

# What is Church?

<b>CALL</b>	<b>reminds us we are</b>	<b>CHOSEN</b>
CONFESSION	renews us as God's	REDEEMED
CONSECRATION	grows us as	HOLY DISCIPLES
COMMUNION	unites us as	JOYFUL FAMILY
COMMISSION	sends us as	SERVANT MISSIONARIES

## PART ONE: CHOSEN



## **JESUS IS GOOD NEWS**

The living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, created humanity that we might share in the joy and love of the divine life. But when we became takers not receivers, when in selfishness and pride we turned in on ourselves, and away from the life-giver, the human race was exiled from God. The quest for independence from the Creator is as foolish as sheep trying to find a new life away from their protecting and providing Shepherd. Yet God, in his mercy, did not abandon us. His plan has always been to draw a people back to himself. "I will be your God and you will be my people" is a phrase found throughout the Bible. Starting with Abraham the Lord began to build a people as his own possession, yet the reality of fallen human nature kept asserting itself. Wandering hearts led again and again to exile. Nevertheless, each time of exile was ended with God's loving determination to lead his people home.

Jesus came as both God and Man. He is God to us – revealing the character of God, so that we know the Creator to be a God who can be loved and trusted. He is Man for us – the one perfect human who never wandered away but whose heart was fully devoted to God the Father. Yet in his death he carried the curse of exile. He was cut off from God so that our separation would be overcome. He carried our sins away so that he might carry us back to God. Then in the resurrection we see a perfected and glorified humanity, humanity as it was meant to be, blessed and belonging to God forever.

Baptism speaks of being united to Jesus. By the Holy Spirit we are born again into Christ's humanity and so become the people of God. Through Jesus "I will be your God and you will be my people" is fully accomplished for us. The exile is over. We belong to God. We have been bought for God by the precious blood of Jesus. We are being built into a people who are also a temple of the Holy Spirit. God's Word says to the church: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:10)

## PREPARATION: LUKE CHAPTER 5

As you read the passage, consider these questions:

- What do you learn about the reason Jesus came to us?
- How does following Jesus fit into that plan?
- What difference does Jesus make to the people he encounters?
- If the leprosy and paralysis are pictures of our spiritual condition, what are we being told about our need for Jesus?

## WHO ARE WE: GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

Ephesians 1:1-14

- What are we told about all that God has done to make us his own?
- God's great purpose is to bring all things together under Christ (verse 10). How does Church relate to this purpose?

## WORSHIP AND IDENTITY: CALL TO WORSHIP – God gathers us

We are summoned as Christ's people together so that he might serve us in our gathered worship. God's people – Church – are marked by Baptism, which unites us to Jesus and to his body, the Church.

We gather because:

- We **BELONG** to God our Father
- We have been **BOUGHT** by the blood of God the Son
- We are being **BUILT** into the temple of God the Holy Spirit

## BIBLE MEDITATION AND PRAYER: PSALM 95

Meditating on the Bible is about careful reading and reflection on a Bible passage, chewing it in your mind, then responding with prayer to your heavenly Father.

**First:** read the Psalm a few times. Think about what the Psalm is saying – what it teaches about God, about the LORD Jesus, about the world, about the church.

**Second:** Pray with thanksgiving to God. Praise him. Marvel at what he has revealed, acknowledge the wonder that God has spoken to you in this passage of the Bible.

**Third:** Confess your sins to God. The passage may reveal your sin and failure, or expose the shortcomings of the church (local, denominational, national, etc).

**Fourth:** Make your requests to God. What do you need to ask for? How do you need to change? Perhaps the passage prompts you to pray for other people or churches.

Psalm 95 calls people to praise and worship God. What are we told about the LORD and our relationship with him? If someone's heart is truly open to God, what will be the evidence (according to the Psalm)?

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

*The flow of the Lord's Prayer takes us through the shape of the Worship service.*

**"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."**

- We gather as a people because we pray "our" Father.
- We have been given God's name in baptism and we desire to see that name honoured in our lives and in church.
- We do not gather to indulge our own tastes or to promote our own purposes. We worship because we want to glorify God and see him glorified in the world.

## **TRUTH IN PRACTICE**

There are many implications of the wonderful reality that we are CHOSEN. We are focusing on these three areas (Family, Money, Mission) because these are parts of church life that need strengthening at this time.

### **FAMILY AND CHILDREN**

Church is the people who belong to God. Our belonging is made real and renewed as we gather each week to meet with Jesus by his Spirit. When children are baptised there is an official declaration that they belong to church. They need to be present each week so that, like everyone else, they are helped to trust in Jesus and follow his ways.

Their sense of belonging can be made real in these ways:

- Help children learn the responses and prayers in the liturgy. One major reason for having liturgy is so that children can quickly memorise and repeat what is being said. You can practice at home!
- Encourage them to add a loud 'Amen' every time the word is said.
- Parents are always setting an example to their children. By singing loudly, listening as well as you can, by being positive about attending church, by giving thanks for church family, your children will learn the importance of church.
- Encourage children to listen to the sermon. It is amazing how much children take in. Talk with them after the service about the Bible passage.
- Baptised children should be encouraged to know that Holy Communion is for them, because Jesus gave his life for them at the cross.
- Children need to experience the reality of church being a family – full of spiritual aunts and uncles, grandparents, brothers and sisters.

Church is the people being built into the temple of God the Holy Spirit. Children have their part to play and have gifts to use. With the permission of parents, you might ask children to pray for you – for example, let them see that you're trying to live for Jesus in your workplace, and show them that you need God's help through prayer.

Because children belong to church and belong to God, we must not try to divide them from the body of Christ. Toddlers and young children may need time and space as they grow as worshippers, and people of all ages may find it helpful to have specific groups, but Sunday worship is when all the people of God get together.

## **MONEY**

Money, wealth, possessions, history, connections... none of these can bring us into the family of God. Only the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross for us, can overcome the alienation from God caused by sin.

This means church must be a community where our wealth and possessions do not define us. We love one another equally and treat one another equally, whether rich or poor (James 2:1).

Church is the people who have been bought by Jesus' blood and belong to him. That means everything we are and all that we have belongs to him. Of course, all that we are and have is a gift from God in the first place! The truth is that our money is a gift from God and it belongs to Jesus Christ. When it comes to money, so often our prayer is "Give us this day our daily bread" rather than praying that our money might be used to honour God's name, grow his kingdom and reflect his will.

What is the income of a church? It is the combined income of all church members. God gives us great freedom in how we use our money but he also commands that we give to support our church, look after those in need and make sure the gospel can go out into the world.

## **MISSION**

Church is the salvation of God being made real in human history. It is the community of people reconciled to God and to each other through the cross of Jesus Christ. God is building people into a temple of the Holy Spirit.

This means that, if people are not part of church, they are outside of Christ and outside of God's purposes. As Christians we want to bless everyone, as God does (Matthew 5:45), and at the same time we want those blessings to draw people to Christ and into church.

Inviting people to church (whether to services, or to other occasions when the church gathers together) is a great way of being part of God's mission. We are inviting people to see the life and power of God worked out in practice, in the family of God's chosen people.

## **UNDERSTANDING WORSHIP: LITURGY**

The beginning of the Bible describes God creating the world. Initially the creation is “formless and empty” but then the LORD God forms/structures the world and then fills it with life. He does this by his Word and Spirit.

Here is a pattern. God is at work in his people, forming us and filling us with his life.

Worship has form. Liturgy is the shape and structure of the service. A good liturgy has a shape that comes from the Bible. Liturgy means we can come to worship as we are – chaotic, misshapen, weak and empty – to receive form and filling from God by his Word and Spirit.

Liturgy means we do not have to be feeling right in order to say the right words. Liturgy sets us free from needing to have all the right emotions. If we had to create the structure new each week, or compose fresh words each week, we would end up focusing on our task, on what we need to say and do. A predictable pattern and consistent liturgy is a gift from outside ourselves, much like salvation itself, something to help us give our attention to the God we worship.

A formal, written liturgy that is the same each week is excellent for children. They can easily memorise the Lord’s Prayer, the liturgical responses, the Doxology and more, and so can actively participate in public worship from a young age.

Worship needs filling with life. Good liturgy is packed full of Scriptural words and phrases, filling our minds with truth and placing God’s words on our lips. In fact, liturgy IS a ministry of God’s Word to us.

The Spirit helps us to fill the liturgy with life. We can declare the words boldly rather than mumble them half-heartedly. We add a loud ‘Amen’ to the prayers, thundering our agreement to what was said. We should sing with passion for we are praising the God who loves us and has saved us!

Of course, sometimes you will feel weak and frail, confused or stressed. One way the Lord will strengthen you is by the rest of the church speaking and singing with the strength of the Spirit. In turn, when you put your energy into the words, you will be encouraging and supporting your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Liturgy means we serve the Lord and each other in an organised way. It means God serves us, forming us and filling us with his truth and life. And so we, the Church, the Body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, are being re-created and re-formed each week.