

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

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Tonight we will look at what the church is, we won't be considering our own churches but we limit ourselves to looking at church from a biblical point of view and I will share with you some points of view of church from books I have read and we will discuss it on that basis, then Jesus on the basis of what we talk about biblically, will direct our thoughts toward our own church next week.

### ***So what is church?***

Church as is often said is not a building but the people within it, and to look at what church is, we can look to 2 things. We can look to Jesus and we can look in Acts to the early church.

We can look to Jesus because the bible refers to him as the head of the church, and therefore the function of church will be defined through him. The church is also called the body of Christ. It does this because we are meant to be representatives of him. To carry on what he did because the same spirit that he had is also upon the church.

I think the way Luke demonstrates this is quite purposeful because he wrote the books of Luke and Acts. Although the way they are positioned in the bible is either side of John, they are meant to be a prequel and sequel to each other. Luke is about Jesus, Acts the church and there are similarities in their beginnings.

Beginning of Luke (chapter 3):

Jesus is baptised by John the Baptist and as he comes out the water the father speaks and the Holy Spirit comes upon him, empowering him for mission, and when you read after that the bible has phrases in it like: Jesus was led by the spirit here and there, that he did things by the power of the spirit and he even reads the portion of scripture found in Isaiah which says:

*<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

*LUKE 4:18-19 (TNIV)*

So After the Holy Spirit rests upon Jesus, he is commissioned to start his ministry and from there that he goes, chooses his disciples and does many signs and wonders.

Church - The Holy Spirit empowers the church to continue Jesus' ministry.

The Church therefore is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit for those who belong to Jesus.

*<sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. <sup>33</sup> Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*

*ACTS 2:32-33 (TNIV)*

We are to be like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. The spirit that the church received is the same spirit that was upon Jesus because what Jesus did, we are also called to do, wherever Jesus went he said to people the kingdom of God is within your grasp. The kingdom of God means Gods rule and reign. So Jesus basically said, Gods here to rule and reign on earth. But Jesus also taught that the kingdom of God is within us. And that we have his authority, so that we may continue his work in the earth.

Jesus was:

1. Prophet / Confessional
  - a. Jesus preached and taught Scripture with authority and commissioned preachers filled with His Spirit to proclaim his words.
  - b. The prophetic functions of the church – The confessional nature of the church requires that the essential truths of biblical Christian faith be declared, defined and defended against false teachings. It is important to have people in the church who are concerned that the bible is preached correctly and purely.
2. Priest / Relational
  - a. Jesus cares for people and deals with their sin compassionately and calls His people to join him in these ministries of mercy.
  - b. The relational nature of the church requires that the new life that Jesus gives to his people is visible both when the church meets together and are individuals day to day. This raise an important point, that we understand we are still the church even when we are not together. So in terms of the church being relational. It is important to have people in the church who are committed to such things as loving the community, living out worship, and carrying out practical ministry for the well being of the church.
3. King / Missional
  - a. Jesus demonstrated his rule over creation through miracles while on earth and today leads his people, the spiritual 'body of Christ' into all nations and cultures through church leaders and principles by the Holy Spirit according to His word.
  - b. The function of the church is to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ into all the world over which Jesus is the anointed king. It is important to have people in the church who are committed to such things as applying the gospel to the culture, evangelism, church planting and overseas missions.

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH? (BASED ON ACTS 2)

The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to scriptures, they organise under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the biblical sacraments of baptism & communion, and are united by the spirit, disciplined for holiness and scattered for fulfil the great commandment and commission as missionaries to the world for God's glory & their joy.

### 8 Marks of Church

#### 1. Regenerative Church Membership (Acts 2:38-41)

<sup>38</sup>Peter replied, "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. <sup>39</sup>The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

<sup>40</sup>With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup>Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

- Regeneration is the inward work of the holy spirit, a new creation, and its about becoming more like Jesus!
- Is a church who isn't seeing people saved really a church? May be not in a truly biblical sense?

#### 2. Qualified leadership (Acts 2:42) First among equals, humble ( Titus 1, 1 Tim 3)

<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- Just because there is leadership in a church, doesn't mean there isn't equality. We see a picture of this in the trinity, where father son and spirit are equal, and yet, Jesus submits himself to the fathers will and does what the father asks him to do. While on earth its recorded in the bible many times that Jesus states that he has come to do the will of the father. Yet they are equal.
- Everyone in church is equal in that they have access to God no more or less than anyone else. But God chooses people, who he has given certain abilities to lead the church. In the parable of the talents, ability wasn't equal among the three servants, but the one with more ability had greater responsibility and because of that, when the master returned more was expected of him.
- Any questions?

#### 3. Gathering for preaching & worship (Acts 2:42 above)

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#### 4. Sacraments rightly administered (Acts 2:42 above)

- Performed regularly, but how regularly?
5. Unified by the spirit (agree to disagree agreeably?)
    - This is important in that there will be things that as a church we hold onto with a closed hand, meaning they are not negotiable. Who Jesus was, what he did etc, certain doctrinal things. But there are other things that we do that we hold in an open hand because we're not they can be debated, like style of worship we do, format of service etc. I think although they are there to debate its usually a good idea to just agree to disagree agreeably.
  6. Discipline for holiness
    - What are your immediate thoughts when you hear church discipline?
    - Discipline isn't about punishment. Discipline comes from the same root word as disciple. And so discipline is about being trained in holiness, in becoming more like God and growing closer to him, because at the end of the day, if we just disciple people to take them closer to God, holiness will be a by-product of this.
    - There will be occasions where a church leadership will have to intervene and enact biblical church discipline in order to bring someone to repentance and to a reconciled relationship with God.
  7. Obey the Great Commandment to love
    - The church is a loving, intentional and relational community that seek the well being of each other in everyway including physical, spiritual, material and emotional.
    - You see the church gathers regularly for fellowship, and such things as worship, learning, sacrament and encouragement. But even when it is not gathered, it is still the church because people are united by the Holy Spirit in belonging and mission. Just like a family is still a family when dad is at work, mum is at the shops and the kids are at school.
  8. Obey the Great Commission to evangelise & make disciples
    - The church is an evangelical community where Jesus is constantly made visible by its preaching, the witness of its members and its loving nature.

You see, we must distinguish between the biblical principle and the cultural method. The biblical principle doesn't change, but the cultural method can and does. All these things can be in place but a church can still be different, because of the different culture it has to reach.

A church needs a missiologist – one who studies the culture & the context and equips the people with the gospel to evangelise, to be true missionaries because the church is meant to be missional.

## ***A missional church***

A church has to do more than bring people into church buildings and events.

Jesus said, "Go into all the world....." not stay in your church and invite everyone to come along.

Jesus speaks of going, evangelizing, making disciples and planting churches that plant churches. Bringing people into church buildings and events is not sending people out into the world to evangelize and disciple people. Western church has sadly become defined by buildings and overly attached to programs, services, and institutions that help us achieve an attractional ministry. To correct this problem, the term *missional* was adopted to emphasise that church exists to go into the nations and the cultures of the earth and live sacrificially for the good of others. In essence we are being like Jesus, to be a missionary to our culture. Instead of striving to be attractional, we should strive to be incarnational, meaning to be like Jesus and in doing so, it will be attractive. Everywhere Jesus went there was a crowd!

A book I read stated some characteristics of a missional church.....

1. is biblical, so a church should have a doctrinal statement like our church has the tenets.
2. practices and preaches repentance (a change of mind about who God is and what really is important.
3. goes into culture
  - if the gospel is the seed of God's powerful work in our lives, then the culture is the soil into which it is planted. Therefore, before doing any ministry, a missional church first examines the culture or proverbial soil, in which they seek to have the gospel take root. Understanding the soil helps the missional church know what the weeds are in the culture as not to choke out the growth of the gospel.
4. contextualizes the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

### *Paul's Use of His Freedom*

<sup>19</sup> *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.* <sup>20</sup> *To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.* <sup>21</sup> *To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.* <sup>22</sup> *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.* <sup>23</sup> *I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23 (TNIV)

Basically, the church needs to speak the language of the culture its trying to reach.

5. trains Christians as missionaries so that conversions happen regularly.
6. is supernatural

<sup>43</sup> *Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.*

*ACTS 2:43 (TNIV)*

7. is countercultural
  - So we must understand culture and our method for taking the gospel is to be culturally relevant, but the principles of the bible are going to be counter culture. The biblical view of sex for instance will be counter cultural to most peoples view. Also we need to realise that we are offering those in the culture and alternative and attractive way of life, so our way of life cannot just look the same as everyone else, but we will have our differences.
8. multiplies
9. is messy

In finishing, a question to take home and think about. If we are all missionaries, what are we doing that enables us as individuals to carry out mission?