

I. Introduction

A. We're in a series called "Follow."

1. Last week: Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, so our top leader NEVER changes.
2. This week, I want to do my best to make very clear from Scripture WHAT the Church IS and what its MISSION is.
 - a. This is another thing that does not change with the change of leadership.
 - b. Even though with changing leadership there can be change in focus or approach, what CANNOT change and DOES NOT change is how Jesus defines His Church and what the Church is supposed to DO.
 - c. If Jesus is the Chief Shepherd of the Church, there ought to be a deep consistency with the Church's identity and mission, because its Shepherd NEVER changes.

B. Today we need to consider the unchanging nature of WHO WE ARE and WHAT WE DO.

II. WHAT IS THE CHURCH? Ephesians 2:11-22

A. So first, WHAT is the Church? What makes this group of people that we call the Church different from all the other groups of people there are in the world?

1. One of the richest passages that speaks to this is Ephesians 2:11-22. Many Scriptures speak into the definition of the Church and bring clarity to its different facets. This Scripture in Ephesians gives one of the most clear "30,000 foot" views of the Church.
2. Before Paul describes the Church, he starts by describing the very bleak situation people were in before they were saved and brought into His family, the Church.

B. *Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:11-12)*

1. Here's the situation people are in BEFORE Christ—before being saved into His family:
 - a. Gentiles were separated from Christ (unsaved).
 - b. Alienated from the people of Israel (disunified, not belonging to God's people)
 - c. Without a covenant (No way to have relationship with God)
 - d. No hope without God in the world (Their future was bleak)
 - e. And in other places, Paul describes the Jews who were unbelieving as being in the exact same situation, even though they HAD the Scriptures and covenants.
2. If this is what they were BEFORE Christ, then Paul must have in mind to contrast their situation before Christ with their situation AFTER. He begins to describe this new life they have in verse 13:

C. *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making*

peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:13-16)

1. The Church is comprised of all people who have been brought into relationship with God through the death of Jesus.
 2. Earlier in the chapter, Paul says that this happens “by grace THROUGH faith.”
 3. Because we are united with JESUS, we are also united with GOD and with EACH OTHER.
 - a. Jesus broke down the dividing walls between people so that the Church might become a diverse family, all united to God as ONE united body.
 - b. Instead of being separated by cultural and hereditary differences, we are united together by ONE COMMON SAVIOR.
- D. *And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:17-18)*
1. We are united together in peace because of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
 - a. We are a collection of distinct individuals but we are all indwelt by the same Holy Spirit.
 - b. Just like my human body has many distinct parts but one soul, one Spirit.
 - c. So it is with the Church. We are all distinct parts of the body but what defines us is the ONE SPIRIT—the Holy Spirit that we all share. He is the “soul” of the body we all comprise together.
 2. So, before Christ, we were separated from God, separated from each other, and without hope. What are we now, as the Church, because of the sacrifice of Jesus?
- E. *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in Whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)*
1. The Church is a collection of strangers who were adopted into the household (FAMILY!) of God. The Church is God the Father’s family.
 2. This family, this household is built upon a foundation:
 - a. The teachings of the Apostles and Prophets (this is the Scriptures that were written and collected into the one book we call the Bible)
 - b. But in ancient buildings, the most important part of the foundation was the CORNERSTONE. This is the first stone that was laid, on which the whole building received structural support, alignment, and level.
 - c. The teachings of the Apostles and Prophets (Scripture!) have Jesus Himself as their cornerstone. Jesus is the foundation of the foundation, upon which the Church is built, unified, and held together.
 3. What is built on this foundation of Jesus, and the Scriptures that rest upon Him?
 - a. Individual stones that are joined together to be a Temple of God
 - b. We together as a family become a dwelling place for God.
 4. Later on in Ephesians 4, we see that all of the people in the Church are indwelt by ONE Holy Spirit.
 5. In Colossians 1:18-20 we also see that the Church is united and held together under its King, Jesus.

6. In Titus 1, we see that Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, has designed His Church to be loved, led and shepherded by qualified under-shepherds who live lives of integrity.
7. In Matthew 28:20 we see Jesus charge His Church to teach His people to obey all that He has commanded.
8. So what do we have when we put this all together? What is the Church? What is our identity? What are we actually?

III. Definition of the Church: The Church is ...

- A. The family of God the Father (Ephesians 2:19), united by faith under the Kingship of Jesus their Savior (Colossians 1:18-20) indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:3-5), led by qualified leaders (Titus 1:5-9) into obedience to Jesus (Matt. 28:20) through the teachings of the Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 2:20) If this is what the Church IS, then it will be marked by certain practices and behaviors to ensure that its actions match its identity:
- B. Marks of the Church
 1. Right proclamation of and obedience to the Scriptures (Mathew. 28:20, Galatians 1:6-9, 2 Timothy 2:14-19). This includes the need for biblically qualified leadership (elders).
 2. Practice of the Ordinances (some call these "sacraments") (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) (1 Corinthians 11, Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 22:14-20)
 - a. Baptism is the one-time visible sign of a person's entry into the Church.
 - b. The Lord's Supper (communion) is the ongoing sign of union with Jesus and His Church by way of remembering His sacrificial death.
 3. Prayer (Matthew 6, Acts 2:42-47, 1 Thessalonians 5:17) Those adopted as sons and daughters of God have an ongoing and vital relationship with **Him**.
 4. Fellowship (Acts 2, Matthew 22:39, John 17:20-21). Those adopted as sons and daughters of God have an ongoing and vital relationship with God's other children—**their siblings**
 5. Disciplemaking (Obedience to the mission of Jesus) (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-49, John 20:21, Acts 1:8). Those who have been brought into the family of God honor His will by joining Him in bringing **others** into the family as well and teaching them to obey Jesus' commands.
- C. Expressions of the Church: (Global and local)
 1. Global: The Church is comprised of all true believers in Jesus everywhere.
 2. Local: The Church is globally united, but locally governed by the Chief Shepherd Jesus and through His Scriptures.
- D. Rhythm of Life in Jesus' Church
 1. Gathered: The Church gathers to honor and practice its worship and unity in Jesus and to build each other up as disciples.
 2. Scattered: The Church scatters to obey Jesus' missionary commission to make disciples from neighbor to nations.
 3. This rhythm of gathering and scattering is like breathing.
 - a. Inhale and exhale are both essential parts. (I was reminded of the importance of this a few weeks ago when I pulled a muscle in my upper back. Not a horrible injury—it only hurt when I breathed!)
 - b. In the same way, so are gathering and scattering

E. So we've seen what the Church IS. Let's move on to mission—what it DOES.

IV. The Mission of the Church

A. *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted. [Even at the christening of the Church's mission, Jesus was handing His mission to a group of faithful yet struggling, imperfect people.] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:16-20)

1. It's REALLY important to note what Jesus says before He gives the Church its mission: "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me."
2. The authority of Jesus is an ESSENTIAL component of the mission of the Church.
 - a. Without Jesus' authority to rule as global King, we have no right to announce to people that He is King and that they should love, trust, and follow Him.
 - b. Jesus' authority to RULE is OUR jurisdiction to evangelize.
 - c. WITH Jesus' authority to rule as global King, His followers have "jurisdiction" to take the Gospel of His Kingdom, even into earthly territories that reject it, resist it, or even outlaw it.
 - 1) Our posture in doing this is so important. We do not invade and conquer the way the world does, with violence and force.
 - 2) Rather, we spread the Gospel of King Jesus IN THE SAME WAY King Jesus did: Grace and truth, love and sacrifice, willing to endure the consequences of loyalty to a Kingdom that is rejected by the kingdoms of this world.
3. Jesus' authority, love, and character defines the way we accomplish our mission, so let's look at the components of our mission:

B. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH:

1. Jurisdiction of the Mission: The Authority of Jesus
2. Go make disciples of all nations.
 - a. There is a "going" involved. For some it's next door, for others it's next continent; but wherever it is, this is NOT a passive endeavor. Disciples of Jesus must make the conscious decision to actively make disciples.
 - b. The command is to make disciples. This means that we share the good news of Jesus to those who are NOT His disciples, trusting that the Holy Spirit will lead them to faith in Jesus.
 - c. All nations: this is the SCOPE of the command.
 - 1) "Nations" in this passage is the word "ethne." The best way to describe this word is "people group", not a national boundary like England, India, or South Africa. Each national entity (country) has multiple "people groups" in it.
 - 2) The Church of Jesus is commissioned to bring His Gospel to EVERY SINGLE people group.
 - 3) No Christian should be satisfied with the fact that there are thousands of unreached and/or unengaged people groups in the world.
3. Baptize them (in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

- a. As we said before, Baptism is the initiatory rite in which a disciple of Jesus announces their faith and solidarity with Jesus. This is the ceremony that shows our change of loyalty from the kingdom of this world to the Kingdom of our Christ.
 - b. Being a disciple of Jesus is not just a secret inward belief set. We publicly unite ourself with Him AND with His people.
 - 4. Teach them to obey all of Jesus' commands.
 - a. Making disciples does not just entail getting them INTO the Kingdom. It also entails teaching them to live by the commands of the KING of this Kingdom.
 - b. Those who are saved must be sanctified. Those who come into the family must learn to follow the King of the family, Jesus.
 - c. So disciple making is both inviting people INTO the family of Jesus and helping them grow to BECOME like Jesus.
 - 5. Assurance of the Mission: The Presence of Jesus.
 - a. Jesus' first statement about the mission was the PREREQUISITE of His authority and therefore our jurisdiction to spread the good news.
 - b. His last statement is His PROMISE to be with us and sustain us all the way to the accomplishment of the mission.
 - c. Obeying the mission of Jesus is not an easy path. Jesus called it "the narrow road" but it is not an isolated road. There is no chapter of fulfilling this mission that Jesus isn't right there with us, leading, loving, sustaining, and accomplishing His will in us and through us.
 - d. And no matter what changes in our world or in our culture or in our church, the mission never changes. The mission CAN'T change because the King DOES NOT change.
 - 6. The unchanging nature of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus, ensures that the definition and mission of the Church DO NOT change with changing culture, politics, traditions, or leadership.
- IV. The way of the world is that change in human leadership will also change values, direction, and belief sets of the entity they are leading, but this is yet another way in which the Church must contrast culture. Certainly, different human leaders in the Church can and will bring different emphases. This is ok, but ultimately, if we believe that Jesus is the true Chief Shepherd of the Church, even when human leadership changes, our top level leader NEVER changes.
- A. I want to leave you with a very important thought—a quote from the missionary, theologian, and pastor Lesslie Newbigin.
 - “When the Church ceases to be one [unified], or ceases to be missionary, it contradicts its own nature.”
 - B. We must eternally hold on to BOTH the IDENTITY of the Church AND the MISSION of the Church—who we are and who we belong to, both Jesus and each other and the assignment Jesus has given His Church until all peoples have heard the Gospel.
 - C. This is like the two rails of a train track. When the Church lets go of WHO it is called to be OR lets go of the MISSION it is called to, the train derails.