

February 12, 2023

The story of REALITY: FINALE 2-The Church

Does it surprise you that there is a growing hunger and thirst for spirituality in America yet at the same time there is a growing rejection of the church?

Does it surprise you that there is a growing number of people in America today who believe in Jesus but do not believe in the church?

It surprises me in some ways, but I think I get it. It's not hard to find fault in any church.

I don't have to look far to find fault with our church.

All I have to do is look in the mirror. And I'm not talking about seeing a big dark seed stuck between my teeth. I'm talking about looking into the mirror of God's Word and seeing a dark sin stuck between my Soul and Body.

This week I was reading Proverbs, and there it was...as clear as that big dark seed in my teeth. *Proverbs 18:13 (NIV) To answer before listening— that is folly and shame.*

That caught me by surprise, as much as that big seed in my teeth! Did anyone else see that in my teeth? Of course they did, and still do until I do something about it.

I decided to put that particular Proverb in my memorization routine. To let God's word wash over me and help me dislodge my sinful pattern.

All that to say, perhaps we have the wrong idea about what sort of people belong in church? Certainly the Pharisees had the wrong idea who is welcome and who is not welcome. They wanted to know why Jesus hung out with the likes of us.

Mark 2:17 (NIV) On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Many of us received communion today. Jesus met with the likes of us—his broken and beloved people.

Communion has a way of flattening things out, doesn't it? We are all broken and beloved.

A prerequisite to enter into a covenant with Jesus is that we have to be willing to admit we need a savior.

We cannot save ourselves because, well, self is the problem. We cannot achieve what we need spiritually, but we can humble ourselves, and receive it.

When it comes to the church, we can all see faults. Does that mean the church is a failure?

No. I believe in the church. I believe in you. Jesus believes in the church because he knows what he can do in you, and through you, when you trust him!

Here's the point today.

I believe the church is God's finale not His fizzled failure.

Consider this quote:

It is as impossible, unnecessary, and undesirable to be a Christian all by yourself as it is to be a newborn baby all by yourself.

N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian*

Do you believe that?

I. How we become MEMBERS of God's HOUSEHOLD

Ephesians 2:18–19 (NIV) For through him [Jesus] we both [Gentile and Jew, those who were far from God and those who were near] have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

God's HOUSEHOLD is another way of saying God's FAMILY.

God is our Father, believers are brothers and sisters, and we become members of God's household when we are born again.

A christian without a church is an **orphan (spiritually)**.

If this is you, you are not experiencing life as deeply as he offers it to you.

Deep and lasting relationships are formed here. **“DON’T DO LIFE ALONE.”**

It’s not too late to sign up for a group.

II. **Jesus called us “my CHURCH”**

Matthew 16:18 (NIV) ...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

“My church,” he says. We belong to Jesus. He purchased us by his sacrifice for us.

Let’s talk about the SMALL and the LARGE of it!

- The church as a family is experienced in the small of it, in smaller groups. Wherever 2 or 3 or 10 gather in his name, he’s present. That’s the small of it.
- The large of it is built into the word, “CHURCH” itself.

The word translated here “church” here is the word *ekklesia*, which means, *Assembly, congregation*. Jesus does not invent the word. It’s the same word the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament scriptures used to describe the massive assembling of God’s chosen people even as a nation in the great assembly.

Also, the term *ekklesia* comes from the root word *kaleo*, which means **“to call, or summon”**. The church (*ekklesia*) is not the building, it is the people who have been summoned by God to be his gathering congregation. It gathers to worship and be eased and equipped and then scatters to live out the Mission. We huddle to run the play in real life in relationships everywhere.

That’s the big and the small of it.

Jesus transforms us through this Spirit-filled, grace filled, supernaturally empowered community that he is building!

Church is **hugely important. Check this out!!**

Ephesians 3:10–11 (NIV) His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the

heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

WOW!! **Church isn't JUST about us!!!** There is a purpose beyond us that we can't even see. God uses the church as **exhibit A** to prove he was right all along to “*the powers of darkness and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Ephesians 6:12) uses similar words.

We prove God's Wisdom Wins!!

What do you see in church? You tend to see what you are looking for? Looking for the flaws? You will find them. Looking for changed lives? You will find them. Looking to change your life? You need look no further, God is at work here. Plunge in. If you haven't yet, go to the next start here. If you don't have a group yet, it's not too late to sign up.

III. We are MEMBERS of his BODY

Romans 12:5 (NIV) so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

This is a huge topic. For now I just want to connect it to this statement.

John 20:21–22 (NIV) Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

Who are we and what are we here for?

As God sent Jesus in a body to seek and save the lost, Jesus sends us as “his body”, filled with his Spirit, “a chosen people”, a “royal priesthood” to seek and save the lost.

We are spiritual contributors not spiritual consumers. The church does not exist for us; ***we are the church*** and we exist to help others also take steps from wherever they are to where God wants them to be.

IV. We are DEEPLY and DEVOTEDLY LOVED!!

Ephesians 5:25–27 (NIV) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a

radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

The church is HIS BRIDE

- Jesus invited us into Covenant with him, saying in effect, “will you be mine” and when we say yes to Jesus’ proposal, we become his covenant people, his Bride, the church.
- From a Jewish perspective, as the Bride, we are currently in the betrothal period. It’s official already, but not yet fully consummated.
- Jesus said he was going away to prepare a place for us, and He’s coming back for us. This is also a Jewish Betrothal practice.
- ***Meanwhile he is devotedly washing us with his love and his word to present us to himself as a radiant church, [radiant people, the bride of Christ]***
- RADIANCE looks like FAITHFULNESS. It doesn’t start with us. It starts with Him.
- Faithfulness reflects his faithfulness.
- Faithfulness also looks like reconciliation.
 - Let me tell you about 12 magic words in marriage. Simple, but hard to say, when pride gets in the way, and yet very effective!
 - **I was wrong**
 - **I am sorry**
 - **I love you**
 - **Please forgive me.**

These work. But using more words is ok too. Sometimes being more specific helps. Today, I’d like to close with these words as our prayer.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer

SMALL TALK

1. Did you grow up in church? What kind? What did you like about it? What did you not like about it?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ Ephesians 3:1-21** What does this section teach about the church?
 - What was the mystery now revealed in 3:2-6?
 - What mystery about the church is revealed in 3:9-11?
 - What other name is used to describe the church in 3:14-15? Compare this with 2:18-19; which terms used in this passage mean the same thing?
 - From the description in 3:16-21, can you show how the church is not a fizzled failure but God's powerful finale?
3. **READ Ephesians 4:1-7** What does this section teach about the church?

GETTING PERSONAL

4. How hard is it for you to see that Jesus is building in our church his Spirit filled, grace filled, supernaturally empowered community to help each of us love God and help others also to know and love God?
5. When you see deficiencies in "in the church", what steps can you take to see beyond the brokenness, to see Christ working through his church?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

6. How engaged are you in the church? Based on this study, are you missing any of the descriptions or experiences described? If so, what can you do about it?