian life (if any)? If you were baptized as an infant, what effect did the knowledge of your baptism have in your own thinking when you eventually learned that you had been baptized as an infant?
3. When do you think a believing child should be baptized? How soon after conversion should someone be baptized?



Week 5

The Sacraments: Water

WHEN DO I IDENTIFY WITH JESUS?

And Jesus came and said to them,
“All authority in heaven and on earth has
been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples
of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the
Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Matthew 28.18-19 (ESV)

In his final instructions to his disciples, Jesus commanded (not suggested) that they baptize disciples—those who follow Jesus. First and foremost, Baptism is an act of obedience to Jesus. Baptism is a public declaration of faith and active identification with Jesus in his death and resurrection.

Though there are slight disagreements about *how* someone should be baptized, at Damascus Road Church we believe that the Bible gives examples of converts being baptized through immersion. The prime example is when Phillip shared the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch. According to Scripture, Philip waited until they found water suitable to be dunked in, as opposed to using the water they had, and proceeded to baptize his new brother in Jesus (Acts 8.36). Regardless of the mode of baptism, a Christian church must practice baptism and, moreover, a *biblical* Christian church believes that baptism is more than just getting wet.

Once a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior and receives the seal of our faith in the Person of the Holy Spirit, then the Bible calls us to make our private commitment a public declaration. Baptism is not “magical”, nor does it come *before* salvation. Simply, Baptism is a visible representation of the invisible change that has occurred in the individual as a result of belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A believer is someone who realizes that their sin separates them from God. A person who is transformed by the Gospel knows they will never be “good enough” to reach God through their own good works or religious activities. Therefore, they depend on Jesus Christ’s work, His death on the cross alone that paid



Week 1

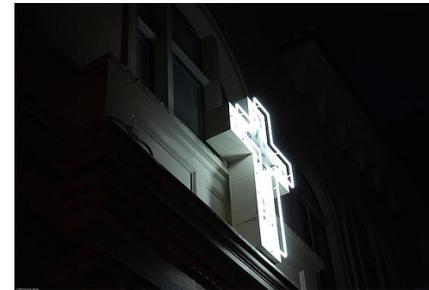
The Church: Assembly

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

“...I will build my church, and the
gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
Matthew 16.18 (ESV)

What is the church? There are fewer and fewer people that can offer a clear answer to that question. Yet, there are an increasing number of people who can easily describe why they “love Jesus”, but have “given up” on the church. Jesus loved the church so much He gave up everything for her. Not only did he promise to build the church through his death, but he also promised that his love would continue to make the church more beautiful (Ephesians 5.25-33). In other words, it is impossible to love Jesus and not his bride—they are inseparable.

Many believe that the church has lost its way. Jesus did not fail to build or care for his bride; rather, sinful men and women corrupted her beauty. This growing sense of disillusionment has been met by an American evangelicalism



attempting to “redefine” the church with numerous “new” kinds of churches: *the emerging church, the house church, the purpose-driven church, the organic church, etc.* Without knowing what the church actually is, they seek to fix what is wrong with it, and end up building communities that are often unbiblical. Reacting to a church and leadership they view as hurtful,

impotent, and institutionalized, they allow everything to be redefined by their emotions and experiences, even Scripture itself.

The current attempts to reinvent the church are often accompanied by a call to recapture the spirit of the New Testament Church, especially from the Book of Acts. Ironically, the same passages used to support their claims are in fact the very passages that admonish them. The people of God are not birthed in the Book of Acts, but in the Old Testament. The church is not a parenthesis in God’s redemptive plan, it is the fulfillment of all of God’s Old Testament



promises to renew and deliver His people, as the church of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Calls from today's movements to return to the church of Acts 2 often emphasize the relational simplicity that exists there while ignoring the explicit truth claims of apostolic authority, qualified leadership, and organized structures.

From a biblical perspective, the church is not less, it is more than most think. As people of extremes, many want to make the church an either/or when it should be a both/and. The church is both fellowship AND commitment. The church is both organic AND structured. The church is both loving AND disciplined. The church is both communal AND missional. And though the church is full of flawed men and women, her identity, purpose, and role as Christ's bride is certain.

discussion questions:

1. Would you consider the church that you are now in to be a true church? How do you know? Have you ever been a member of a church that you would think to be a false church?
2. Read Matthew 18.15-20. In context, what does verse 20 mean? Are two or three gathering together on the golf course or at Starbucks a church? Why or why not?
3. When you think of the church as the invisible fellowship of all true believers throughout all time, how does it affect the way you think of yourself as an individual Christian?
4. Read some of the passages listed below. Which of the metaphors for the church most impress you? How do they change your view of the church? (John 15.5, Romans 11.17-24, 1Cor 3.6-9, 1Cor 3.9, John 4.35, 1Peter 2.4-8, Heb. 3.6, 1Timothy 3.15, 1Cor. 12.12-27)
5. Read Ephesians 5.7-13. What does Paul write as one of the purposes of the church? Where or how do we see this?

scenario:

A Christian friend tells you that they love Jesus but not the church. They tell you that going to church doesn't make them a Christian and that they enjoy community with a few friends semi-regularly. In their view, they cannot see the value of church relative to their personal relationship with God. How do you respond?



discussion questions:

1. What has been your experience with the Lord's Supper in the past?
2. What things symbolized by the Lord's Supper have received new emphasis in your thinking as a result of hearing today's sermon? Do you feel more eager to participate in the Lord's Supper after learning more about it? Why or Why Not?
3. In what ways (if any) will you approach the Lord's Supper differently now? Which of the things symbolized in the Lord's Supper is most encouraging to your Christian life right now?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 11.27. Discuss what you think it means to "eat or drink" in an unworthy manner? How does this relate to our approach to worship overall (See Matthew 5.23-24)?
5. Are there any broken personal relationships that you need to make right before you come to the Lord's Supper again?
6. Are there areas in which our church needs to do more teaching about the nature of the Lord's Supper? What are they?
7. At Damascus Road, we take Communion every week. The practice of most of the church throughout its history is to celebrate the Lord's Supper every week when believers gather. However, in many Protestant groups since the Reformation, there has been a less frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper—sometimes once a month or twice a month, or, in many Reformed churches, only four times a year. Discuss your experiences and opinions? (See 1 Corinthians 11.26)

scenario:

You bring a friend to church who you know is not a Christian. Following the sermon, the pastor invites people to participate in Communion. He fails to inform those listening that Communion is for repentant believers. As you go up for Communion, your friend follows and also participates. What would you say to your non-Christian friend? What if your friend was an unrepentant Christian?

sermon notes _____

Week 2

The Word: Preaching

WHY MUST WE PREACH?

...Preach the word; be ready in season
and out of season; reprove, rebuke,
and exhort, with complete patience
and teaching.

2Timothy 4.2 (ESV)

Why do we preach sermons on Sunday morning? In an attempt to engage the culture, there is a movement in evangelical Christianity today to do away with the sermon in exchange for “conversations.” In the views of some, listening to sermons is akin to sitting for root canal work. Not only are they boring, irrelevant, and uninspiring, the pastors who preach them serve as the poster children for institutionalized religion. Believing that sermons are not sanctioned by Scripture, many of the “new communities” rising up today are characterized by singing, reading of Scripture, conversations about God, even mutual encouragement and accountability, but no sermon. Pastors, evangelists, or any other preacher are often viewed as power hungry CEOs who like to hear themselves talk.

The issues with preaching have less to do with the sermon or the preacher and more with those listening. The cry to return to the New Testament era when the services were simply a group of people sharing their ideas about God represents an ignorant view of New Testament History. In his study of the “sermonic thread” from Jesus to the apostles and through the early church fathers, John Stott concluded that, “Preaching is indispensable with Christianity.”

Some of the disdain for sitting and listening to lengthy sermons has to do with our increasingly illiterate culture that, through the power of technology, has developed a solid 12 minute attention span. But more of the issue has to do with confusion about what a sermon is or what a preacher is actually doing. The Greek word for preacher is *kerux*. A *kerux* is a herald who proclaims truth. A herald is not a Bible study leader or a discussion facilitator. A herald declares a message that



We read in Acts 2 that immediately following Pentecost, Christians began “breaking bread” in remembrance of Jesus. The apostle Paul has much to say about who should take Communion and how in 1Corinthians 10.15-22 and 11.17-34. The concern for today’s church is that Communion has lost its sacredness and, as a result, its meaning. Many of us grew up at churches where we took communion once a month out of routine. Ushers would pass large plates with microscopic crackers and smurf-size cups of juice. Without much thought, we’d take a cup and wafer because it felt weird not to. We felt like we should without knowing why. The experience felt obligatory, like an add-on, something you did out of obligation with little intentionality.

In truth, Communion is the zenith of our worship service on Sunday; it is the moment that all moments point to—remembering the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. We worship together with our voices in song; we worship together through hearing the Word of God proclaimed; we worship together through giving of our offerings; and we worship together through taking of communion. Though we do not believe Jesus is literally present in elements of Communion, we do believe that He is spiritually present through the indwelling Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.



In other words, Communion is more than a meaningless routine, it is Sacred. Through this powerful active experience, we come to know Jesus intimately in a way that sets us apart from the world as genuine believers (Luke 24.25). Not only are we memorializing his death for us, we are proclaiming it. Not only are we proclaiming, we are participating in the benefits of that death. As we receive physical nourishment, the meal gives us spiritual nourishment. As we take the bread and cup individually, we do so in unity with one another. Together, we affirm Jesus’ love for us and the blessings that come from that love. Together, and all at once, we affirm our sinfulness and our faith in Jesus to cleanse us from all sins. It is a meal like no other, one filled with joy, thanksgiving, and a deep abiding love (John 6.22-59).



Week 4

The Sacraments: Bread & Wine

WHEN DO WE “KNOW” JESUS?

Then they told what had happened
on the road, and how he was known
to them in the breaking of the bread.
Luke 24.35 (ESV)

The Protestant Reformers were concerned that the Roman Catholic Church had the outward, institutional form of the church, but it was just a shell. They refused to define the church in this way, so teachers like Martin Luther and John Calvin wrestled with the marks of a “true” church. In describing these identifying marks, John Calvin wrote, “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted a church of God exists.”

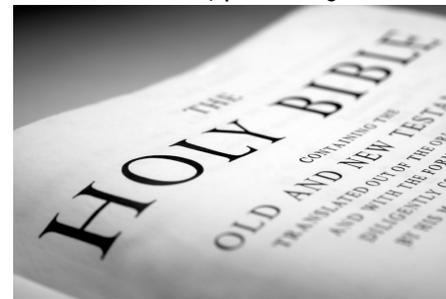
Jesus left his followers with two different sacraments to regularly practice. A sacrament is a visible symbol or sign of an invisible reality. In other words, it is a physical representation of what has happened spiritually in the believer who participates in it. Jesus instructed his disciples in two different sacraments, communion and baptism. Communion is more communal in nature while baptism is more missional in nature. Communion was instituted by Jesus on the night before he would be crucified. Only hours before he was to be betrayed and arrested, a Jewish Jesus sat down with his Jewish disciples to celebrate the Jewish feast of Passover. The Passover meal symbolized the story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt when God killed all of the firstborn sons of the land, but spared Israel through the blood of a sacrificed lamb. Fulfilling all that the Old Testament had pointed toward, Jesus declared that He was in fact the bread and the wine that they ate and drank: *“²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”* (1 Corinthians 11.24-26, Luke 22. 19-20)



changes the listener’s condition and requires a response. The preacher then declares God’s Word, the heart of which is the Gospel—the news of what God has done to accomplish salvation.

God’s Word has always been His chosen instrument to create, convict, convert, and conform his people. In truth, God himself is a preacher who preached the first and best sermon in Genesis 1. He preached the Gospel in Genesis 3.15, preached the promise of faith to Abraham in Genesis 12, and preached about holiness through His giving of the Law in Exodus 20. All throughout the Old Testament we see God preaching His Word through prophets, priests, and Kings with a view of renewing and delivering His people—it is the way God works (Isaiah 55.10-11).

The New Testament witnesses to the importance of preaching God’s Word. Jesus, who is the Word incarnate, preaches. Many people have a skewed understanding of Jesus, believing he sat and had private conversations with those who would listen, especially the marginalized. While he did do this, Jesus preached publicly. He preached to both small and big crowds while sending his disciples out “two by two” to preach (Mark 1.7,38, 39; 2.2; 3.14; 16.20). After his death and resurrection, before his ascension, Jesus commissions his disciples to preach the gospel once they have received the Spirit whom he sends. Then, throughout the book of Acts we see the disciples fulfill their mission, preaching the Word (Acts 2-3; 5.42; 6.2; 8.4,12, 25, 40; 9.27-28; 10.36).



There is a familiar saying that Christians often put on church signs, “Preach the gospel, and occasionally use words.” This encouragement to love people in very practical ways is certainly needed. But, salvation comes by hearing the verbal proclamation of truth. Because Paul believed that faith came by hearing the Words of Jesus (Romans 10.17), he charged a young pastor to “preach the word” as he led the church. We must never forget that the power to save and transform a heart is the Word of God. The Word of God is not a dead book, rather, it is living, with the power to give life. It is the preaching of God’s Word, not programs or people, that unleashes the power of God. His Word builds, grows, protects, guides, and defines the church.



discussion questions:

1. Read Romans 10.17. What is the message that Paul is referring to?
2. In Romans 1.16, the apostle Paul writes, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” What is the Gospel? (see 1Cor. 15.3-8)
3. In your opinion, what is “good” preaching and what is “bad” preaching? What is biblical preaching? (See 2Corinthians 4.-6).
4. What is the role of God’s Word in the world? Read Ezekiel 37.1-10. What is the connection between breath, spirit, speech, and word?
5. What is the role of God’s Word in the church? Read John 17.17 and Ephesians 5.25-26.
6. Asked about his accomplishments as a Reformer, Martin Luther said, “I simply taught, preached, wrote God’s Word: otherwise I did nothing...the Word did it all.” Read Isaiah 55.10-11 and Romans 10.17. Why is preaching so important?
7. There are a number of criticisms against expositional preaching today. Some argue that we need more artistic, conversational, less authoritarian and more participatory “sermons”. This may include the use of video clips, graphics, or other methods necessary to engage today’s culture. Read 2Timothy 4.3. Is this what Paul is warning against? How much must we consider our culture in the form of preaching?

scenario:

A friend tells you that he is leaving the church because he feels that weekly gatherings are not required biblically and that preaching itself is an invention of man. He’s decides to join a more “authentic” community meeting in a nearby home. There, everyone is encouraged to teach as they share and engage in spiritual conversations about God. He believes that traditional preaching stifles individual interpretation and encourages a passive experience with God and His people. How would you respond?

**sermon notes** _____

6. Read Hebrews 13.17. How do the words “obey” and “submit” make you feel? Why do you think you feel that way?
7. Do qualifications like, “husband of one wife” really mean there can only be male elders? Why does this even matter? Doesn’t such a position diminish the value of women in the church?

scenario:

A friend of yours had a bad experience with a church in which they disagreed with a particular decision. Because this was more than a disagreement over the color of carpet, their experience left them bitter toward and skeptical of church leadership. Though they continue attend church semi-regularly, they refuse to ever become a member of a church. When asked about verses like Hebrews 13.17, they respond with reading from 1Peter 2. They claim that because they are part of the “priesthood of believers”, they don’t need to submit to leadership. How would you respond to them? Or would you engage them at all? If not, why?

sermon notes _____



Week 3

The Leadership: Elders

WHO IS LEADING GOD'S PEOPLE?

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Acts 20.28 (ESV)

When God gave the fifth commandment to, “Honor your Father and Mother” (Ex.20.12), he reaffirmed the inherent authoritative structure that exists as an essential aspect of the design for His people. There is a growing desire to see the church abandon the constraints of structure and authority in exchange for a more relational community devoid of hierarchy. As writer and pastor Kevin DeYoung observes in his Why we love the Church, “There are only two problems with this model of church: it’s unbiblical and it’s unrealistic.”

The Bible says that God is a God of order (1Cor. 14.40). Even though sin can often cause us to make an idol out of order, without order we have chaos. The key is to have the right kind of order which comes from biblically qualified leadership. As we confess that men have, at times, failed to lead the church perfectly, we mustn’t abandon the need for biblical leadership. Even though leaders fail, a leaderless church is not an option.

God has declared that his people be led by godly men. Even in the Old Testament, we see men selected as elders to help shepherd and judge the people (Deut. 18). God continues to engage His people through his prophets, priests, and kings as an extension of His authority. When Jesus comes to earth, he calls 12 men to aid him in his ministry. Even within these 12 we see a hierarchy of leadership develop. When it comes time for Jesus to be crucified, his prayer in John 17 make clear the roles that exist within the Trinitarian relationship itself, serving as a model for the relationships of His people.



After Jesus ascension and the empowerment of the church is realized in the book of Acts, we see the apostles exercising authority over all of the churches planted (2Corinthians 13.1-4). In their writings, the apostles encourage the elders (pastors) to exhort, rebuke, correct, teach, and exercise discipline over the assembly. As the church grows, the apostles install Deacons to assist them in managing the practical ministries of the church (Acts 6.1-7). Finally, we see the members of the church charged to submit to and obey their leaders (Heb. 13.17).

The question is not whether the church should have leaders, but what kind. Again, the Scriptures provide a clear description of the kinds of men who are called to eldership. To be considered for eldership, a man must exhibit the highest of Christian character according to the qualifications of Scripture (1Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9). In simple summary, the elder’s call is to nurture his relationship with God, maintain his household well, and teach and defend the truth SO THAT he might manage the church, shepherd the people, and provide a model of Christian living for others to follow. God equips those he calls. In other words, the qualifications listed in Scripture are not traits to be developed as much as they are traits to be identified. Some of the qualifications listed by Scripture require interpretation. The elders of the local church are empowered with the collective authority and wisdom to discern who is qualified and who is not as it is their responsibility to confirm their call.

discussion questions:

1. What is wrong with a “leaderless” church?
2. What do you think is the supreme responsibility of the elders of the church? How does the metaphor of a Shepherd help us?
3. At Damascus Road we often say that Jesus is the Senior Pastor of the church? What do you think we mean? Why is this important to remember? (Ephesians 5.23, Colossians 1.18).
4. Read and discuss the meaning of the eldership qualifications found in 1Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9. How do you determine the meaning of some of the more ambiguous qualifications? When all is said and done, who decides if someone is qualified or not?
5. What role do you think the congregation should play in the selection and installment of elders? (Acts 20.28)

