

The Nature, Marks, and Purpose of The Church

INTRODUCE MYSELF

Lets read God's word and then we will pray.

Acts 2:41–47 (ESV)

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

The Fellowship of the Believers

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

PRAY

If we're going to have healthy churches, we need to know what healthy churches look like... We need to know what the church is! See when we don't understand things rightly, we tend to make a mess out of things... and we can go about failing. **TELL STORY OF GETTING MUGGED OFF ON SUNDAY ...** Now that story really does have a point... the point is, I didn't understand the Kenyan shilling and yet I tried to go about spending the schillings anyway and I made a very big loss out of it. I lost some money on Sunday... not the end of the world. But if we misunderstand what the church is supposed to be we can lose far more than a few Ugandan schillings.

And so let's look at the nature and the marks and the purpose of the church today... my prayer is that with clarity about what the church is we will, by God's grace, see the churches we minister at grow all the more healthy...

1. Nature of The Church (Called Out)

In Acts 2, the local church is in the process of starting. And when you think about the nature of the local church it is important to understand where it began and we find that playing out in the book of Acts. There is a WHEN and a WHERE that goes along with the starting of the church... But more importantly there is a WHO that has everything to do with the starting and the very nature of the church. That WHO of course is JESUS... The church was started by Jesus. And that's a vital principle to understand and we'll see this throughout our whole time today... no human person started the church. Jesus started the church and I know that seems so obvious but examine the way you think about the churches you lead and pastor and are preparing to plant... do you see them as the work of your hands? When we think that the church begins or holds together by any of our own power we are deeply mistaken... the church is started by Jesus, it is completely the work of Jesus and it belongs fully to Jesus. So follow along with me here and maybe even write down some passages here that we will not be having the time to read:

- We read in Luke's gospel account that Jesus fulfilled his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22; 4:16-21).
- We read in the Luke's sequel, Acts of the Apostles that Jesus sends the Spirit to indwell his followers so that they can continue his work of building the kingdom of God. We see that Spirit is promised by Jesus before he ascends to the Father (Acts 1:1-9).
- The Spirit is poured out by Jesus on his followers (2:1-11).
- Peter, indwelt by the Spirit, preaches repentance and trust in the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:36-41).
- Those who trust the gospel message receive the Holy Spirit and continue Jesus' ministry (Acts 2:42-47).

So please hear what I am saying, if every single one of us dropped dead right now in this room, God would continue to accomplish his purposes in Kenya and Uganda and Malawi and Nigeria and South Africa and back in America. It's not our church. The church belongs to Jesus. And even without any of us... The Holy Ghost would continue to empower others to preach the truth of the gospel and Jesus would continue to build His church. The church belongs to Jesus it always has and it always will and even with you or without you Jesus will continue to build it. But oh what a joy and honor and great privilege we have to be a part of the unstoppable work of Jesus building His church, Amen?! He doesn't need any of us to build His church but by his grace he has called us to it. Are you joyful today that you get to pastor and lead the church?

So of most importance in knowing the nature of the church is know WHO started the church... our Savior and King... Jesus! That's good news... because we'd have really messed this thing up by ourselves... but Jesus never fails.

When we think about the nature of the church I want us to think about one more thing... and let's keep it very simple here...

The word church in the New Testament is the word "ekklesia". It literally means the called out from among ones. It is applied to those people who have been called out from among the world to belong to God in Jesus Christ.

Called out from among "ones"

Of course the "ones being called out are people. Know this very clearly the church is a people... Not land or building or logo or a facebook page. It's not even an activity that happens on Sunday morning. It is a people.

On Sunday mornings when my children say they are going to church, I say, "NO! We are going to a building where the church will gather together and worship Jesus." I want them to understand as early as possible that the church is a people NOT a place.

So the church is a people, and they are a people who are called out "from among"

The people who are were once somewhere else...

1 Peter 2:9

[9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (ESV)

We all at one time walked in darkness. We all walked in the way of the world with all other sinners lost, broken, dead in our sin, and blind to the truth...

And let me say this here... This should influence how we lead.

We must refuse to forget that we were once among those counted worthy of death and hell... we were once incapable of seeing and knowing and responding to the gospel. You yourself and the church that you pastor or lead or desire to plant are sinners saved only by the grace of God.

This should change our expectations in ministry. Are you patient with the people you minister to? Gracious to the people you minister to? Are you quick to extend mercy and love and forgiveness to the people you minister to? There are no perfect people in your church... not even yourself, we are all every one of us, SINNERS saved by grace. And because of this truth. Pastoring and planting churches will many times be messy and difficult. People will not always get everything right, you will not always get everything right. Sometimes, you're going to fail at preaching or leading or counseling! Sometimes people will leave your church because they are angry and some people be so so very slow to overcome their sin.... Sometimes ministry will seem impossible (apart from God). And that is the right conclusion to arrive at, because ministry is infact, impossible apart from God.

So may our expectations be correct that, pastoring and church planting is not all happiness and perfection and glory... it will also include sadness and failure and heart break... be ready for that... we are sinners ministering to sinners... so let that influence your expectations.

And also let it influence our posture as pastors and leaders knowing that we were once among those separated from God... may knowing that cause us to be grateful, humble, and desperate for grace.

Are you thankful today that the gospel is good news not only for the people you minister to, but also most certainly the gospel is good news for YOU?!

Are you humbled today by the fact that apart from the truth of the gospel you would be hopeless and lost but oh the grace of God to save you and bring you into the kingdom of God... are you humbled by that today. You are nothing! I am NOTHING! Without Jesus. Be humbled by that.

So the church is a people who were once from among darkness... a people from among those who are lost and far from God... but by God's amazing grace we have been "called out" of darkness and into wonderful light! -

1 Peter 2:9 (is so nice we will hear it twice)

[9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (ESV)

We are a people called out by God!!! Hallelujah! God looked at broken and lost sinners like you and me and God initiated the relationship. Notice the Bible never says that we WALKED out of darkness and into His marvelous light. No! The Bible says we were DEAD in our sins... and dead people don't walk. We didn't walk into marvelous light we were CALLED... only one voice can raise the dead... just ask Lazarus... he'll testify to the solid fact that Jesus can raise the dead... dead body's like Lazaus and dead hearts like ours have no choice but to respond the call of God.

The church is a people called out. By the grace of God alone. For the glory of God alone

So the nature of the church is this. The church is a people called out from among the darkness of sin and into the marvelous light of God's grace. And hallelujah to that!

Now let's see the marks of such a people as this? TELL STORY OF SOJOURN UGANDA AND KEN KNOWING THE TRIBES... there were certain features up certain people that marked them as being from a certain tribe... and there are certain things that mark the people of God as the church.

2. Marks of The Church (Set Apart)

Are there 3 marks or 4 marks or maybe 9 marks? And maybe some of you don't even have an opinion about how many marks there are... that's fine. Today I want to simply list a few things that biblically must be present for a church to be a church or to say it the opposite way... unless it does these things unless it is marked by these things a church is actually not a church.

Headship of Christ (over): Who Is The Head Of The Church? Jesus: The Bible is clear that Jesus Christ is the head of the church

Colossians 1:15-20

[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (ESV)

Jesus is the head of the church! Is Jesus the head of your church... as a leader, as a pastor, as a church planter, do you submit to the absolute and unquestionable rule of Jesus or do you falsely perceive yourself to be some kind of a big deal?! You may be a great communicator or an inspiring leader and you might fill some building in some place but unless Jesus is at the head... in the absolute leadership of what you are doing... it is NOT a church.

Another mark of a healthy church is **Rightly appointed leaders (who oversee):**

To be a church by the biblical definition of church there must be rightly appointed leaders...

In The Apostle Paul's words to the church at Ephesus:

Ephesians 4:11-12 [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (ESV)

God by His grace gives leaders to His church. Many of you here are such leader. ----- We'll mention two specific types of leaders here. Elders and deacons. They have responsibilities within the church, yes BUT they are defined PRIMARILY by the evidence of God grace at work in their lives... they are measured by their character...

First elders.

With the church at Antioch in Acts 14:23...

Acts 14:23 [23] And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (ESV)

Elders –

- Elders are the male leaders of the church who are also called pastors, bishops, and overseers (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2).
- These men may or may not be financially compensated for their service. The elders are men chosen for their ministry according to clear biblical requirements (1 Tim. 2:11–3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).
- The elders are always spoken of in plurality in the Bible because God intends for more than one man to lead and rule over the church in order to protect both the church and the man.
- The elders' duties include
 - ruling (1 Tim. 5:17)
 - managing (1 Tim. 3:4–5),
 - tending (1 Peter 5:2–5),
 - giving account (Heb. 13:17),
 - living exemplary lives (Heb. 13:7),
 - using authority (Acts 20:28),
 - teaching (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim.3:2),
 - preaching (1 Tim. 5:17),
 - doctrinal instruction (Titus 1:9),
 - and church discipline (Matt. 18:15–17)

These leaders, those called elders, must be rightly qualified by the biblical standards! If you are an elder in your church, please take this responsibility seriously. If you are appointing elders please take this responsibility seriously and if you are considering being an elder, please take that potential responsibility very seriously!!! 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1 ANYTHING ELSE? Are the places you should go to be reminded or to be informed of exactly what the biblical qualifications of an elder actually are and abide by these standards.

ALSO ... Deacons... Deacons are servants within the church who are qualified to oversee and care for God's people. The office of deacon officially began in Acts 6 to help the apostles serve food to widows.

And the qualifications of deacon are the same as elder EXCEPT the ability to teach and preach

Go to 1 Timothy 3:8-13 is where you will go to be reminded of the qualifications for Deacon. And one more difference is that deacons may be either male or female.

Elders and Deacons must be rightly appointed and biblically qualified to lead. And a church must have rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders.

So we see that the church is marked by the headship of Jesus over rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders overseeing true believers...

Next mark, **True believers / true Christians (as they)**

John 1:12-13 [12]

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (ESV)

It is God who justifies! Not our family heritage or our behaviors or our works. It is God alone who justifies through the finished work of Jesus on the Cross... and this is how the only true church grows... now hear me. There will very likely be people involved in your Sunday gatherings and weekly communities and ministries and maybe even leading certain things within your church who are not true believers/true Christians. I'm not talking about the people at your Sunday gathering... I'm talking about the true church. The true church of God for whom all the promises of God are secured is made up ONLY of the true children of God. And this is very obvious so we need not labor on about it, but if there are not true Christians within your church than, of course, it is not truly a church.

God is growing the church by saving people... by making them true believers... back to Acts 2:47

Acts 2:47

47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

God is doing the work of saving people and these true believers are the church.

So we see that the church is marked by the headship of Jesus over rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders overseeing true believers [who gather regularly](#)

Gather regularly:

46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,

They are meeting consistently... regularly....

Look to Hebrews 10:24-25

Hebrews 10:24-25 [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] 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. (ESV)

We see the church at it's earliest days meeting together regularly and we see the author of Hebrews counseling the church to not neglect meeting together regularly... and today for a church to be a church they must do the same. In worship and in community and in ministry and in hospitality the church is gathering regularly and consistently.

So we see that the church is marked by the headship of Jesus over rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders overseeing true believers who gather regularly [to worship God](#)

Another mark of the church is that they **Worship God:**

Acts 2:43

43 And awe came upon every soul...

The response of the child of God to the work of God is awe and worship! We, the people of God... the church... we are designed and called out to live for the praise of His glory:

Ephesians 1:11-14

[11] 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, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. [13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (ESV)

Is your church a people who respond in awe and worship of God. Worship matters deeply.

So we see that the church is marked by the headship of Jesus over rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders overseeing true believers who gather regularly to worship God [and preach the word of God](#)

Another mark of the church is **Preaching: the Word of God:**

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..

These people in Acts 2 and people throughout all of history who are saved were saved by the grace of God through the power of God's Word. This is why we are devoted to the apostles teaching... to the preaching of God's word. We are saved through the Word of God.

1 Peter 1:23

[23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; (ESV)

and we are kept sustained and through the power of God's Word:

Matthew 4:4

[4] But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (ESV)

Brothers... devote yourselves to the teaching of God's Word. Do not bring your words to your church or some TV preachers words to your church or the words of some best selling book... in the churches you minister to... bring them the Word of God.

So we see that the church is marked by the headship of Jesus over rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders overseeing true believers who gather regularly to worship God, preach the word of God, [and practice the sacraments of baptism and communion.](#)

Another mark is practicing the sacraments of baptism and communion:

Acts 2:41:

So those who received his word were baptized

Matthew 28:19-20 [19] 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...

The people of God will proclaim to the world through baptism that they have been raised with Christ to newness of life...

Luke 22:19[19] And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (ESV) 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 [23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (ESV)

The children of God will continue to remember the death of Jesus until the day that He returns.

So we see that the church is marked by the headship of Jesus over rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders overseeing true believers who gather regularly to worship God, preach the word of God, and practice the sacraments of baptism and communion [under the exercise of church discipline](#)

The final mark we will look at today is the exercise church discipline:

The Apostle Paul is response to unrepentant sexual immorality in the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 5:3-5 [3] For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. [4] When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord

Jesus, [5] you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (ESV)

Matthew 18:15-17 [15] “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (ESV)

A true church will be a place so filled with love for brother and sister that sin will not be left un-confronted. A true church and in particular biblically qualified and rightly appointed leaders in the church will confront sin with truth and love... and unrepentant sin will never be tolerated in a true church.

TELL STORY OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE – RUSHTON - \$\$\$

Church discipline is essential for the health of the church.

So we see that the church is marked by the headship of Jesus over rightly appointed and biblically qualified leaders overseeing true believers who gather regularly to worship God, preach the word of God, and practice the sacraments of baptism and communion [under the exercise of church discipline](#)

Those are the marks... but what’s the purpose of all this?! What is the purpose of the church?

3. Purpose of The Church (On Mission)

The Primary Purpose is Worship

Psalm 22:27

***[27] All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you. (ESV)***

God will be worshiped by all the families of the nations... you can bank on it

Revelation 7:9-12

[9] After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10] and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” [11] And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12] saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” (ESV)

On that day the primary purpose of the church will be achieved and an eternity of perfectly fulfilling that purpose will begin! ... but that day has not yet arrived! And so the church continues to advance. Think about this... this multitude described in Revelation 7 that is so great that nobody can even count it... some of the people in that multitude will be people that God has saved through the ministry of your churches in the coming days. God is saving for himself a people who will worship Him joyfully for all eternity. And he is using the church to accomplish this purpose!

The primary purpose of the church is that our great God will be worshipped by a multitude of people that nobody can number and the primary way that He is accomplishing this is through discipleship... which is most successfully accomplished through church planting.

The Primary Purpose of the church is Worship

The Primary Means God is using to accomplish His purpose is discipleship

Matthew 28:19-20

[19] 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, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

We are to be about the work of sharing the gospel with both the lost and far from God AND with the children of God that we minister to and equipping them to share the gospel with others. We talk about a desire for healthy churches... and healthy churches are made up of healthy Christians and so we must be investing deeply in the health of the ones we minister to teaching them to observe all the things that God has commanded us...

The Primary Purpose of the church is Worship

The Primary Means God is using to accomplish His purpose is discipleship

The Primary Place is Everyplace

Acts 1:8

[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (ESV)

We are to be making disciples in our immediate context. On our street, in our villages, in our apartment buildings... where we work and eat and play. You are the missionaries to your city and to your town and to the place you live!

We are to be making disciples in the areas surrounding us and we are to be making disciples to the ends of the earth!

The Primary Purpose of the church is Worship

The Primary Means God is using to accomplish His purpose is discipleship

The Primary Place is Everyplace

We've covered a lot of ground today and we could have said so so so much more... but I want to finish here...

Matthew 16:13-18

[13] Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (ESV)

Be assured of this today... we should all continually seek wisdom and work tirelessly to see the churches we lead be healthy and thriving... but when we fail... and we will fail... remember... you are not the one who builds the church. JESUS IS.

And the church that Jesus builds... not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it

That is our confidence. To the end.

LET'S PRAY.