

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Why We Should Love the Church**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: TMC88

This morning I've been asked if I would share with you as we go through some of the distinctives that are precious to the heart of The Master's College on the subject of the local church. Most of you know, of course, that my passion is the local church. My love is the local church. A lot of you were with us yesterday. We had an absolutely unbelievable and unforgettable day as we thanked the Lord for 35 years of ministry at Grace Church. I'm often asked why I'm a pastor. Did any of you see that article in The Signal yesterday? How could you miss it?

When I was being interviewed by the writer for that, and when I was being interviewed by the writer who wrote the article in the Times a couple of weeks ago, they all want to know why I'm in ministry. Some of them asked me why I'm not a lawyer because it seems like I like to argue about things. Some of them say, "I thought you were in athletics in college and you played football and this, why didn't you go into an athletic career?"

And I've even been asked at having been a pastor for so many years, "Why are you still a pastor? Don't you get tired of it? You could be the president of a school and wouldn't that be enough of a job to keep a normal person occupied? Or you could be a radio preacher and teacher, and maybe write a few books. Why do you go on pastoring a church? Aren't churches places where you have a lot of problems? Isn't it tough dealing with volunteers?"

"You have to work with the people that God gives you. Isn't it difficult preparing two sermons every week of your life and delivering them? Isn't it difficult living in a goldfish bowl and having all that responsibility, and trying to deal with the sins of people, and fouled-up marriages, and messed-up homes, and wayward kids, and all the problems? Why do you do that? Why is the church so precious to you that you would, among all the things that you might do with your life, do that?"

And so as I approached the theme of the church this morning, and just share it with you, there's so much that can be said. I've written numerous books on the subject. And last night I was sitting in my little blue easy chair and I was looking through some of my old books, and notes, and things, and saying, "What am I going to say to these kids in a half an hour this morning about the church that's going to leave some indelible impression on them?"

I could go through the whole book of Acts, the whole book of Ephesians, or whatever and try to unfold some of the principles. We could talk about issues of church leadership, or church government, or

format, or ministry, or whatever. And I really went to bed last night with absolutely nothing in my mind because I couldn't seem to come up with what I ought to share.

I came in the office this morning and I sat down and I thought to myself, "Why am I in the church?" That's a fair question. And here's the answer I wrote down on this piece of paper.

There are several reasons why I love the church, not only as a pastor but as a Christian. If I'm not at Grace Church, if I'm somewhere else in America, I'll find a church on the Lord's Day. And if I'm not preaching, which is a rare thing, I'll find a church where I can just go and be. I want to be in a church. I love the church. And I'll give you a few reasons why.

Number one reason I love the church is it's the only institution Jesus ever builds and promises to bless. With all that Jesus could have done, might have done in the world, had the power to do, He only built one institution, that's the church. In Matthew chapter 16 Jesus said, "I will build My church, I will build My church." You know, that's a marvelous statement. He never said He'd build anything else. All He ever said He'd build is a church - not a college, not a radio ministry, He'd only build a church.

One time a reporter said to me, "Do you have a desire to build the church? You have a fast-growing church, you have a - are you driven by this? Do you have a big desire to build the church?"

And I said, "I have no desire to build the church."

He said, "Why?"

I said, "Because Jesus said He'd build the church and I don't want to compete with Him."

I really have no desire to build the church. I've never asked the Lord for any more people at Grace Church than we have. That's enough responsibility to have what we've got without having more responsibility. After all, Hebrews 13 says I have to give an account to God for what I do.

I have to just let the Lord build the church, and that's a tremendous joy for me. I'm not a part of a man-building operation. I never wanted to come to the end of my life and look back and say, "I wonder whether I did this or God did this." I guess I've had a fear of that, and that's why I really resist gimmicks, and intimidation, and formulas, and marketing strategies, and whatever else kind of stuff comes down the pike.

All I know about the church is that Jesus said He would build His church, and the Bible says He'll build His church through the power of the Word and the power of the Spirit. And anything else may end up with a man-constructed institution. I don't want to come to the end of my ministry, look back and say, "Was this God or was it me? Was it part Him, part me?" I want to be able to look back and

say, "Well, I only preached the Word. That's all I ever preached. And I depended on the power of the Holy Spirit, so it's His church." I don't really want to be a part of anything that God isn't building.

Once I was asked to be a president of another institution and I said, "I can't do that because I have to pastor a church. I have to be in a church. I have to be a part of what Jesus is building." I can come alongside some other things that help the church, and strengthen the church, like the college, or whatever it might be, but I have to pour my life into the church.

Do you know, young people, most people who graduate from seminary do not go into ministry in a church? That's amazing. That is why at The Master's Seminary we're committed to producing pastor/teachers who can exposit the Word of God as a life-commitment in the church. It's the most exciting, creative, thrilling adventure that anyone could ever have, to go along with Christ as He builds His church, or as Denise sang, "He builds His kingdom."

Secondly, I love the church because the church is going to win in the end. I'm a part of a winner. A lot of people start businesses that fail, you know that? A lot of people pour their life into a career and end up with little or nothing. Some people decide they're going to go into finance and investments and they lose it all. Some people decide they're going to start a business and it goes belly up. Some people get into a career, and a few years into the career, it's tedious, and tasteless, and it's not an adventure, and it doesn't really matter, and who cares? It has no lasting value, and there's no guarantee that it's going to have any major impact on changing society.

But I'll tell you this. Pour your life into the church and you're going to be a part of the winner. Because Jesus also said, "I'll build My church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." "The gates of Hades" is a Jewish statement referring to death. The gates of Hades simply a symbol of death to the Jews. And Jesus is saying this, "I will build My church and death won't stop Me."

You see, death is Satan's most powerful weapon. He first used it on Christ. He thought if he could kill the builder of the church, he could kill the church. But the builder came out of the grave. And then not only that, but throughout the history of the church, he has endeavored to wipe the church out. He slaughtered the church, killed the church. People have died as martyrs, and even to this day are still dying as martyrs for the cause of Jesus Christ. The most powerful weapon that Satan has, however, cannot stamp out the church, and any student of church history will tell you the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed in which the church flourishes.

Jesus said, "All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me and I will lose none of them. Satan will not snatch anybody out of My hand. All that the Father has determined to redeemed will be redeemed and nobody's going to get lost in the process." And then Jesus said in John 6, "I will raise him up at the last day." Everybody the Father puts His hand on will come to Me. Everybody who comes to Me I will hold, and everybody I hold will be raised at the last day.

The church is going to be victorious. That's why if you read Hebrews chapter 12, you see the church, the firstborn triumphantly in heaven, and they're going to be there triumphant in total in glory. You come in to Revelation chapter 4, and you see the church represented by the 24 elders and they are singing, "Praise to the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." And there they are in their glory.

I'm a part of something that is eternal. I'm a part of something that is a winner in the sense that it's eternal. I'm pouring my life into the church that Jesus is building and Satan's most powerful weapon, death, cannot even stop it. And some day the church totally intact with nobody lost, but all the Father draws who come are kept by Christ, and nothing will separate them from His love, but they'll dwell with Him forever in eternity as the church glorified and triumphant. And I'll be there, and you who love Christ will be there, and we'll be the winners, and we'll inherit the glory forever and ever. I've always wanted to be on the winning side. Haven't always been, but I am this time.

The third reason that I love the church is because it is the most precious - the most precious - possession that God has on earth. You say, "How do you know that?" Because in Acts 20:28 we read this. "Be on guard for yourselves - " talking to the elders at the church at Ephesus. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, - " listen " - to shepherd the church of God." And then this, "Which He purchased with - " what? " - His own blood."

How precious is the church? How precious is the church? Peter says, "You were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold from your former manner of life, but with the precious blood of the Lamb, spotless and without blemish." God has paid the infinite price.

"What - " says Paul to the carnal Corinthians. "What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of God? The temple of the Holy Spirit, which you have from God, and you are not your own for you were - " what? " - bought with a price." Jesus Christ Himself knew the price, and He felt it as He knelt in the garden that night with the disciples falling asleep. And He said, "Father, please let this cup pass from Me. This is more than I can bear, to shed My blood as My life is crushed out of Me by the sheer weight of the sins of the world."

I love the church. I love the church because Christ loved the church, and He loved it enough to give His blood for it. And I don't like it when people speak against the church or diminish the church. It's the only institution Jesus ever built, and the only one He ever promised to bless, and it's the winner. It's the winner. All other institutions and associations will end, and the church triumphant will occupy the glories of eternal heaven. And the price, inestimable, beyond belief. That's how precious the church is.

There's a fourth reason I love the church. I love the church because it's the earthly expression of the heavenly kingdom. It's the closest thing - are you ready for this? - to heaven on earth. It is. Do you

remember back in Matthew when Jesus was giving the sermon on the mount and He said, "This is how you're supposed to pray?" You remember that? How are you supposed to pray?

"Our Father who art in heaven - " say it with me " - hallowed be Thy name, Thy - " stop right there. "Thy kingdom come." Now the next line, "Thy will be done." What's the rest, "On earth as it is in heaven." Hm. Now where do you think God's will is going to be done on earth as it is in heaven? Where? In the government? In the educational system? In the moral value system of us? No. Only one place where God's will in heaven is done on earth, where is it? Church.

In Matthew chapter 18 there's a very, very important passage about the church, and I just want to mention it to you. I don't want to take time to unfold all of it. Matthew 18:15 says this. "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private." That's pretty simple, isn't it? People say sometimes, "What do I do if I see a Christian sinning?" Go to him and tell him he's sinning. That's pretty clear. Just go to him in private and say, "You're sinning." You say, "Really?" Yeah, that's right. "And if he listens to you, you've won your brother." I mean it. You really will win your brother if you go to him in private and confront his sin. You'll win your brother.

Recently I got a phone call from a dear friend, and he said, "I have a friend. You baptized him. He's left his wife and he's living with another woman. What shall we do?" I said, "Well, I'll meet you Saturday morning at church at nine o'clock the next day and we'll go, and we'll confront him, because you've got to go to your - " That's what it says. It's not too hard to interpret that, is it?

So we went to the house. He was coming back to his wife's house from which he had departed to be with another person. And we were just in the living room. We parked around the corner because we thought he might run if he saw a familiar car. So we were sitting in the living room when he walked in to pick up some of his things. That's a shock to have John MacArthur sitting in your living room when you're engaged in immorality.

And he walks in and he goes, "Baa - baa." He couldn't speak. He said, "What are you doing here?" And we just confronted him. And he wept and he said, "I want to repent. I want to do what's right." And so - I never had a very close relationship with him, but now he calls me three times a week because I told him, "You have to call me three times a week and tell me you're living a pure life."

His wife was unsaved, wouldn't take him back. And he had spent a year trying to live a Christian life, and then he just shattered the testimony. But there's a sense in which there's a bond between the two of us now that's not like anything that ever existed before.

Now what happens if your brother doesn't listen? If he says, "You know, I'm not interested in that. Get out of my sight." Then you take two or three witnesses and gang up on him. If he still doesn't listen, verse 17 says, "Tell the whole church. Tell the whole church." You say, "Why do you tell the whole

church?" So they can all gang up on him. And if he still doesn't listen, you put him out as if he was an unbeliever.

You say, "Man, that's hard. I mean, you can't just run around the church looking at people and saying, 'You're sinning, you better repent. I'm going to tell the whole church.'" I remember when we started the to follow the Matthew 18, 20 years ago or so, one pastor said to me, "You'll empty the place. You'll absolutely empty the church. People aren't going to stand for that."

Well, that was when we had 500 people. We didn't empty it. We just followed the directions and God blessed, God blessed. Because I believe real Christians hate their sin, and the accountability of that kind of confrontation keeps you pure. You say, "Well, it's hard to do. I mean who am I to do that? I've got my own problem." Then fix your own problem, will you? You say, "I can't go to him. I've got a two-by-four in my own eye." Right, get it out, then you can go work on your brother. So it's sort of a self-purifying thing.

You say, "Are we really supposed to do that?" Yes. "Why?" Verse 18, here's why. "Truly I say to you, that whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." In other words, if you go – Now, what do you mean binding and loosing? Well it's an old rabbinical term. To say someone was "bound" meant that they were still bound by their sin. They hadn't repented. They hadn't turned it loose. To say someone was "loosed" meant they had repented, yielded up, and they had let that sin go.

So He said, "Look, if you go to the person, and you confront them, and they say, 'I'm going to keep doing my sin. I don't care what you say.' And you say, 'Then you're still bound in sin.' That's already been said in heaven." Heaven's already made that judgment. Do you understand that? Whatever you bind and say, "You're still bound in that," shall already have been bound in heaven. So you're simply doing on earth what heaven has what? Already done.

If you go to the person, and they repent, and confess it, and they let go of that sin, and you say, "You're loosed from your sin because you've repented and confessed it." Then what you say about him being loosed has already been said in heaven. And you know what you're doing? You're doing on earth what has been done where? In heaven. That's how the kingdom operates on earth. That's how the kingdom works down here. We're trying to reproduce the kingdom in the life of the church.

He goes on in verse 19, He says, "Look, if two or three of you witnesses see this deal, and you go, and you follow through with it - " listen to this " - it will be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." God will be with you. God, because God wants this done on earth as it is in heaven. You think they tolerate sin in the church in heaven? Would they? No. You think God can tolerate sin anymore in the church on earth? No, He doesn't like it here, either. And so He says, "If you'll just go and deal with it, I'll go with you."

He goes a step further in verse 20. He says, "Where two or three of you are doing this in My name - " Jesus says " - I'll be there, too." You have the approval of God, the presence of Christ, and when you deal with sin in the church on earth, you're doing on earth what heaven has already done. You're making the church like heaven. You're purifying the church like heaven is pure.

You see, the church is the earthly expression of the heavenly kingdom. I want to live in the church. I want to be a part of the church. I want to be there every time they crack the doors because this is my place. I don't want to be a sometime attendee in heaven, do you? I don't want to visit heaven. I want to go there and stay. I want to live in the kingdom. That's why I love the church.

You say, "Well the church isn't that great." Well, it isn't what heaven is, but it's a lot better than any other human institution, and I want to give my life to make it as close to heaven as I can.

There's another reason why I love the church, not only because it's the only institution Jesus ever built and promised to bless, and because it's the winner in the end, and the most precious thing on earth, and the earthly expression of the heavenly kingdom, but it's the place of worship, it's the place of worship. Oh I know I can worship God in my spirit. Philippians 3:3 says that we worship God in the spirit. I know that.

I can worship God in my own heart all alone, but there's something that absolutely lifts me right out of myself in corporate worship, isn't that true? When Denise was singing this morning, "my soul desire is to be used," I mean, I felt the tears in my eyes, did you? Because I was feeling with all of you the sense of responsibility that we all have to give our lives in total devotion to Christ and to serve Him.

This kind of corporate dynamic that happens when we get together here, you're not going to get that sitting in your dorm room alone. There's a dynamic. That's why in Hebrews 10 it says, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together." Why? Because you stimulate one another to love and good works in the dynamic of a corporate worship. I need that. I need to sit in the pew, and I need to hear the Word of God preached to me with somebody sitting beside me who knows me very, very well, so that they know that I know that, and they can hold me accountable to live that, right?

You say, "I don't go to church. I buy John MacArthur and Chuck Swindoll tapes." Give me a break. You can listen to a John MacArthur, Chuck Swindoll tape and nobody in the world knows you're accountable for what you heard because nobody knows you heard it, right? Your accountability comes in the relationships. That's what's so bad, as Martin Marty said, about Mr. and Mrs. Invisible Religion, who sit at home and watch the TV, and that's their church. You need the corporate responsibility of having sat right there with the people who know you, and they now know that you know what you just heard, and you're accountable to live it.

There's no substitute for the church. That's one reason we have chapel, because you all know that you all know what's been said. And so it's a place for worship. It's a place for edification. It's a place to be taught. We come there for worship and edification.

Some people today think the church is a place for unbelievers to come. I don't believe that. There's not one word in the New Testament that says a church service is to be designed for an unbeliever, not one word. That's right. We don't design church services for unbelievers. We don't gather together for evangelism. We gather together for edification and worship, and we scatter for evangelism.

We don't collect to preach over, and over, and over, and over the simple gospel to figure out a way how to entertain unbelievers. That is not the purpose of the church gathering. The church gathers in order that it might corporately worship God and stimulate each other to love and good works. And it might be edified and accountable for the truth that it's hearing, and then it scatters to touch the world.

In 1 Corinthians there's a very interesting comment the apostle Paul says. And I think most people don't even know it's in there. You just kind of look past it. He's looking at the Corinthian church, which is just total chaos. He says, "Look - " verse 23 " - if your whole church gets together, and everybody speaks in tongues, what will happen if an unbeliever comes in?" Now isn't that an interesting statement?

He says, "Look, if you're having church, and everybody is speaking in tongues, what's going to happen if an unbeliever comes in?" You know what first hits me about that? The whole point of church isn't for unbelievers. But imagine, one of them might even come, an unbeliever might come. It's possible. I mean, it's not as if it was the plan, right? You say, "What are you going to do if an unbeliever shows up?" Like what an odd thing, but it might happen.

We don't meet for unbelievers. If the unbeliever comes in and you're all doing that, he's going to say, "These people are out of their minds, everybody speaking in tongues." "But if all are prophesying - " what does that mean? That doesn't mean some esoteric ecstatic experience, that means if you are declaring the truth of God, if they come in and someone is teaching the Word and declaring the Word, then an unbeliever is going to come in, and he's going to be convicted by the devotion of everybody to the Word of God, and he's going to be called to account by everybody. The secrets of his heart are disclosed, and he falls on his face and worships God, and says, "Wow, God is here."

You don't have to create some kind of a comfort zone for unbelievers and try to attract them to the church. But if they come, and they eavesdrop on your worship, and they eavesdrop, and they hear the Word being powerfully taught - and there's no power like the Word, sharper than any two-edged sword - and they see that you all submit to the Word, and you're all worshipping God, he's going to fall on his face and say, "God is here. This is incredible."



A few Sundays ago, some of you were there on Sunday night. I think it was before school started, a young man came into the baptistry - he was homosexual, dying of AIDS - and said, "I wandered in the back of this church all alone." And he said, "John, the first thing you did was stand up and you read the Psalm - a Psalm I never heard in my life." And then he rattled off ten verses verbatim, which he had memorized out of that Psalm.

And it was about the chains being broken, and the prisoners being set free, and those who are on the edge of death being given new life. And he said the tears began to race down my face, and I sat through that service, and I watched a people who worshiped God, and I heard that God was a delivering, healing, restoring, freeing God. And at the end of that service I gave my life to Jesus Christ. Three weeks ago.

He said, "I not only have not had a homosexual encounter," and they have sometimes as many as five a day, "but I have no desire for that, and never had since the moment I gave my life to Christ." We didn't create a service for homosexuals to make homosexuals feel loved and comfortable. A homosexual eavesdropped on the power of the Word of God, and the corporate worship of God's people, and he fell on his face to worship God.

That's why I love the church. It's a place for worship, and it's a place for edification. And then a last point, it's the beginning point of world evangelization. It's the beginning place of world evangelization. You go into the New Testament book of Acts - and I won't even take the time to go through it - and you'll find that it's the church that sent out all the missionaries. There was always that kind of accountability. There was always that kind of connection to the local church.

There they were - read Acts chapter 13. There they were, Paul and Barnabas, with three other pastors in the church of Antioch. There were five of those guys. They were just pastoring the church at Antioch, and all of a sudden as they were meeting and sharing, the Spirit of God began to prompt their heart, and the message coming from the Spirit was, "Separate two of your guys, Paul and Barnabas, and send them to the world." And they went right out of that local church and world evangelization took place.

But it wasn't just for those unique kind of people, it was for everyone for whom the Spirit of God dwelled, because Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "after you receive the Holy Spirit, you shall be witnesses unto Me - " where? In the church, in the foyer, in the lobby? No. "In Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and - " what? " - the uttermost part of the earth." The church is the starting point for world evangelization.

I love being the president of a college. I love it because I love you. I just love seeing God change your lives. It's just an unending joy. And I love the thrill, and the excitement, and the adventure of seeing God build this college. And I love doing radio ministry, because I love to teach, and I love to write

books because I love to just put truth down and spread it. But if I lost every bit of that, I would be completely fulfilled in the love of the church, pouring my life into that glorious institution.

Young people, I hope you catch my passion for the church and I hope you love the church. Jesus loved it enough to give His blood for it. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, thank You for the church. Thank You for making us a part of it. There's no such thing as a Christian who's not in the church. There's just some Christians who don't seem to understand how precious it is to you. Make us men and women of the church who love it in all its imperfections, all its weaknesses. The church isn't a perfect place, we know that. But it sure is a hospital for people who know they're sick and know who the Healer is. Thank You for making us a part. In Jesus' name, amen.

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