

DAY 22: SERMON: THE BRIDE OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLESHIP AND CHURCH GROWTH PROGRAM

SCRIPTURE

Acts 8:1-4 *And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. 4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*

Acts 2:36-47 *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Week Four Introduction: What is Faith?

Scripture

Hebrews 11:1 *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Romans 1:18-20 *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

James 2:19 *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

John 3:3 *Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

Hebrews 11:5-8 *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. 8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

Exposition

The Christian view of faith is vastly different from any other religious claim ever made. Since the Fall mankind has attempted a litany of meritorious acts with the goal of appeasing God (usually substituting the true God with false gods). Everything from complex religious incantations to sacrificing offspring has been and will be, nothing more than humanity trying to “get right” with God. Ironically the more we attempt to appease God by our own standards, the greater we offend His justice. The idea that we could possibly save ourselves puts us at an equal level with God because we then become the catalyst for His shift in judgment. We would be the driving force behind His actions. A god dependent on us is the not the God of the universe.

So, what is saving faith? Historically it has been explained in the terms of Notia, Assensus, Fiducia: Knowledge, Assent, and Trust. Knowledge is the principle that everyone inherently knows there is a God. Despite this inborn knowledge we all naturally suppress the truth about God to varying degrees (Rom. 1:18). Knowing that there is a god, whether admitted or not, saves no one. Muslims, Hindus, Atheists, and every single person in history has known there is a god because it is clear in creation (Rom. 1:19-20). Assent is when we believe that the God revealed in Scripture, and His work of salvation, is true. The issue is that if you believe that God is the creator, that Adam and Eve sinned, that God set in motion all that has taken place in redemptive history, that Jesus Christ the Son of God died on



the cross and rose again, and if you know that only through repentance and faith in Jesus can anyone be saved you're at that point qualified to be a demon (James 2:19). This leaves us with Trust. Trust is when you believe all He has done and then act on that knowledgeable belief in total repentance and dependence in the work of Christ. We're saved by grace alone through faith alone (Eph. 2:1-10) and are then enabled and driven unto good works (James 2:14-26, Phil. 1:6). Belief in the objective historical acts of God doesn't equate trusting in Him alone for your salvation. And without the mercy of God, we couldn't move past assent.

Saving faith is contingent on the regenerative work of the Spirit, without which we would never understand the truth of the Gospel (John 3:3). Man's need for regeneration is in no place more evident in Hebrews 11. This chapter is famous for two things, the first is the definition that the author gives regarding faith. The second is the written accounts of key individuals used by God in redemptive history. Sometimes this section of Scripture is called the "hall of faith". I understand the sentiment behind that assertion, but I would have to disagree with that often-chosen title. If you were to take away the work of God in the lives of these saints, then there would be no positive arch to their narrative. Enoch wouldn't have walked with God after pleasing Him with his faith (Heb. 11: 5-6). Abram would've lived a life of ease and plenty in Ur of the Chaldeans making images of false gods (Heb. 11:8). Moses would've lived as an outlaw for murder. With these accounts alone, we can see that this passage isn't about how great these men were of their own accord. And then we come to the judges and beyond.

Application

Gideon was hiding in a hole when he was called by God, without that call he would've remained a coward. Barak refused to take up the mantle of leadership and trusted more in Deborah than God, he would only be known for poor leadership. Jephthah sacrificed his own daughter. David got one of his closest allies' wife pregnant and then had the man killed to cover his sin. And even Samson, the most disobedient of the Judges, is on this list! This isn't the "hall of faith" it is the hall of God's faithfulness to His chosen people. Our faith is a result of God, He is faithful to us even when we lapse in our faith. Our faith isn't a commodity used to get what we want, it is a result of God's work in our heart to accomplish His purpose. Faith is at the core of Christianity, and not only in the broad sense but also in the specific. Have faith in the planning of the future of your churches, regardless of outcome He will not forsake you.

David Chambers, Director of Middle School Ministries, Christ Covenant Church, Charlotte, N.C.

DAY 23, “FAITH ALONE” AND DUE DILIGENCE

Proverbs 15:22 *Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.*

Proverbs 11:14 *Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.*

Proverbs 20:18 *Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war.*

Proverbs 24:5-6 *A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might,⁶ for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.*

Exposition

“Churches, like individuals, should have a teachable spirit. Proverbs, the book of wisdom, reminds us more than once of the value of getting good advice. Of course, “plans” and “guidance” are assumed to be advance initiatives that guide a decision rather than an effort to affirm a decision already made.

Rev. Jim Swedenburg tells of going to a church as minister of education. He soon discovered that the church had space that was not functional. There were problems with classrooms being the wrong size for the age group, having too few rooms for some age groups, and having more rooms than needed for other age groups. So, the church secured the services of a Church Architect to help them renovate their space. The building was renovated over twenty-five years ago now, and the space is still serving the church well. Now the rest of the story... The church had discarded almost identical drawings from the same Church Architect twenty years before Jim came to the church. The church committee had decided they knew better than the expert and went with a local architect. Jim found the rejected blueprints stored in the office. If the church had listened to wise counsel the first time, their space would have lasted fifty years instead of twenty, and the ministry would have been more efficient..

Church members sometimes discount the help of denominational leadership or outside consultants asking, —What do they know about our church or community? (As if their church is completely unlike any other church or community.) Outside consultants can be an immense help: An outside consultant can bring fresh eyes to your situation and see things from an objective point of view. By the way, it is not only our weaknesses we miss; sometimes, we need help to see some of our own strengths. While the consultant is not a member of your church, he will have had experience in many churches. By contrast, most of the leaders in your congregation have been members of your one church so long, they may have a more limited perspective. By virtue of his training and experience, your consultant will know things you do not know. Most consultants will want to listen to you to gather your insights about your church and community. Then, based on your input, along with the hard numbers and his own observations, he will bring recommendations for your consideration. Be willing to consider that even if he is not 100% right, he may be 75% right—and you need that 75%!” Derek Gentle

Application

Our churches are connectional churches, members of a Presbytery. One of the advantages Presbytery leaders can offer us is free counsel and recommendations to proper outside counsel where they see a need. Making decisions without advance counsel could lead to missed steps in the process of change, wrong directions, wasted resources, and delayed opportunity to fully engage in the ministry the church is called to perform. Never put faith in any human, but in God alone. Instead, give advisors your prayerful and thoughtful consideration. When various counselors have told you the same thing, that should give their counsel extra weight and serve as an indicator of God’s guiding.

DAY 24, LIFE CALLING, VALUES, VISION, AND FAITH

Scriptural Text:

Romans 15:4-7 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Exposition:

What am I supposed to do? What is the Spirit teaching me today, in this season of my life?

That is the basic question that God used to give us our Call to Faith in Christ, to teach us our Values and Vision in life, and that is still the question before us today. The Spirit speaks to us primarily through the Scriptures. For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that “*through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*”

“We come to the Scriptures because we believe that in the God-breathed record, the wisdom of God, the heartbeat of God, and the purposes of God are being revealed in ways that instruct and inspire faith for every generation of Jesus’ followers. We know that the events that the Scriptures record happened in contexts very different from our own. So, we come asking the Holy Spirit to teach us what we need for our time and our place. We come conscious of our fallibility and wanting and needing of one another’s insights and encouragements as well as our own. The fellowship of the church provides us with the context we need to better understand the scriptures and live out our faith accordingly.” Derek Gentle

For those of us with leadership influence, it is especially important that we keep wrestling together with the implications of the Calling, Values, Vision, and Faith that God has given us, in the light of the Scriptures, asking the Spirit to guide us. The Session and Diaconate best understand effective, biblical leadership in the context of their leadership teams.

Application:

“Think it not hard if you get not your will, nor your delights in this life; God will have you to rejoice in nothing but himself.” Samuel Rutherford

Consider the history of how God has brought you to where are now spiritually, and to your church fellowship. Thank him for his past leading and blessing, and consider anew your personal Calling, Values, and Vision for your life, your family, and your church in light of the Scriptures; and pray that the Spirit will continue to clarify how God is leading you to engage as a ‘*living sacrifice*’ in ministry to others for his glory today. Write down areas to explore to volunteer to serve your family or church in a specific way today.

DAY 25, HOW ARE YOU LOOKING AT IT?

Scriptural Text

Esther 4:14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Exposition

"It was October 29, 1941, during the trying days of the Second World War. Winston Churchill was visiting his old school. It was his second visit during the war. On both visits, the students serenaded the prime minister with the words of school songs he himself had sung as a boy. A verse was added to one of the songs in Churchill's honor. —" Not less we praise in darker days the leader of our nation.' In his remarks Churchill thanked the students for the honor. Then he told them how he had asked the head master to change the words from —" darker days" to —" sterner days", explaining,

"Do not let us speak of darker days; let us rather speak of sterner days. These are not dark days: these are great days - the greatest days our country has ever lived."

In a matter of weeks, Japan would attack Pearl Harbor and the Americans would be brought into the war alongside Great Britain. This time Churchill spoke to a joint session of the United States Congress:

"I will say that he indeed must have a blind soul who cannot see some great purpose and design is being worked out here below, of which we have the honour to be the faithful servants."

If these seem to be challenging times for our church, perhaps we are seeing this as a dark time. Rather, we can see these as great days and see ourselves as part of some great purpose of God, on mission with God.'

Application

'Most people must settle for coasting through a legacy left by someone else, but — whether the answer for our church is relocation/merger or not — we get to be part of the generation of vision. By the grace of Almighty God, you have the privilege of being there —*for such a time as this!*" Rev. Derek Gentle

Consider not how the 'church legacy' you are part of might be a blessing for you; but how you can be a blessing for the visible and invisible church—the bride of Christ. What is the best strategy to protect and grow the legacy of His Bride, the church and fulfill its Commission —to go and make disciples?

The stakes are high. Perhaps either our obedience to God will be the source of "*relief and deliverance*", or it will rise from another place "*but you and your father's house will perish.*" Perhaps it is not the health and welfare of two churches that we should consider, but the health and welfare of His Bride, The Church. In such as time as this, how can you best serve her?

Thank God for the honour and consider how you might invest your life in other lives, spend much time with Jesus, 'divide' the Word rightly, entrust to those faithful ones who are likely to entrust to others, stay in context of the local church, family, work or business, seek wise counsel and develop the Christ-like character of the new creature God will's you to be. Your faithful outlook may be the single thing that changes a word, an attitude, a heart, a church, a community, or a nation for the glory of God.

DAY 26, LIVING BY FAITH IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Scriptural Text

Philippians 4:6-7 *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Romans 12:3-8 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Exposition

“The Way In”: The human body is a complex miracle that reflects compelling spiritual truths. The health of the human body is based on an elaborate and instantaneous communication system between each individual cell and the brain. The health of the Body of Christ and its individual members is no different. God hears the prayers of His people who live by faith in Him - even the murmurs and cries of mourning. Like the human brain receiving constant communication with the various cells in the human body, our triune God thrives on such contact with the cells (members) in the Body of Christ, His Church. Brand says, “the lack of such contact and the absence of faith (in Christ) limits the Spiritual Body as surely as the lack of sight limits the entire physical body”.

“The Way Out”: Brand describes the descending aspect of the Head’s channels to each cell. That is, God speaking to us as part of His Body. We have opportunity to hear God by his Spirit speaking to us through his Word based on our relationship with God the Son. God has access to us as we have access to Him. God’s Word is a faithful means of grace for our growth and health as we receive it.

We are made In His Image – a cell or member in His Body intended to live and flourish in concert with other cells (members of the church). When we cannot ‘see’ the point or purpose of it, we must act in faith that in God’s perfect design there is a significant place for us in the local church. If the Bride of Christ (the invisible church) is the most important institution God has on earth today, then our connection to it must be through the local (visible) church. It takes faith to remain committed to the local church and to trust that God will use our intentional service there for his glory and our joy.

Application

“The Way In” and “The Way Out” are both essential for physical and spiritual health. Each cell must do its part to communicate wellbeing or danger (such as pain). Each part must respond to instructions from the Head. If they fail to communicate and obey, then individual parts of the body and possibly even the whole Body can suffer. Don’t be a silent participant in your Church Body. Be the vibrant and valued individual cell that is an essential part of the whole Body. Get help to discern your unique gifts to do your part --and do it well. In child-like faith, be a healer when healthy, and willing to be a wounded healer --able to communicate your own pain to encourage others when appropriate. Let constant communication with God and obedience move you from spiritual darkness to awesome light and life.

Offered by Rev. Ron Lively, Condensed from: [In His Image](#) by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI. (1984).

DAY 27, MAN'S PROBLEM, GOD'S SOLUTION

Scriptural Text

Romans 3:10-12 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Romans 8:7-9 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ... Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 3:28 ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Exposition

"This, I say again, with as much absoluteness and seriousness and sorrow as I can see and feel from God's word: The greatest problem facing this world is that the Creator of the universe has sentenced every human being to everlasting condemnation, because we have all committed treason against him by giving the allegiance of our greatest affections to other things and not to him.

Human Rebellion, Divine Solution: And from this rebellion on our part, and this holy wrath on God's part, flow all the errors, all the ugliness, and all the miseries of this world. This means that every subject and every issue ..., and every relationship in your life, and the life of this city and this world is distorted by this double reality: human rebellion and divine wrath. Their ruinous fingerprints are everywhere.

This means that the reversal of this rebellion and this wrath — wherever it could happen — would be personally, relationally, academically, socially, politically, pervasively, and globally relevant everywhere all the time.

This also means that, if you knew how the reversal of human rebellion and divine wrath could be brought about, and you spent your life savoring and showing the causes and effects of that reversal, you would have joined the greatest purpose in the universe. You would not have wasted your life. How could it be a waste to show the world the solution to its greatest problem, and how that solution affects everything?'

Application

"And you do know! God has acted in Jesus Christ to bring about this solution. And we are focusing today on one central, glorious, inexpressibly amazing stand-on-your-head-with-joy aspect of that solution: The justification of the ungodly by faith alone in Jesus Christ." John Piper

May the joy of your salvation be so abundant today that you cannot but share it with those who do not yet know Jesus, and may your joy fill your dreams with hope for the beauty of His Bride, the Church.

DAY 28, THE SOURCE AND OBJECT OF GROWING FAITH

Scriptural Text

Romans 4:20-21 *No unbelief made him (Abraham) waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

Hebrews 11:8 *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go ... And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*

Exposition

Abraham has ample reason to discount God's leading to go to a place he did not know. He had considerable wealth and security, he was almost 100 years old and his wife was also old. He could have thought about the dangers that they might face, the idea of living in tents for an extended number of years, and thought, "Surely, if God loves us, he would not want us to give up all we have now at this time in our lives, in our present health, and start all over."

But Abraham had '*no unbelief*'. How? Because he recognized God for being God and gave him glory for his attributes and supreme power. And, because he did not have faith in his own ability to create wealth, nor safety, nor health, nor comfort; in other words, in himself. His focus was on God and he was '*fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*' This combination of giving glory to God as God and believing or being '*fully convinced*' that God can fulfill his promises was the engine of faith for Abraham.

Too much of what is taught and preached today about faith is foolish. It is not uncommon to hear words like, "if you have enough faith within you...", or "if you just believe hard enough...", or 'God has put himself in you so that you can name and proclaim ...'. In every one of those cases, self is the 'hidden' source and object of faith. It is a form of self-deification and worship, and therefore completely anti-God, idolatrous, and far from the concept of biblical faith. "Our agony comes through the willful stupidity of our own heart." Oswald Chambers

Christians do not have faith in and of themselves, and do not believe in their own ability to gen-up belief; they recognize God as the source of their faith. It is a gift from the God who is God. Faith is believing that God will do what God has said he will do. Small faith in God's integrity and promises is mountain-moving, life-changing faith, and it is not dependent on human will, not deterred by formidable circumstance.

Application

"Continually revise your attitude towards God and see if it is a 'going out' of everything, trusting God entirely. It is this attitude that keeps you in perpetual wonder... Suppose God is the God you know Him to be when you are nearest to Him.... Let the attitude of the life be a continual 'going out' in dependence on God, and your life will have an ineffable charm about it which is satisfaction to Jesus. You have to learn to 'go out' of convictions, out of creeds, out of experiences, until so far as your faith is concerned, there is nothing between you and God." Oswald Chambers

Make the God of the Scriptures the source and object of your faith, find his promises for you, and God will never disappoint you.