



## **SECRET CHURCH**

### **THE BODY OF CHRIST**

I want to remind you, from the very beginning, why we call this "Secret Church." The reality is because we have many brothers and sisters who are forced to gather in secret at the risk of their lives to study this work. Secret Church was kind of birthed out of some times that I've had with underground house churches in those sort of locations. The qualification to get into those meetings was not that you were able to get online. The qualification to get into those meetings was that you were willing to lose your life to know this Word. I just want to remind us, from the very beginning, that this is not a game for many of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Just this last week, these stories came out. Uzbekistan...20 police officers raided a private home during a meeting of a house church. Church members were beaten and threatened. Bibles were torn from the hands of their children, and leaders of the house church were summoned and detained. Azerbaijan...police in the northern town of Quasar raided the home of a Baptist house church. Four leaders were arrested and are awaiting trial while we meet in this room. Assam, India...two church buildings and over four hundred homes of Christians were razed and burnt to the ground. Over a thousand families, including children, babies, pregnant women, and severely ill brothers and sisters, are now homeless. The article said, "Spending cold nights under the open sky."

Many of you heard about Baghdad and what is being called the "most lethal attack on Christians there in the last seven years." Militants stormed in a church building with approximately 100 people inside. They began firing at various worshippers. One leader was pushed to the ground as he pleaded for the gunmen to spare others. Within seconds, his body was riddled with bullets. The assailants held others hostage for approximately four hours until an ensuing gun battle with authorities ended up leading to the death of 46 Christians. Aide workers who rushed in found blood smeared on the walls and scraps of flesh strewn across the floor. The militant behind the attack publicly stated, "All Christian centers, leaders, and followers are legitimate targets for us wherever we can reach them."

A brother of the underground church walked in to this room and his comment was "This is like heaven." He's from Central Asia, and he said, "This is like heaven to have this big a room for this many people to gather and to sing praises together to God." He said, in his words, "To gather together with this many believers sing praises to God without terrorists waiting outside to storm in and slit your throat."

So, this is why we gather. We gather to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. We gather to remind ourselves of the artificial, superficial battles that we surround our lives with. These are real battles. So, I want you to realize this weekend what the real battles are because, if we're not careful, we'll think that the real battles are football games. Those are superficial, artificial battles. Who cares? It doesn't matter. I'll tell you what matters. We've got brothers and sisters in prison in Central Asia, and brothers and sisters who are homeless in the cold night in Northeastern India. We've got brothers and

sisters around the world this Sunday who will gather together at the risk of their lives. There are real battles going on this weekend.

So, we're going to pray, and we're going to press into God on their behalf. We're going to pray, and we're going to study. We're going to study this Word because we want to know this Word, and we want to know God, but we're going to study so that we can be equipped in this room to spread this Word wherever we live and to the ends of the earth. That's the goal.

I say this at every Secret Church, and I want to make sure to say it again from the very beginning. The goal is not to entertain. If you were looking for entertainment, there were a lot better options available to you on Friday night than six or seven hours in this room. The goal is not to entertain. The goal is to equip. The goal is not for us to walk away and say, "Well, that was cool," or "not cool," or "That was neat," or "Well, I've learned a lot of stuff." That's not the point. We are not receivers. We are reproducers. Think, brothers and sisters...in the middle of war-torn Southern Sudan...think teaching the Word to them in a little mud hut and, the whole time I'm teaching them, I hardly ever see their eyes. It's not because they are dozing, or they are just kind of wandering. No. It's because they are writing down every single thing that I say, and then, when it's finished, they come up to me, and they say, "We know that we have a responsibility to take everything we have learned from the Word and translate into our tribes' languages and teach it in our tribes." They're not just listening to receive. They are listening to reproduce. So, that's the goal.

The goal is not for you to receive. Don't waste your seat on receiving. The goal is that we would walk out of here equipped with this Word. We gather with this much material to get it out there now in a way that it can be translated for the sake of our brothers and sisters in other contexts around the world, so that when they gather together, and they've only got an hour before they can get caught and thrown in prison, that we give them as much material as possible to use in that hour, and then, for us in this room, to walk out of here six hours, seven hours from now, exhausted and compelled to spend our lives, not on superficial battles, not to waste our lives on the sidelines playing superficial battles, but to spend our lives for the advancement of the church and the spread of this Word to the ends of the earth, for the glory of God.

Well, there are a lot of folks who have not been informed. Just so you know, what we're going to dive into is available. We are intentionally...you're going to hear more about it later...translating it in other contexts into other languages, so they can be taught in other contexts around the world.

I got this email...just share it with you real quick...from somebody two weeks ago.

Dear David, I have just returned from my trip to India. All I can say is praise Jesus. We spent the last two weeks training pastors and leaders through three of the Secret Church sessions. It took us two days for the Old Testament, two days for the New Testament, and a full final day for the Cross of Christ. The pastor here, who invited us for this training, told us that no one has ever taught the Old Testament to the local believers before. He confirmed this by asking the crowd twice on our first days. Although we were sad that these pastors had never been trained in the Old Testament, we were praising God that He used us for such a glorious privilege. So, we used the Secret Church material to remind these pastors that the cross of our Lord Jesus is the center of God's Word in our faith and reminded them that they should have no other resolve but Christ and Him crucified. The response to the week

of training was overwhelming. They could not thank of us enough. We knew in our spirit that we could not thank our Lord Jesus enough for using us in such a way. Thank you so much for this material. Every day, they listened carefully and took notes. I loved observing them, learning from their examples. Somebody came to me afterwards to say they're excited about sharing this with others. In fact, we rejoiced with our group as two Hindus became followers of Christ as a result of the week of training.

Survey of the Old Testament. New evangelism tool.

Hallelujah! Our Indian brothers and sisters in Christ reminded me that it is far better to give than to receive. It goes on and on. Just thanks again, and to Christ be the glory.

## **Ways We Often Cheapen the Church ...**

What we're going to dive into is the Body of Christ, the Church. To my shame, I slept through discussions of ecclesiology, which is the theology of the church. I slept through discussions of ecclesiology even when I was in seminary. I think what was going on in my mind and in my heart was representative of our tendency across the board in our day to minimize the importance to the church, to cheapen the church. I want you to think about ways we often cheapen the church.

### **In our independence, we ignore the church.**

In our independence, we ignore the church. In our sinfulness, we are self-reliant, self-sufficient people. We can do...even Christianity...we can do that thing on our own. Is the local church really that big a deal? Isn't the church just a formality, and unnecessary at that?

It's not just a picture. I don't even think just of our independence. It's also our immaturity. Now, what's interesting is, often times, people will talk about how they don't need the church, and they'll talk about it in a way that they're trying to show, "I am growing enough in Christ without the church. I don't need the church." So, they're trying to show maturity. People will say, "I love Christ. I just can't stand the church." Don't say that. Just don't say that.

Think about that statement. The church is the bride of Christ. What if I come up to you, bro, and I say, "Man, I love you, but I cannot stand your wife?" Is there going to be conflict? Are you going to be like, "Thanks, thanks?" If my wife, Heather, comes up to me and says, "Babe, I love you, but I cannot stand your body," I'm not going to walk away with chills going down my spine, like, "Wow, that was special." No. That's immature to say things like that. It's not good. In our independence and our immaturity, we ignore the church.

### **In our pragmatism, we pollute the church.**

In our pragmatism, we pollute the church. Pragmatism is a fixation on what works, and if something works, then it must be right. This is so dangerous because we do this with really good motives. In the church, we want to reach as many people as possible and draw as many crowds, as many people, as possible in, but in the process, we begin to appeal to the world or begin to become like the world that works, that draws the crowd in, but now, we're drawing them into a church that we've polluted from the start. We think we're doing God a favor. We pollute the church with our pragmatism.

### **In our missions, we minimize the church.**

In our missions...this is tragic...we minimize the church. Historically, you look at it. The church has often times, even recently, become so engrossed and so busy doing so many different things that disciple-making and missions just kind of gets left out of the church. So, what happens is you have the spring-up of all kinds of organizations...para-church, mission organization, this or that. I'm not saying they're all bad by any means. Don't hear me saying that, but when you listen to who's talking about disciple-making and going to the nations, you hear it more from these outside organizations than the church. That misses the whole point. What happens is, often times, these organizations end up doing it apart from the church or around the church, and that's just foolish. The church is the only agent, the only avenue that God has promised to bless for the advancement of the Great Commission. We can't bypass the church and think we're doing him a favor.

I was sitting around, not long ago, with a group of leaders in some of the largest Christian mission organizations in our country. I don't know what I was doing there, but I had been invited to just share with them a little bit from the Word. So, I shared with them. We had this amazing discussion afterwards, and I just sat back and listened. One of them said, "You know, we've missed it." He said, "Our philosophy used to be with the church, 'You can do it, and we can help.'" They said, "Basically, what we've done is we've said, 'We can do it, and you can help us.' We've missed the point of the process," and that began a discussion to platform the church. Yes, that's what we need to do.

Another tendency, even along this missions line, I see some mission organizations...again, I'm not bashing mission organizations. I think there's a place here. The church should be platformed, and when we talk about the church, I see some missions organizations talk about, "Well, we're planting 'X' thousand churches all over this place or that place." Then you ask, "Well, what is the church?" Well, if you built a building, then OK, you planted a church or, "Well, where two are gathered," and yet more than two Christians...that's just lying. A building and/or two people does not necessarily qualify a church. I saw one the other day that said, "For twenty dollars, you can plant the church." "Oh, no, it didn't say that." That's cheapening the church in the name of mission.

### **We elevate our traditions over God's truth.**

So, we minimize the church...which, even the church, when we elevate our traditions over God's truth...oh, this is the humbling reality. Much of what we think of when we think of church is far more based on our traditions that it is on God's truth. We say, "There's the church," and we point to a building when, in God's Word, there is not one command to build a building anywhere and never is the church called a building in that kind of way. We fill our churches with programs and with stuff that are far more traditional than they are biblical. Any church, if you're going to take away some of those programs and stuff, it's like World War III is breaking out, but we've elevated our traditions over God's truth.

Like, you go to places where our brothers and sisters are gathering in secret. Kind of imagine going to a late-night worship service in the middle of Asia. You put on dark pants and a jacket with a hood on, and you get in the car late at night, and they drive you under the cover of moonlight into this remote village. You get out with your hood on and this Asian believer meets you and takes you down this winding path where you're around the corner into this small room, nowhere near even the size of this stage, and there's 60 believers just crammed in on little stools, one little light bulb hanging in the middle. They don't have any of this stuff that we have. Somewhere along the way, they've just begun to believe that the Spirit of God and the Word of God and the people of God are enough to accomplish the mission of God, and that's enough for them. The question is, "Is that enough for us?"

### **We value our preferences over God's priorities.**

We elevate our traditions over God's truth, and we value our preferences over God's priorities. I know this is, obviously, I think...I hope you can tell...there's a real wrestling in my own heart on these things, but there's over 500 million people in the world right now who are on the verge of starvation. They lack food, water, basic medical care. Children dying from diseases like diarrhea. Those who live will suffer from brain damage and early protein deficiency. Others will be forced...sold into forced labor. One hundred fifty million of them are orphans. Yet, the way we do church, we find ourselves saying, "Well, yeah, but we need a nicer parking lot, don't we?" What is most important in the heart of God? What happens when we have to change our churches and prioritize what is important in the heart of God more than our preferences? Things start to look radically different.

### **We practically define the church according to our personal comforts.**

If we're not careful, we will practically define the church according to our own personal comforts. We'll say a church is good if it makes me feel good. It's common in our day. We know the marketplace. People just shop and hop from church to church to church to church. "What's going to work for me? When I drive on campus, I want a nice parking spot, and I want to walk in the door. I want a latte in my hand. I want to drop my kids off at a state-of-the-art program. I want to go listen to an entertaining service that leaves me feeling good and gets me out on a timely fashion, so that I can beat the traffic on the way out." No. Are our brothers and sisters around the world and our brothers and sisters in this world not saying loud and clear, "You are missing the whole point. Give up your traditions and reorder your preferences and let go of your church building, your comforts." The church is not about sipping our lattes. The church is about sacrificing our lives to take the gospel and the glory of Christ to the ends of the earth.

## **Why We Must Cherish the Church ...**

So, we can't cheapen the church. So, we need to ask the question. The goal is to ask the question, "What is the church? What is the essence of the church? What is essential in the church?" Think about the stuff that we take on that ends up inadvertently, unknowingly, sometimes blindly, cheapening the church, and why we must cherish the church.

### **Because we love the glory of God.**

These reasons: number one, because we love the glory of God. This is huge. From the very beginning, God's very nature in and of Himself has provided a platform for our understanding community with one another. God desires for His glory to be the foundation of our community in this world. Listen to what Jesus said before He went to the cross. He says John 17:20-23, "*that they may all be one...*" talking about His people "*...just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*" That's an astounding verse. God's glory..."*Just as you, Father, are in me,*" the unity we have, we want them to be one like that. When that happens, God desires for our community to be a reflection of His glory in the world. "When that happens, when we're in a community like that, the world will know that you have sent me."

A lost world cannot see God, but they can see the church. When they see unity in the church and community in the church, then they'll see the love of the Father toward the Son shared by the Father and the Son and the Spirit. When they see division and cheapening in the church, then they see a cheapening of God. So, we want, like Ephesians 3 says, "*glory in the church...glory to God in the church.*"

### **Because we adore the Son of God.**

So, we cherish the church because we love the glory of God, and second, because we adore the Son of God. Jesus established the church. He's the one who builds it, Matthew 16. He purchased the church. He purchased the church with His own blood. That right there is...Acts 20:28...is enough to say, "We've got to give ourselves to the church and to love the church and devote our lives to the church," Acts 20:28. Jesus identifies Himself with the church. I love Acts 9 when Jesus confronts Saul...Paul, and He says, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul didn't do anything directly to Jesus in the flesh. Who was Saul persecuting? The church. Oh, isn't that good? Like, "You mess with the church," Jesus says, "you're messing with me." That's good.

### **Because we treasure the Spirit of God.**

We adore the Son of God because we treasure the Spirit of God. We're going to talk about this in a minute, but God's Spirit dwells in us. 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are God's temple, that God's Spirit dwells in you?" That's a plural "you." In the church.

We see this imagery in Ephesians 2. We'll talk about this more later, but God's Spirit dwells in the church ...

### **Because we value the gospel of God.**

... Because we value the gospel of God. The church is designed by God to declare His gospel. That's the whole point of the Great Commission...that the gospel be declared through the church, which we'll talk about. The church is designed to defend the gospel. Paul exhorts Timothy, "Guard the good deposit entrusted to you." (2 Timothy 1:13-14) Praise God that for centuries, there have been men and women in the church who have faithfully passed the gospel on from one generation to another to another to another. Like, we didn't just come on the scene in the 20<sup>th</sup>...21<sup>st</sup> century and start this thing. Like, we were indebted to many of brothers and sisters who have gone before us and have defended the gospel, which we celebrated even last week with All Saints Day. The church is designed to display the gospel. The church is the gospel made visible. I am firmly convinced...we'll talk about this in a minute...but if we distort the church, we will distort the gospel. God has designed the church in a way that would be a demonstration of the gospel. So, if we distort that demonstration, we will distort the gospel itself.

### **Because we desire satisfaction in our own lives.**

So, we value the gospel of God because we desire satisfaction in our own lives, so a little bit of a tinge of self-serving motivation here. We cherish the church for our own good. Follow me here. Genesis 1, God created us to enjoy life in Him, and we're created in His image to relate to Him, to know Him, to enjoy Him, but don't miss this: God also created us to experience life with others. When you get to Genesis 2:18...now, this is before sin has even entered in the world, and the Bible says, "God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.'" So, everything wasn't perfect. Even before sin came in the world, there was still more that needed to be accomplished. When man was alone, he needed...he needed woman. He needed community. We were created, yes, to enjoy life in God, but also to experience life with each other. I think we miss this sometimes when people talk about it. When people feel alone, we say, "Well, you're not alone. You have God and that's enough." There's a sense in which that's true. Yes, God is sufficient, but God has created us not to be alone in this world. He's created us to experience life. "It's not good for us to be alone," God says. We need each other.

I came across a Harvard study that tracked 7,000 lives over nine years, and listen to what they found. The most isolated people in this study were three times more likely to die than those with the strongest relational connections. Even people who had bad health

habits...smoking, poor eating, obesity, alcohol, bad health habits...but strong social ties, they still lived significantly longer than people who had great health habits, but were isolated. So, takeaway: it is better to eat Twinkies with friends than to eat broccoli alone. So, mark that down. That could be your best takeaway from this entire message. It's because God has created us that way.

### **Because we want salvation for the lost.**

We want satisfaction in our lives, and then, in the end, we cherish the church because we want salvation for the lost. Over and over again in Scripture, we see our love for one another in community and in the church tied with the demonstration of that love to those who don't know Christ. John 13:34-35 makes that very clear. Listen, in Acts 5, the reputation of the church was highly esteemed, and multitudes of men and women were coming in. You see the peace of the church connected with the growth of the church. In Acts 9:31, this is why, ultimately, we must cherish the church, because we want to multiply the gospel to every corner on the earth because Revelation 5:9-10 says that God desires a church giving Him praise from every tribe and tongue and people and language, and we want that gospel to get to them. The way it will get to them is through the church. For all these reasons, we don't want to cheapen the church. We must cherish the church.

## **So Where Do We Go From Here?**

So, here's where we're going to go from here. First, we're going to look at four questions: first, "Who is the church?" We want to know God's definition of the church. We want to know how God defines His people in His Word because He didn't say anywhere, "Pay fifteen dollars, and you've got a church." So, we want to be responsible, biblically responsible, with how we define the church. Second, "What does the church do?" There's a lot of things we already mentioned that we do...the church...that God never said to do. So, what does the church do? We want to follow God's design for the church. Third, we're going to ask, "How is the church led?" We want clarity on the organization of the church. We want to know it. Has God ordained any structure for the church, or is it just fluid? Is it totally just organic? I guess that is the popular word today. Or is there structure, and is that structure good or bad? Then, we're going to end with the question, "Where is the church going?" We want confidence in the future of the church.

## **Who Is the Church? God's Definition of His People**

Who is the church? God's definition of His people. Now, I want to be careful when I even say that because there's not a place that we can go to in the Word and say God gives a dictionary definition. In fact, we see one scholar that said there are 96 different images of the church in the New Testament. So, there's just a multiplicity of pictures of the church that we see in Scripture. It's not very monolithic, but what I've got here is actually...and I'll talk about some of the books that I recommended in the back there...but Mark Dever, in a great theology for the church, uses this definition, and amidst all that I've studied and looked through, this really summed up. So, I want to kind of use this and unpack it as a definition of the church. So, it's not really God's definition of the church as much as it is Dever's definition of the church, but I think it captures the essence of the multiplicity of

images that we're going to see in the church, and then we'll kind of get it specific. We're going to start pretty general, and then get it specific.

## Definition of the Church ...

So, the church...here's where we're going to start...the church is the body of people called by God's grace through faith in Christ to glorify Him by serving Him in this world." So, that's where we're going to focus. The key word being there...what I want you write in..."called," is because the key word in the New Testament for the church is "*ekklesia*," and that's kind of a compound word that uses the Greek word for "call" in it. It literally is "called out."

### The body of people ...

So, here's where we're going to start. We're going to unpack that definition. The body of people: the church is a gathering, a gathering of people. I reference that word "*ekklesia*"...it's written there...mentioned 114 different times in the New Testament. We see it twice referring to an Old Testament assembly. So, it was referring to a gathering of people in the Old Testament. Three times it refers to a secular assembly. So, just a gathering of people that are not followers of Christ, but then 109 times it refers to a Christian assembly, to a gathering of Christians, to the church of God that is in Corinth. It's the gathering of the people of God in Corinth, same picture...there's numerous ones, 109 of them.

So "*ekklesia*," I mentioned, is a reference to those whom God has called out. We see this picture all over Scripture in Romans 1. It's really clear. "*Called to belong to Jesus Christ...called to be saints.*" So, the picture of the church is those whom God has called out. So, there's a clear distinction between those whom God has called out and those who have not...those who are in the church and those who are not, and those whom God has called together. By being called out, they've been called together in a gathering with one another, which is what we're going to see. Romans 12:5 says we are "*members of one another.*" So, the church is a gathering, an assembly. I put there that the church is an earthly assembly with a heavenly destiny. I love these verses in Hebrews 12. "*You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.*" That's the picture of the church in heaven...the church: an earthly assembly with a heavenly destiny.

So, the main picture we see..."*ekklesia*," is a gathering, but then all kinds of other images. We're just going to fly through these. The church is people. Obviously, the church is people. We see that stage set with the Old Testament people of God and then coming about. 1 Peter 2 is a great picture of that in the New Testament. The church is the people of God, and the church is a family. The church is a family. We are sons and daughters. We are brothers and sisters. All over the New Testament, you see that language of brothers and sisters. Would you think about it with me? Just pause for a second. I want to remind you that our family relationship as the church supersedes even physical family ties in a sense, because the reality is...say you have a Christian teenager, a teenager who comes to Christ, and mom and dad are not followers of Christ. The reality is, if they do not choose to follow Christ in their lives, they die without Christ. Well, this teenager is going to have a relationship with brothers and sisters in the church in a way that it will last billions upon billions of years, in a way that's not going to happen with mom and dad. So, I just want you to think about why this is so important, even for our brothers and sisters in persecuted contexts around the world. You come to Christ, and often times, you are kicked out of your family or totally

taken away. Sometimes even your family wants to kill you, and so you really see this meaning come alive. "Oh, I have a whole other family," which is what Jesus is talking about in Mark 10 with the rich, young man and His disciples after that. So, we have brothers and sisters. We're a family.

The church is a bride. Christ "*gave himself up for her*" (Ephesians 5:25-27) as the bride. We see that imagery all over the Old Testament. The people of God are referred to as a bride to God. Then, we see that in the New Testament. We see Revelation 19, which we'll look at later. One day, the wedding of the Lamb will come, and we will be fully united together with Christ as His bride. So, the church is a bride.

The church is a building but not a bricks/mortar kind of picture like we would picture a building. That's not what the New Testament is talking about here. When it talks about how you are "*God's building*," (1 Corinthians 3:9) literally, God's...well, the next thing, the church is a house. It's a picture of the dwelling place of God. When he's talking about a building, when he's talking about house, this is where God dwells. We see temple imagery all over the New Testament used to referred to the "church" just as God's presence in His glory dwelled in the temple in the Old Testament. So, we see this happening in the church. We also see it with individual followers of Christ in 1 Corinthians 6. We see the church is the dwelling place of God, a building, a house. The church is a temple. You see that here in 1 Timothy 3 and other places. God's Spirit dwells within the church. God's glory is displayed through the church. That was the whole purpose of the temple, and that's what the New Testament is teaching us about the church.

1 Corinthians 3, which we looked at earlier, says the church is a field. You are God's field. God is growing this field. God is harvesting this field. The church is a field. The church is a tree. We won't read Romans 11, but that's the picture there. Jesus talks about how we are...we are branches on a vine. The church is a priesthood. 1 Peter 2, "*The church is a priesthood*," which is a great picture. The priests are the ones who worked in the temple and who offered sacrifices and praise to God, who had intimate knowledge of the glory of God in a way that nobody else has. So, Peter comes on the scene and says, "You are a royal priesthood. You don't have to go through somebody else. Christ alone is sufficient. You can come to God and be intimately familiar with the glory of God." We'll talk about that more later in church, the priesthood. The church is a body. The church is a body. We are one body. We're a unified body. So, "*one body...one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism...*" (Ephesians 4:4-6) This picture of body shows us unity, but it also shows us diversity. We're a diverse body because each of us makes up different parts or members of the body. So, it's this beautiful picture in the body of unity and diversity together.

So, that's the introductory picture. The church is a body of people, a gathering of people, bride, house, temple, building in which He dwells. The church is a body of people called by God's grace through faith in Christ.

### **Called by God's grace through faith in Christ ...**

So, how do you become one of the called out ones? I want to pause here for just a second because I realize that there are likely some, if not many people, who are here...that you may not know Christ. You may have not come to the point in your life where you have trusted in Christ as Savior and King and Lord. Maybe you're here just exploring Christianity. Maybe you just saw a bunch of cars and thought, "Well, I'll just figure out what's going on in there." I want you to see a picture of what it means to be called out by God. As I walk through this picture, I pray that God, by His grace and His spirit, will work in your mind and your heart in such a way that He might even...in this holy moment...might call you out and draw you to Himself. So, I'd encourage you to open yourself up to that, and then, for every

Christian in this room, to be reminded of what it means for us to be called out by God's grace through faith in Christ. Think about it, what we were in our sin. Ephesians 2 says,

*You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

Paul does not mince words. We were dead. Paul says, "You had no spiritual life in you. You were dead." I think about that verse, Ephesians 2:1, anytime I do a funeral, especially anytime where I've carried a casket at a funeral, just struck by the realization: that is what I was in my sin. I'm dead.

There's an old story about a preaching professor who took his class out to a graveyard, and he said, "I want you to stand over the graveyard" to students. He said, "Stand over the graveyard and preach and call the people who are in the graves to rise up and walk." They were like, "That's probably not going to happen." He said, "Try it." So, one by one, they stepped out and shouted out over a silent, still graveyard. After they all tried, he said, "The reality is this is what you do anytime you preach because you are speaking to people who are dead in sin."

Dead, who are living in darkness and love the darkness. John 3 says "*blinded by darkness*." We didn't want anything to do with the light. We ran from the light. We were children of disobedience. This is what Romans 5 talks about. Genesis 3, serpent tempts Adam and Eve to disobey, and Adam and Eve disobey and condemnation comes to all men, all of us, every single one of us. I have a four-year-old and a two-year-old, and they are proving this. We all prove this. Every "*intention of man's heart is evil from his youth*," Genesis 8:21 says. You said, "Well, not me. I've always loved God." No. Like, you may have loved some god you made up in your mind, but the God of the Bible, you hated, and you rebelled against Him. You turned from Him.

Children of disobedience, and we are captivated by sinful desire. Slaves to sin, in the "*snare of the devil*," 2 Timothy 2 says. Ultimately, we were condemned to hell. "*Whoever does not believe is condemned already*." (John 3:18) Romans 5:10 and James 4:4 says, "We were enemies of God." Ephesians 2, which we read earlier, says, "We are objects of eternal wrath." How is that for the power of positive thinking? There are all kinds of preachers today who will tell you that you need to believe in yourself and trust in yourself and have confidence in yourself. They are lying. You don't believe in yourself. You're dead. You're dead.

Now, here's the question: if you're dead...and you can't be more dead or less dead. You're just dead. If you're dead, how can you come to life? What can you do to come to life when you're dead? Nothing. You're dead. The only way, if you're dead, that you can come to life is if you were acted on by another. There's not a list of things here. There's not check off the box, walk the aisle, say the words here. You're dead. You need something to happen to you from outside. We were dead in our sin. This is what we were, but listen...this is what God did by His grace. I have so much to learn about what it means to know Christ, but I have learned this. I have learned to speak of my conversion to Christ in passive terms. I didn't convert myself to Christ. I couldn't. I was dead. I was in the darkness. I ran from the light. I was converted. I was, by the grace of God, acted upon by another.

Ephesians 1:3:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

Praise God.

Look at what He has done. You say, "Well, I don't know about all this chosen and predestined stuff in the Bible." Well, what are you going to do? Are you going to throw out Ephesians 1? Why would you throw out Ephesians 1? This is good. What did the Father do? Listen, the whole Trinity is involved in this thing. The Father planned our salvation; He chose us, predestined to us, and gave it to us. Think of it. Before the sun was created, the moon was created, before one star shined in the sky, before one drop of water was put in the ocean, the Almighty God of the universe set His affection on you. He planned it. He saw us in the casket dead, and He said, "Life." How can a holy God do that? Well, the Son purchased our salvation. We have redemption through His blood. Redemption to buy, to purchase...He purchased us with His blood, and the Spirit preserves our salvation. The Spirit opens our eyes and changes our lives and takes our dead souls and gives them life to the praise and the glory of God.

Do we realize how wonderful this is? There is this tendency...we almost think the more dramatic a testimony of conversion to Christ, the better. Like, the more drugs you did before, the more alcohol you drank, the more whatever you just indulged in, "Wow, that was strong." People come to Christ at like ten years old, and they're like, "Well, I disobeyed my mom." "Ah this is boring." No, that's not boring! Like, the reality is you were dead in sin, a child of disobedience, captivated by sinful desire, and on a road that leads to an eternal hell; an object of wrath before a holy God, and that God, by His grace, spoke into your life by His Spirit and said, "I want you, and I give my Son to die on your behalf, to purchase...to pay the price for your sin to make you mine." He brought you to Him, so that now the Spirit lives in you, guaranteeing your salvation for all of eternity. That's not boring, that's good.

So, this is what it means to be the church. We are called by God's grace through faith in Christ. What we now are as His church...what we now are...now, this is Hebrews 10:19-25. We're going to camp out here for just a minute.

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith,*

*with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Now, those verses sum up six chapters of some of the most intense theology in all the New Testament. The author of Hebrews, which only God knows who wrote that book, says, "This is the deal. We are recipients of a new covenant." That's what he spends the whole book talking about. We're recipients of a new covenant. We have access to God. We have confidence to enter the holy place. Freedom, access, and boldness, some translations say, "to enter the holy place."

Now, think about how this is so huge because the old covenant...remember, back in Exodus 19, which I have here. God led His people out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai where He was going to enter into a covenant, the Mosaic covenant, with them, and the command was to stay back in fear. When you look down at verse 18 here, it says:

*Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look and many of them perish. Also, let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them."*

In other words, "Tell them to stay away from the mountain because, if they see my glory, they will be struck down." The reality is, if you sit and look at a mountain that's shaking and you have voice of thunder, like, you're OK just to sit back and watch this thing unfold. So, that's what they did. That was the picture we see all throughout the rest of the Old Testament: God's supreme, indescribable glory. How can sinful man come into His presence? So, what you see right after this in Exodus 19 is we see the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. In Exodus 25, God promises that He's going to dwell among these people in a Tabernacle. It turns into the Temple later in the Old Testament. So, God's going to dwell with His people, but that's the question. How can a holy God dwell with a sinful people?

What God does is He sets up a provision. In Leviticus 16...Day of Atonement...an annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. "Atonement" literally means "reconciled" or "to be at one with something." So, God sets up a way for His people to be at one with Him. He had said, in Genesis 2, "Adam and Eve, if you sin, you will surely die." That is the payment for sin from the very beginning of Scripture. So, how can a sinful people live in the presence of a holy God? They should die.

So, God sets up this provision. The whole day revolved around three elements. One: a priest entering an earthly sanctuary. This talks about Aaron here in Leviticus 16. Aaron will come to the holy place. Aaron is the high priest. He'll put on the holy linen coat and the linen undergarment, tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear a linen turban. These are holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water, then put them on. Like, you're going to go, and you don't go in the presence of God unclean. Like, you take a lot of baths. Then, the second element: the blood of a spotless animal because...you could say, "What's the deal

with all the sacrifices all over the Old Testament?" Well, the reality was the sacrifices were there because the payment for sin is death. So, sacrifice was death. It was death. The payment for sin being poured out.

So, what happens is the priest would offer a sacrifice for himself. Then, he would take the goat, and he would sacrifice it. You see this in Leviticus 15 and 16. He would sacrifice the goat and take its blood into the Holy of Holies. The picture in the Holy of Holies is you had the law of God, the Ark of the Covenant, that is what it's called. That's where they store the law of God. Then, you have an atonement cover over the law of God. This was the picture of God's presence with His people. What the priest would do is he would sprinkle blood over the atonement cover in this picture of God's presence and His law that the people had broken to show that death had been paid. That was the picture that God gave to His people. This was the sacrifice that would need repeating. They would do this year after year after year after year. People would come together on the Day of Atonement, and the priest would offer the sacrifice of atonement, the blood of sacrifice.

The effect was it was a reminder of all their sin. That's what Hebrews 10 says. These sacrifices were reminders of sins every year because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away the full payment of the people's sin.

So, we come to the New Testament and everything changes...new covenant. This is what the author of Hebrews is talking about. Instead of stay back in fear, the command in Hebrews 10:19 says draw near in faith. Come into the presence of God. Old Testament saints were told, "Stay away." Church, followers of Christ, are told to draw near. Provision...not an annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, but an abiding sacrifice in the death of Christ. You have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place, not because you're a good person or because you attend church or because you prayed a prayer one day. You have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. He has given us sacrifice.

These elements: a priest entering a heavenly sanctuary. The priests in the Old Testament entered an earthly sanctuary, a Tabernacle here on earth. Listen to Hebrews 9:24, "*Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now, to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*" Priests entering a heavenly sanctuary, and the blood of a sinless man.

*For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:13-14)*

The one who had no sin, paid the price for sin in a sacrifice that will last forever. His blood guarantees an eternal covenant, and the effect: the removal of all our sins. Hebrews 10 says because of Christ, God says, "*I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.*" Those are beautiful words. It's not that God has amnesia, and He forgets. He knows everything. The beauty of His grace is that He knows every sinful thought and every sinful deed and every sinful motive, the things that you know that nobody else knows, that you would tremble if other people knew. He knows them all, and yet He chooses not to hold one of them against you. Our guilt is gone, Hebrews 10 says, and our conscience is clear.

I shared recently at Brook Hills, and I just want to bring it back real quick. The story of Rolls Royce. A guy in England bought a Rolls Royce. It was advertised as the car that would

never, ever, ever, ever break down. So, he buys one, real expensive. He drives it. One day, he's in France, and the car breaks down, and he calls Rolls Royce, and he's like, "Never breaks down, huh? I'm in the middle of France, and my Rolls Royce isn't working." So, they put a mechanic on a plane and fly somebody to France to fix the car and get him on his way. Now, he, obviously, in the days to come, expects a bill, and he never gets a bill. Like, it's not often that somebody will fly a mechanic to you to fix your car. So, a couple months go by, and he hadn't heard anything, so he calls up Rolls Royce, and he says, "Listen, I know you fixed my car, and I just want to pay my bill. I have the means. I can do this, so I can get this behind me." Rolls Royce says to him, "We're sorry, sir, but we have absolutely no record of anything ever having gone wrong with your car."

Oh, think of what the God of the universe says about your life. "I have absolutely no record of anything ever having gone wrong in you." As a result, we have access to God, but not just access to God. We have an advocate before God. There's so much here in Hebrews. Jesus is the eternal king who forever rules us. He's our king sitting at the right hand of God, and He is the high priest who forever represents us. Listen to this: Hebrews 7:25, "*He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*" You have a Savior on high. His work is not finished on your behalf. Yes, He has done all that is necessary to pay the price for your sin, but He is at the right hand of the Father interceding for you, recipients of a new covenant, and we are members of a new community. This is the whole picture.

What the author of Hebrews says, "In light of that, draw near, hold fast." Consider Hebrews 10:24, how to stir up one another in love and good works. So, this is what we do as the church, because we're recipients of a new covenant. That also means we're members of a new community called the church, and together, we draw near to God in faith. We come to God together...not just you or me...together as a community. We come before Him with sincere desire, confidence, assurance, full assurance of faith. We come to God with cleansed hearts. We come before Him with purified bodies. "*Our bodies washed with pure water,*" Hebrews 10 says.

So, what we do as the church is we draw near to God. Together, we hold fast to God in hope. We hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, Hebrews 10 said. Think about the barriers to hope. Even in the first century book of Hebrews, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our brothers and sisters around the world...barriers to our hope. We will face trials. Those brothers and sisters in Hebrews were facing trials. The reality is there was a time when it was not easy to be a Christian, not easy to come out of Judaism to follow after Christ.

We will face temptations. You see Hebrews 10:32-34 talk about how they were being...they were suffering and being afflicted. They were going to prison, and property was being plundered. From what we can tell, this was not an easy time for these brothers and sisters, but what was the basis of their hope? Their hope is the faithfulness of God to His promises. God is faithful. You go back to Hebrews 6:13-20 to see that. The faithfulness of God to His promises and, don't miss this, the return of Christ for His people. Hebrews 9 talks about how we wait for Christ to come back a second time. Hebrews 10:35-39 talks about how we're looking forward to our reward. The reality is this is who we are.

We're a people who draw near to God in faith. We hold fast to God in hope. We motivate one another to love. We motivate one another to love. We gather with one another regularly. That's why it talks about coming together. The church gathers together. We encourage one another continuously. Consider how to spur one another on toward Christ. That's what we do as the church.

### **To glorify Him by serving Him in this world ...**

So, we are a body of people called by God's grace through faith in Christ to glorify Him by serving this world. Keep going. We have been filled with the power of Christ. Now, we're not going to be able to read all this, but Ephesians 1...we just read the first part of Ephesians 1, which we established that we don't want to take it out. So, if we're going to keep it in...and it gets even better at the end of the chapter when it says...look at just the end, verse 22 and 23 says that *"God has put all things under His feet...Christ...His feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* So, this is what Paul is saying there: Christ has all authority. He is the risen Savior. This is what Paul talks about in the first part of that prayer above. He's the risen Savior. He is the exalted king. He is the sovereign Lord to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that He is the Lord. So, Christ has all authority everywhere.

The church...now follow this...the church has the fullness of Christ. That's what Paul said at the end there in the verses we read, that His body is the fullness of Him. Colossians 2:9-10 says, *"In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."* So, follow this. Christ has all authority; the church has the fullness of Christ. Put it together. What does that mean? All the authority in all the earth belongs to the...who? Church. Are you catching this? I'm not making this up. Check this out. 1 Corinthians 3 says, *"All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."* Ephesians 2:6 says, *"we are seated with him in the heavenlies."* Are you believing this? God has entrusted the fullness of Christ to us. The church is not weak in this world. We are victors in this world. We have the authority of Jesus Christ in us. We need not be timid. Be bold, a bold display of the glory of Christ. This is where...attach it to the Great Commission. Jesus says, "You go and make disciples. Why? Because I've got all authority in heaven and earth, and I've given it to you."

God's design is to use the body of His Son to show the glory of His son to all creation. Listen to Ephesians 3:10: *"Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."* Let that soak in, and you see the rulers and authorities...this picture in Ephesians 6:12 later in the book. It talks about rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and this present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. You think about this. It will take your breath away. God is saying to all the angels in heaven and all the demons of hell, "You want to see my glory? I'm going to take this man and this woman and this man and this woman. I'm going to take them in their total sinfulness, captivated and smeared by the devil, and I'm going to bring them out of the pit, and I'm going to raise them up. I'm going to put my grace on them, and I'm going to fill them with all my fullness. I'm going to lift them up, and I'm going to show all the angels of heaven and all the demons of hell my greatness in the church." Don't cheapen that. God is saying, "Look at the church and you will see my Son. You'll see Christ." A body of people called by God's grace through faith in Christ to glorify Him by serving Him in this world.

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