

Let's Talk About Church

A realistic look at what church is, and isn't.

About Church

Churches of all shapes and sizes are meeting this weekend – around the world

- mega to mini; above ground in the open & underground and hidden
- million dollar budgets & production teams; one-man shows – sermon and a song

Different Styles of Churches

- church buildings; ancient cathedrals; huts; factories; homes; caves; open fields;
- loud & extravagant; quiet & reflective
- contemporary & modern; traditional & steeped in rituals;

Jesus Draws Crowds

Jesus was a crowd drawing guy – he knew how to bring people together;

- small crowd (disciples) – by invitation 'come, follow me'
- bigger crowds (preaching - bold, miracles, authority of teaching, tackled hypocrites)
people wanted to get in on the act – excited!
- some of his techniques would not sit well with modern approaches

1. rich young ruler (Matt 10)

“You know the commandments, ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother....”

2. controversial subjects (drinking blood, eating flesh)

“Will you leave me as well?”

- a core of followers always stayed

Jesus is a Builder

So – here’s the point – Jesus was a tradie!

As a carpenter knew how to build a static objects, static structures

- assemble the resources you need; develop the foundations
- build the frames, connect the structures, erect the walls
- support & protect the newly formed building with a roof, doors & exterior cladding

Now – Jesus is working with people.

- He is now building ‘people teams’

Jesus begins gathering people together from the beginning of his ministry -

- a centre for teaching
- a place of equipping - where **methods** could be modelled, **vision** could be imparted
- provided a sense of community (watering hole for weary souls)
- provided social connection (friendships forged,
- provided encouragement & strength (prayer for one other)
- sin & holiness could be addressed

Key Aspect of the Gathering

- Think about what was happening – think about the charged environment
 - word was preached
 - truth of God proclaimed “Truthfully, I say to you ...”
 - hypocrites were challenged / sin exposed “brood of vipers”
 - healings occurred pack out meetings – roof entry, withered hand
 - demons cried out / cast out made uncomfortable due to God’s presence
 - people received freedom & salvation

The **rare air** of God’s anointing was upon these gatherings.

The **air was charged** with the presence of God.

The glory of God was on display for all to see.

Foundation

Jesus has been doing mobile church of 3 years – he turns to Peter and confirms what he intends to do into the future – it’s a prophetic statement:

 **Matthew 16:18 (NIV)**

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.

Don't Miss It

The church – or Ecclesia (Greek: “**assembly of citizens**” – the church)

Was going to be built by who?

- Me? You?
- By social activities? (well-meaning as they might be)
 - anti-poverty initiatives
 - food banks
 - community meals
 - counselling services
- A program? A movement? High-paid church growth consultants?
- Great parking, perfect facilities, coffee, seats, sound systems?
- Flashy website, slicker presentation, better marketing

No! Jesus said that “**I will build my church**”.

- You say, “But aren’t those things important?”
- I’d say you’re asking the wrong question – the right question this morning is, “**Who builds the church?**”
- these things are merely the activities of an established or an establishing work
- But the single point of our focus this morning needs to be on the builder
- that’s Jesus.

Follow the Trajectory

1. Jesus makes this statement “I will build his church”
2. He keeps gaining and losing followers - it’s a fluid environment
3. Jesus nears the end of His ministry

4. enters Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna!” – Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord;
5. Now crowd turns and bays for His blood – “Crucify Him!”
6. He is nailed to the cross and dies – he loses His ‘church’ when he needs them the most
7. They scatter in fear – locked away in hiding, in the shadows, timid, arrested by grief
8. Shut-up and shut-down by fear;
9. Jesus rises from the dead – presents himself to his church – ascends to the father

At this point ‘this church’ has:

- Farewelled its leader – Jesus returned to the Father
 - are now leaderless
 - central point of all their lives – now removed & gone
 - guided their every step; handled the tough conversations
 - settled arguments; set the tempo;
 - In Jesus they found strength, purpose, meaning – he’s now Gone!
- Censored by angry Jewish religious establishment
- Surrounded by unbelieving Jews
- Encircled and monitored by a Roman army
- Living in a culture that is hostile to its message

Go South or Bust!

The church can hang up the “CLOSED” sign – and disappear (Peter had already returned to fishing)

But look what happens:

- Church explodes in numbers (Acts 2)
- 3000 were added (probably more like 10,000 – men only counted) - all baptised!
- The Jewish authorities are freaking out – they can’t contain this thing
- Their best man (Saul) changes course – switches sides after an encounter with Jesus
- The Romans try to shut it down – threats, killings, jail-time, lions/tigers

It marches across the known Roman Empire – to Asia Minor; to Africa; to India;

- churches are **popping** up everywhere
- **communities** are being transformed
- **emperors** are being threatened
- religious **elite** are going nuts
- no-one knows how to stop it

In the background, Jesus is working, pushing things forward, Jesus is building His church.

So what happened ...

We read that the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in Acts 2:1

Acts 2:1

*On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And **everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit** and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.*

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

The Church was born that day!

So check it:-

1. Jesus begins his building project
2. The Holy Spirit arrives & the presence of God manifests amongst their gathering

Look at what the Spirit does :-

1. Under the power of the Holy Spirit - they are doing what?
2. Proclaiming the wonderful things God has done!
3. What has God just done? Set the world free the power of sin – it's all about Jesus.

That's what the presence of the Holy Spirit – He points everyone to Jesus:

- He always **affirms** & **exalts** the Son
- always **elevates** Jesus; reveals the beauty of Christ
- he **captures** hearts; draws us into worship to Christ
- he **imparts** love for Jesus; he causes us to **behold** the cross;
- he **convicts** us of sin; **warns** of coming judgement
- then he draws us into a **surrendered** attitude to Jesus

Q. When God visits – Jesus is exalted, and never man!

Then Peter goes on in Acts 2 to preach the sermon of the century!

His message reveals & exalts Jesus

After the msg, people cry out “What should we do?” – A. “Get born again!”

 **Acts 2:38**

Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And thousands came to Christ that day ... Jesus is building His church.

While Jesus Builds, Satan Opposes

For the last 2000 years, Jesus has been building His church.

- many attempts to kill off the church; to silence it
- in days past – Romans, Jews, Middle-Ages (Catholic Church), the Ottoman Empire
- in recent – think of Communism, China, North Korea, Soviet Union
- Most recently – Islamic attacks in Cairo, North Sudan, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Indonesia
- genocide of Christians in the Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Myanmar, Burundi

Jesus promised:

- the gates of Hell would not prevail against it
- around the world there has been an outbreak of growth in the church

Moves of God are everywhere around the globe:

- Mega-Church in Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Jakarta, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore
- Millions coming to Christ across the globe (even Muslims & ISIS fighters)

Dead Churches

Something's clearly gone wrong in the west – here in Australia:

- Churches are closing their doors;
 - apparently it didn't take a locked door to keep the people out
- Buildings are falling apart
- Buildings are being sold off (Hindu temple on Poath Rd)

- Pastors are leaving the church in droves (check out the job offers)

We have to ask “What’s happened? What’s the story behind every closure?”

- Once glory of God – and word of God preached
- Consider Western Europe – once the hub of Christianity
- churches are turned into bingo halls, brothels, bars and restaurants
- biggest churches are now museum pieces of tourists (it’s beautiful; no, it’s dead)

We’re headed that way – unless something dramatic changes.

James MacDonald

“What’s going on in many churches that do still meet is a watered down, hyper-therapeutic, hardly better than Dr Phil church – where you get helpful little tips and 3 ways to communicate with your adolescent, and 4 ways to balance your budget, and all this horizontal helpfulness – but it’s not about God! And you don’t hear from God. And people aren’t meeting with God. And people aren’t being confronted with the pride-withering presence of God. And church is supposed to be an earth shattering, window rattling, life-altering encounter with the God of the universe. That’s what church is supposed to be.”

Here are some troubling questions:

- Q: “What causes Jesus to vacate the building?”
- Q: “What causes Jesus to halt the construction works?”
- Q: “What causes Jesus to pack up and head elsewhere for building works?”

James MacDonald

“Churches don’t die – God’s voice within them dies...”

Where the enemy targets

We need to be very clear on this:


- it will help us decode what Satan does
- to re-direct and ultimately distort and corrupt the purpose of the church

Let’s check out a statement that Stephen renders – it costs him his life, but he’s right on the money:

 **Acts 6:12-15 (NIV)**

So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

 **Acts 7:51 (NLT)**

"You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit?"

Resisting the Holy Spirit

This was the problem with the religious Jews.

They are like so many churches today:

- an appearance of Godliness
- they resist the Holy Spirit and His desires, purposes

As Jesus vacates the premises, the glory of God departs – things become tough.

- we start to try to figure out how to restart the building works
- we start putting on programs to draw people to church,
- connect with the community, engage with the councils
- to win favour, recognition with the world
- avoid touchy topics – sin, repentance, judgement, hell
- avoid controversies – keep it happy
- compromise, capitulate, water down everything
- we take our eyes off Jesus and we start looking horizontally to grow our churches
- meet needs, to make our services interesting & entertaining

Our resistance to the Holy Spirit makes Jesus shut down the building project!

Many churches don't even know Jesus has left the building!

Unattractive Churches

All it takes to make our gatherings unattractive to Jesus:

- is an indifferent attitude – a casual attitude, a “**whatever**” attitude
- a luke-warm approach to word, worship, prayer and witnessing
- Jesus says, “I’d rather you be hot or cold – but you’re neither!”

The Holy Spirit will not work with our “indifference”

- it repels Him:
- it’s what makes our churches unattractive to Jesus
- the Glory of God has departed

The Good News

We saw earlier that the Holy Spirit:

- directs everything to Jesus
- turns our gaze vertically, upwards to Jesus
- Jesus becomes central to all we do
- we sing, love, preach, proclaim, respect, adore, surrender
- The Spirit’s greatest delight is to exalt the Son and see Him lifted up

When the Holy Spirit comes into a gathering of believers - things begin to change:

- **Praise** is activated – it’s a sheer joy to worship - it comes alive
- **Prayer** is activated – enthusiasm for prayer grows – prayer meetings are packed
- **Proclamation** is activated – WOG is fearlessly & forcefully preached
- **Witnessing** is no longer optional – its integral to the fabric of who we are
- People have an encounter with the God of the universe – and lives are forever changed

This is a vertically oriented church!

One that gazes on God and says “send your fire on us Lord”

Don’t you long for a church where:

- worship is passionate, pure and honest
- prayer gatherings are full
- faith is stirred and people are called to believe in the impossible
- sin is addressed, repentance is regular, living holy lives is important
- the lost matter to us, because they matter to God
- people are loved, friendships are forged, you feast on hope & encouragement
- the fragrance of Christ is everywhere

And meeting with the God of the universe is a regular event!

The Church comes alive when the Holy Spirit arrives

We need to make our lives and our gatherings

- attractive to the Holy Spirit
- get out of His way (surrender to what he wants to do)

We need to start looking vertically – upwards to God and asking Him to come.

Facts:

- Jesus wants to build his church
- We can assist Jesus or block his work
- If we get out of the way (surrender) – then the Jesus **WILL** build his church

What are you going to do this morning?

- The hope of the world is the church
- It's where the glory of God is revealed to the world
- The health and vitality of the church matters to God –
- Jesus wants His church healthy, flourishing, maturing, growing

If this message has spoken to you then let's make an agreement together:

- Our agreement is

 ***“To make my life and our church as attractive to Jesus as possible”***

Let's Pray

Jesus, we want you to come and build your church – and reveal Your glory. We know that you do not dwell in buildings made by human hands – but rather you dwell in the hearts of men and women.

We ask you to come and make your home in us. We repent where we have blocked or resisted your Holy Spirit and we repent for our indifference toward things that matter to you. Please forgive us.

God, increase our love for your word; increase our passion for worship and prayer; increase our love for the lost.

Come and reveal your glory in your church God. Change us and change our church – make us attractive to your presence.

In Jesus name. Amen.