

**7-17-22**

Sermon- In the Image of God

Scripture- Colossians 1: 15-28, CTW Ps 52

Hymns- 65, 668, 677

Theme- Paul reminds the people in the church in Christ at Colosse that no one can ever honor and truly serve God unless they are convinced of the supremacy of Christ as the true image and representation of the invisible God and His church. Sometimes we forget that we are caretakers of the church. It is not ours. We are here for a short while and then pass it on to the care of others. The one thing that is constant though is the sovereignty of God to lead us on.

### **I. The Church Jesus is Building**

Today I want us to focus on our church. I am sure if I were to ask the question "what is the church?", that I would get a variety of answers. Some would say it is an organization. Others would say it is people who are born-again who make up the church. Others would say it is the building.

**A. I believe that church is made up of all these things, but I believe that the church that Jesus is building, which we want to be a part of, is something more.** I believe that Jesus established the church to be a living, growing, adapting organism, and if allowed to develop with His guidelines, it will achieve the divinely desired result.

If we use a pregnant woman as an example, the baby inside her is a living human organism. It is developing and growing all through the pregnancy. The one thing during this time to focus on is doing everything we can to allow this human being to continue to grow and develop as he or she should, to reach the desired goal of the birth of a beautiful baby.

The same can be said about the church. Churches are established in different ways. Sometimes it is a missionary effort where a person goes into an unchurched area and attempts to set up a work there. Others are established as satellite or sister churches, where a congregation will ask a number of families to meet in a different area and establish a church there.

**B. The goal is the same as for that of a pregnant mother...to focus on the growth and development of the church into a mature body of believers.**

In some ways it is reflective of the parable of the sower. In that parable the sower sows seed that falls onto four types of soil, some fell where the ground was hard and it could not take root, some fell on rocky ground and there was no water, some fell among thorns and were choked out, some seed fell on good properly prepared ground and the seed grew and produced a valuable crop.

Many churches are planted and will not survive for various reasons as the first three types of seeds suggest. So we must focus on the fourth group and realize that the church that will succeed is a church that is properly prepared before it is founded, is cultivated as it grows, and will produce a harvest of souls as a result.

**II. The great question for us to focus on is how can this happen... more specifically how can this happen for Trinity EC in Rutherford?** Make no mistake, the church conference headquarters in Myerstown, which we are a part of, is in a crisis of growth, and our Bishop will talk to us next month as to how that is being addressed.

**A. This may be a difficult subject to address but just because it is difficult doesn't mean that we should not try.** We are not ostriches who hide our heads in the sand in the face of difficulty and think that since we cannot see it that it is not there.

I read of a pastor, who had to give a particularly hard message, and used a peanut to illustrate several points about the wisdom of God in creation. At the conclusion of the service one of the members greeted him at the door saying, "very interesting pastor. I never expected to learn so much from a nut."

You can draw your own conclusions about the nut who is talking to you today, but for now let's look at the church Jesus had in mind.

**B. There are two important facts that we must acknowledge to understand the church that Jesus is building. First: Matthew records Jesus and Peter speaking and in answer to Peter, Jesus states:**

**Matthew 16:18:** and I tell you that you are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it.

The important phrase in this verse is "**I will build my church**". It is a statement of ownership. The church belongs to Christ.

Buildings will come and go as will congregations. We are here but for a moment and then others will fill our seats or the seats will be gone.

The church, that living breathing organism, will continue to be strong because **Jesus, not man**, is the head.

**Colossians 1:17-18 states:**

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 and he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Jesus spent his early years on earth as a carpenter, building homes and furniture. It is possible that he spent much time learning the trade from Joseph.

I watch a number of home improvement shows on T.V. and I think the conversation between the two could be interesting at times. Can't you hear Joseph saying, "yes Jesus, I know you created the wood, but in this shop I have the last word on how it is used!"

Later Jesus would leave the carpenter's shop and begin building what we would come to call the church. He would give his life for it, only to come back through the Holy Spirit to continue to watch over it as he does today.

Churches that are successful will realize that they are servants and not owners. This means that we must be submissive to the leading of the will of God in all things.

Church is not about our pleasure or what makes us feel good, it is about praying for and receiving a word from the Lord and following it.

It is about our lives being molded and shaped by the master carpenter and realizing that we will not be the same leaving the church as when we came in.

**C. Second: the church is made up of God's called out born-again people. The Greek term for church is "Ekklesia" and refers to a called-out group of people from among all the citizens.**

Born-again people will understand the message of the Gospel, and realize that the Gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

They will recognize every word of the Bible as God's word for humanity, teaching us how to live in this world and guiding us safely home to be with him.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17 is a good constant reminder for all of us that: "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the**

servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

By following the Bible, diligently studying it in full context, we as servants of God will be equipped to complete the most excellent work of being Jesus’ instruments to build his church. Scripture is the standard that we follow and if we don’t then we are merely a social club.

#### **D. Look at the History of the Colossian church:**

The Colossian church had within it a group of false teachers who believed that the church should be more exclusive, using people who had certain gifts or knowledge and to carry out certain religious rituals or traditions. It would be what we would call legalism. Paul wrote the letter to refute this teaching.

In v. 25 Paul says that he was “commissioned”, meaning that he was given a special task or sent to be a steward of someone’s possession.

It is a commission that all born-again people share. **We** have been commissioned to share as Paul puts it “the mystery that had been kept from them for ages. That mystery is “Christ in you – the hope of glory.”

It is here that we find the true mission of the church. The true mission of the church, the total focus of the church **must be the presentation of the gospel**. In the presentation of the Gospel we find the solution to all of the issues that we face in this world.

Here it is good to remember **John 12:32**: “and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

**III. In all this we must remember that the answers to the issues of the world are found in the love of Christ.**

**A. People want to be accepted as they are and come to Christ to find acceptance. Jesus said in Matthew 11:18-20:**

“come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

**B. People want to know they have value, that their lives are not wasted. God said in Jeremiah 31:3:** the Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

How many times has Israel, God’s chosen people, turned their backs on Him, and each time He forgave them. It was his chosen people who screamed for the crucifixion of his son, to whom Jesus said “I forgive you.”

We will always find our true value when we hear the gospel proclaimed to us. Now that is a good purpose clause for a church of Jesus Christ...to constantly, faithfully, and accurately proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

**Remember the Words in John 3:16-17:**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

**C. We are to proclaim the Gospel from the pulpit and the pew to help people realize that God loves them just as they are.**

We are all sinners in the eyes of God. We are all bound for a lost eternity. It makes no difference the nature or degree of sin. A murderer will face the same hell as an adulterer or a gossip.

When we accept Christ as our lord and savior, He will make us into new creations and will work into our lives what is pleasing to Him. We will read scripture and know the changes we must make in our lives and because we love Christ **we will make them.**

**2 Corinthians 5:16-17 reminds us:** So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

When we regard people with a worldly point of view we try to rank sinfulness. Murder is greater than stealing, gossip is not as bad as being a drunk. We want to legitimize sin because it is lawful in this world, so we say it's okay to live common law, or to live together before marriage, or to be gay and married. This is all from a worldly point of view.

When born-again people of the new creation study the word, and realize what God wants them to do, there will be no need to preach on these issues, for they will naturally want to please God.

The focus of the church then is to present the Gospel as it was in the time of the Colossians. Then the individual believer will change his life in submission to the absolute lordship of Christ.

**IV. I want to conclude with the words of Christ in John 17. This is his high priestly prayer in which ONE of the things he prays for is the church. He identifies four things which will happen in the church when we preach the Gospel.**

**A. It will reveal the glory of Jesus.** In his prayer the words "glory" or "glorify" appear over 7 times. The church is called on to reveal the glory of Jesus. God's glory is seen in the church when we work together, when we love and worship together.

**B. To proclaim the word of God.** Proclaiming the word of God must be the central focus of God's people. It is here that we find the gospel presented.

**John 17:14** states: I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

The word of God is the truth and is authoritative. Jesus in his prayer anticipates his word being received lived out and proclaimed by the church.

**C. That the church would be filled with the joy of God. At one point Jesus spoke of his purpose in teaching the disciples so as to make our joy complete. (John 15:11).**

Jesus wants his church to be bathed in sacred, holy, pure, joy. When this happens it becomes a magnet to the world outside. They will want to become a part of the joyful people of God.

**D. And finally, that the church would live united in God's love. In John 17 Jesus prayed 4 times that his disciples would be united perfectly in love. In John 13, Jesus declares:** By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The heart of the Gospel is that. As His church, we need to preach it, teach it, defend it and hold it as the sole truth in this modern world of falsehoods and sinfulness...

Amen? Let us Pray...