

# (Colossians) the Church's Purpose

by Brian Brodersen

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*Brian Brodersen emphasizes the church's purpose of worship, edification, and testimony, highlighting Christ's supremacy and the church's nomadic nature in fulfilling its mission.*

**Duration:** 50:25

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:14

**Topics:** "Church Purpose", "Spiritual Freedom"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being right with the Lord and being freed from worldly attachments. He encourages the listeners to have a vision of what the church is meant to be and to be a part of it. The preacher highlights the contrast between seeking a city built by man versus seeking a city built by God. He also emphasizes the temporary nature of this world and the need to serve the Lord wholeheartedly and bring others into His kingdom. The sermon challenges the listeners to let go of worldly desires and focus on doing the will of God.

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## Transcript

Once again, looking at verses 14 through 20, picking up in verse 14, Colossians chapter 1, speaking of Jesus Christ, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. Now, Paul is taking an opportunity here to clarify just who Jesus Christ is.

The Colossians were coming under the influence of some heretical teaching about Jesus, some teaching that was undermining His supremacy, His preeminence, His divinity, and so forth. And it was happening in a very subtle manner. They were teaching that Jesus was, of course, important and that He was a representative of God, but they were looking at Him as being one of many emanations from the true God, rather than looking at Him as being the true God.

And this whole idea of several thousand spirit beings descending from Him is an idea that's not found in the Scriptures. It was more of a Greek kind of a way of thinking about the gods. Although they did not deny the fact of one God, they exalted these beings that they referred to as emanations from God, and they considered Jesus to be one of them.

This false teaching became known later as the Gnostic heresy. And so Paul is refuting it by simply declaring the majesty and the glory and the supremacy of Jesus Christ, showing that Jesus Christ is the very God, the true God, the only God, and that this whole idea of Him being an emanation is not at all true, and showing that this whole idea of there being this kind of a divided-up concept of God is an inaccurate one. And so that's what Paul is doing here.

He's basically stating his case very positively for the supremacy of Christ. And he says concerning Christ that He is the image of the invisible God. He is the picture that we have of the invisible God.

He is the one who is supreme over all creation. He is the firstborn. We saw how that word means that He is the one who has supremacy and that He is the creator.

He Himself is the creator, and it was for Him that all things were created, and He is the one who is presently holding everything together. So stating the deity of Christ, really, the divinity of Christ, His majesty and His honor, He is before all things. And now in verse 18, he says, And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

So Paul is putting forth Christ in all of His glory, in all of His splendor, rather than dealing with the false teaching by answering each specific aspect of it. He just presents Christ in all of His glory and all of His majesty, and that solves the whole issue right there. And as we pointed out many times before, in our evangelism, it's important to present Christ because He answers all of the other questions.

He solves all of the other riddles and so forth. And you get into talking with people, you can discuss philosophies, and you can discuss politics, and you can discuss religious theories, and you can go on endlessly discussing those things and get nowhere. Present Jesus Christ in all of His glory and all of His majesty.

Present Him biblically, what the Bible has to say about Him, and He alone is a refutation of everything else, for the Bible presents Him as being God. He is God, and that's why He is so important. That's why He holds that place of preeminence.

But now Paul is taking it down to the church. He's presented Christ as the image of the invisible God. He's presented Him as the creator, the one who is holding everything together.

And now he says, and He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning. So in other words, the same one who has brought the universe into existence is the same one who has brought the church into existence. And He is the head of the church, meaning that He is the source from which the church has been birthed, also meaning that He is the head in the sense of being the authority over the church.

Jesus Christ is the head of the church. There's no man that's the head of the church. It was a sad day in the church's history when a man claimed to be the head of the church.

Whenever you find a man being in the position of authority within the church, you find something that is no longer the church. The church is that body of people who are under the lordship of Jesus Christ. He is the head.

He is the director. He is the one who holds the authority. He is the source from which the church's life has sprung, and He is the one to have continual sovereignty over the church.

Now the church, you remember, is made up of a multitude from every nation, every tribe, every tongue, every people. The church is that vast company of men and women, boys and girls who have been born of the Spirit, that vast company of people worldwide who have submitted themselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ. That is the church.

That is the church collectively. We have the church locally, which is represented in the local assemblies of people gathering together who are there because Jesus is Lord. And then we have the church individually, each one of us as individuals submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The church is not an organization that you can join. It's an organism that you have to be birthed into. We do not have a membership here at Calvary Chapel, and we've had in times past people wanting to become a member.

We want to sign up, and we can understand that because that's where so many churches are. You have a membership, you sign up, and you're part of the church. But we firmly believe that the only valid membership in the church is a membership that comes through being born into the family of God, not signing on the card and, you know, being placed then on the roll.

So this is an organism. The church is an organism. We've got to be born into it, not...we can't be joining it as an organization.

We have to be born into the family. Now you can be born into the family, and then, you know, if the structure of the church is such that there is that organizational aspect to it that allows for membership, I'm not saying that that is something that's horrible or, you know, I'm not putting that down. I'm just simply saying that that is not what it's primarily all about.

And yet, many, many people, unfortunately, are deceived by thinking that because they have a membership at a certain church that everything is, of course, going to be okay in the end. You have to have membership in the of Christ, and you can only have that by submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ by being born of the Holy Spirit. So the church.

What is the church? What is the purpose of the church? Why are we here today? Why are people gathered together around the world? What is the purpose for the existence of the church? Well, there's a threefold purpose in the church's existence, and that's what we want to concentrate on today. The threefold purpose of the church. Purpose number one is that the church is a body of people who worship the living and the true God.

We worship the living and the true God, and so the first purpose of the church is to worship the Lord. God calls out for creation to worship him. Read through the Psalms.

You find over and over the exhortation is given, let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. All of creation is to be singing forth the praises of God, and all of creation does, except the highest created

being, man. Man is the only one of all the created beings in this material universe that refuses to give glory and honor and worship to the Lord.

Man consistently resists that and worships and praises himself instead of God. That's the great sin of man, worshiping himself, worshiping himself above God. The church is a people that God has called out of this world, redeemed them, given them a knowledge of salvation, and now calls them to praise and to worship him.

So Peter tells us that we have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light that we might show forth the praises of him. So we are a people who is set apart to praise and to worship the Lord. That is to be our objective, to praise and to worship the Lord.

And you know, when you think about all that God has done for us, when you think about what's said here concerning Jesus, the fact that he has revealed God to us, the fact that he is God the son and the creator, our very existence we owe to him. We need to think about that. We need to realize that consistently, the very existence that we have we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But going beyond our existence, the redemption that we have, being made the children of God, being taken from this place of separation from God and enmity toward God, we've been reconciled, we've been brought into the family, and now we're children of God. And so when we think of the fact that God is our creator, that we exist because of him, that he is our sustainer, that everything that we have and enjoy comes to us as a blessing from him, and then when we think of all the spiritual blessings that God has bestowed on us through Christ, all of this should provoke in us a constant flow of praise to the Father. You see, that's what the Lord is looking for, a people who will show forth his praises.

So the church is, first of all, a place of praise. The first purpose of the church is to praise and to worship and to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. That's our first purpose.

Our second purpose is to testify to the world concerning Jesus Christ, to testify to the world concerning Jesus Christ. That is the second purpose of the church. Now, the third purpose is for the church to be built up, and you might actually put that as far as, you know, under the...if we're going in a chronological order, you might actually put the third purpose in the second place because without the body being built up, its witness is ineffective.

So let's reverse that. The first purpose is to worship and praise. The second is for the body to edify itself, for the body of Christ to be built up.

And here's what God has done. He has given us each a place within the body. And of course, this term body is analogous of the human body.

That's what he's...that's the illustration that's used so consistently in Scripture, the human body. And the human body is a unit. Our human bodies, they function in unison in order that the body might, you know, be all that it's supposed to be under the direction of the head.

So for the body to build itself up, that means that every member of the body does its part. We each have an active part. And being in touch with the head, being in communion with the head, receiving instructions from him, we do our part, and so the body is built up.

The body is made strong. The body is brought to maturity and to its ultimate place of functioning. So that's the second purpose, really, of the church, that the church might edify itself in love.

And then the third purpose would be to testify to the reality of Christ. You see, God has us in the world for those three things, primarily. To worship and praise him, to build one another up, and to testify to the world of his reality.

That's what the church is all about. That's why we're here on earth, primarily. Now, when you think of this third purpose of the church, to reach out and to touch other people, isn't it interesting that the Lord has most of the church scattered throughout the world? There's a small segment of the church that is not isolated from the world, but to some degree, you know, removed from it and concentrates its gifts on building up the body.

That's the leadership, the pastors, the elders, the spiritual leadership. The primary role of the spiritual leadership of the church is to build up the rest of the body. But the body itself, for the most part, is spread out into the various communities.

So you see, there's a handful of us that are here on a regular basis, and there's a large number of you that come here a couple of times a week to get edified, to get strengthened, to get built up. And then where do you go? You go right back out to where you were before. You go back out into the world.

Why are you out there? You're out there because the Lord has placed you out there. He's put you out there with a purpose, and the purpose is to testify of Him. You see, it's so important that we understand what the purpose of the church is.

The church is not just some additional thing that one adds to life to make life more balanced. But yet so many people think of it in those terms today. Oh, we want to add, you know, religion into our lives because that'll give us a healthy, well-rounded experience in life.

No, the church is really...it is the life. God has called us to a new life. He's called us out of the world.

He's called us to worship and praise Him. He's called us to build one another up, and He's called us to testify to the world of His reality. And everything in our lives as God's people ought to be working toward that end in each of those three areas.

And everything that's detracting from that, everything that's preventing us from doing that needs to be dealt with, needs to be put in its proper place. The church of Jesus Christ is to be nomadic. The church is to be nomadic.

It's not to be stationary. But you see, that's a problem that all of us struggle with to one degree or another. We want to be stationary.

We want security. We want stability. We want permanence.

But that is not what God has called His church to be. He's called His church to be nomadic. He's called His church to be on the move constantly.

Now, remember this and keep this in perspective. Jesus is the Creator of all things, and then He created the church. He created the church to be the instrument through which He would accomplish His work in the world.

That's what the church is. The church is the instrument of God through which He will accomplish His work in the world. He's going to accomplish His purposes through the church.

Now, not all of them. There are certain purposes that He will accomplish on His own. The setting up of the kingdom of God is His work and His work alone.

He will come back to earth, and He will establish God's eternal kingdom. But in the meantime, He is wanting to draw out of all the nations more and more people to become part of His family and to ultimately inherit this kingdom that He will establish. And He's chosen the church to be the instrument through which He has done it.

But here's where the dilemma comes in. The church so often is trying to be stationary. The church so often is looking for security and stability in this world and refusing to be nomadic that it's not fulfilling the work that God has for it.

Jesus said to the apostles, He said, The Spirit will come upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. The Spirit came upon them, and they were witnesses in Jerusalem. And they were witnesses in Jerusalem, and they were witnesses in Jerusalem, and they were witnesses in Jerusalem.

They just got stuck in Jerusalem because it was a great place to be. Jerusalem was the place where all the people of God were. Who wanted to leave Jerusalem? It's a happening place.

But you see, the Lord said, You're going to be witnesses beyond Jerusalem. And yet it seems that they were not really wanting to go. They forgot the nomadic call of the church.

They were settling down in Jerusalem. And so what happened? Well, we read about it in Acts chapter 8. A great persecution arose against the church. And because of the persecution, the believers were scattered abroad, and they went everywhere preaching the gospel, and they went down to Samaria.

That's what Jesus said to do. Go to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. And so then they went to Samaria, and then they went to Caesarea, and then they went to Antioch, and eventually they went out into the farthest uttermost parts of the earth.

But you see, they had to be reminded of that. They had to be stirred up. They had to be provoked and sent out through persecution.

The Lord has called us to be a nomadic people. Remember Abraham. Abraham, the Bible tells us that he dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the promise.

Now, why did Abraham dwell in a tent? Is it because there were no cities at the time, as some people have speculated? No, that's not why. Abraham came from a great city, actually. He came from one of the most advanced cities of ancient civilization.

He came from the city of Ur in Chaldea, modern-day Iraq, over in that region, but a very advanced society. Abraham came from this great city, and there were plenty of other cities that he could have gone to, but he never did. He lived in a tent.

He was nomadic. He went from place to place, and in doing so, he was making a statement. And this was a statement.

He said, I'm looking for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. So he lived as a sojourner. He lived as a pilgrim on the earth.

Abraham did that as an example to us. That's what we're called to do. We're called to be so free from being tied down in this world that we can just get up and go wherever the Lord leads us to go.

But look what we do. We want to settle down. We want security.

We want stability. We want those comforts of life. And there's this great conflict that goes on.

The Lord has purposed that through His church, He's going to touch the world, but His church is stuck. They don't want to go anywhere. They want us to settle down.

Now, I'm not saying that everybody has to get up and go somewhere. What I am saying is we all have to be free enough, if the Lord calls us to do it, to be willing to do it, because that's what the Lord has called the church to be. The Lord has called the church to be freed from the things that bind people to the earth so we can get up and go as He leads.

In the book of Revelation, there's a constant reference to those who dwell on the earth. We're earth dwellers, and it's a contrast with God's people. But what has happened? Many of God's people have wanted to become earth dwellers.

We want to settle down. And we want to live out the American dream. And I think, you know I'm a highly opinionated person.

This is another opinion of mine. I think one of the greatest curses on the church in America is this wanting to live out the American dream, wanting to experience what the Constitution laid out for us, the freedom to pursue liberty and happiness and, you know, all of those kinds of things. Those things are wonderful things.

I'm not putting them down. But those are not the things that God has called us to. Those are the things that God has prepared for us in the millennium.

But you see, the church is to be like an army marching through the earth, marching through the earth and bringing the knowledge of Jesus Christ wherever it goes. That's what the church is to be. But in this particular country, we've got a very distorted view of Christianity and what the church is.

And you hear it all the time. You hear it on the radio. You read it in the Christian publications.

And I think it's seen most clearly in the movement known as the religious right. The religious right has a concept of Christianity that is not biblical. It's not a biblical concept of Christianity.

It is the settle down and, you know, let's dig in and let's, you know, make a wonderful nest for us to enjoy life in here. That's understandable. Those things appeal to me as well as they do to the next person.

But they do not line up with what the scriptures teach. And that's the problem. I was listening to a radio program the other night as I was driving home.

And it was focused on the family. And there was a man who was speaking, a good man. I'm not, this has nothing to do with putting a person down or, you know, he was talking about the values in America and the

fact that, you know, we've fallen on hard times and what we need to do and, you know, getting out there and being active and getting the right people in office and all those things that we all hear about so often.

And he kind of summed it up. He said, you know, when it all comes down to that, I'm just like every other guy that I'm addressing here. He said, you know, I want to just have a nice place to lay my head at night.

I want to be able to enjoy my kids, my family. And, you know, basically what he was saying is I just want to be able to be content and to settle down and to live out the American dream. The American dream of just life, liberty, happiness, all those things.

And that, you know, he was expressing that and people were cheering. And the sad thing is that people think that, yeah, that's Christianity. That's what the message is.

That's what it's all about. That's not it. You don't find that in the New Testament.

As wonderful as those things are, and believe me, those things appeal to me as well as they do to everybody else, I think. I like a nice, safe environment for my kids. I like the thought of going on vacation and just enjoying life.

I mean, all that stuff is wonderful. That's great. But listen, the millennium is a thousand year vacation.

You're not on vacation right now. We're not here to do that right now. That's not what the church is all about.

And we have to break free from that mentality. And remember, the church is nomadic. The church is to be on the move.

The church is an army marching through the earth, not setting up the kingdom as we go, but drawing people out of the world to be part of the kingdom when it comes. That's what we're to be doing. And all of this thrust toward, you know, getting our traditional values back and doing all of those things, I understand from the human point of view why we would want to see that happen.

Because again, just like the next guy, I want to live in peace and prosperity and all that. Who doesn't? But the question is this, is that the call of God for His church? And the answer is no, it's not. You don't find it in the pages of Scripture.

This isn't what Jesus told us to look for or to go out and seek to establish. The church is to be on the move. The church is to be going with the message of Christ.

And my personal opinion is this, because the church has lost its focus and doesn't understand what it is to be doing and has this great desire to settle down. That's why the church has so many problems. We have to break free from this mentality.

Christ is the head of the church and He wants to lead us. You remember what was said about Jesus in the Gospels? Actually, Jesus Himself said it. He said, foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.

The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. And then Jesus said, He said to follow Him. Follow me.

Follow you where, Lord? Wherever I want you to go. Doing whatever I want you to do. But we all struggle with that.

We all battle with that. We want the security. We want to settle down.

We want to be earth dwellers, although we don't want to admit it. But you see, the church has a purpose. The purpose is to worship and glorify God, to edify itself and to get the message of Jesus Christ out into the world.

And I want to challenge you in that area today. And again, I'm not saying pack your bags. You got to leave.

What I am saying, though, is remember that you're not. Are you settled down here? Is this what is this what you're living for? Is this what you're striving for? Are you ready if the Lord says, hey, I want you to change jobs? Oh, but Lord, I've got so many years in here, I'm just ready to retire and then I can go fishing. It says, no, I want you to change jobs.

Oh, but Lord. You see, we have to be open to things like that. I want you to move from this area over to here.

Oh, but Lord, the weather over there, you know, I hate that. But you see what what's happening again? We want to settle down. We want the comforts.

We want the ease. It's it's a it's a curse. It's the American curse of prosperity.

And we, as God's people, have bought into it. Now, when that happened in the early church, persecution came. And the persecution stirred things up and the believers were thrust out of their nest.

Could that be where we're headed? Could that be what's going to happen in this country? It could possibly be. Persecution might come, but it's almost like persecution needs to come because we won't take the initiative on our own. We won't let the Holy Spirit stir us up, get us going.

We know we can't do that now. We don't want to think about that. You know, we're in this comfort zone.

It might take some persecution. It might take some really, you know, riling up of things to get us to realize we're not supposed to settle down here. That's not what we're here for.

I don't know if that's going to happen or not. I hope it doesn't. I hope we can allow the spirit of God to move us without that kind of thing needing to happen.

But maybe we can't. Maybe the church is stuck in this place. It seems to me that it is in many ways.

Jesus is the head. He has a plan. He has a purpose.

We are his people here for his purpose. And his purpose is to get his message to as many people as possible, that they might hear it and that they might be saved. That's why we're here.

Are you a Christian? Is that your understanding as a Christian? Is that your purpose? Is that where you're at? Do you realize that I'm here for for this purpose, this threefold purpose? I'm here to worship God, to build up other believers and to get the gospel out. Do you understand that about yourself? That's what we're doing here. And anything else that we do ought to be incidental.

I mean, we all have to do other things, right? But in each of those other things that we do, we can have these things as the priority. You all have to go off to work. We all have to get up and go do our thing every day.

But again, as I was saying earlier, why are you out there? God has you out there. That's a mission field for you. It's supposed to be.

The Lord has you out there to show forth his praises and to testify to his reality. And you come back here or wherever you go for your edification. We gather together consistently with one another to build each other up so that we might go out again in strength and minister and show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Is that your understanding of the church? If it's not, then I want to tell you, you have a misunderstanding. You know, for some people, the church is a club. You used to belong to one club, and now you belong to another.

And you come just to see your buddies. And for other people, it's a place where they find purpose. You know, they find some kind of meaning to life.

They sense that they're needed over there. So they're coming to meet their own need to be needed. For other people, it's just a social thing.

For other people, it's something that, again, they add as, you know, just some additional thing to balance their life out. They want a well-rounded, a well-balanced life. So church is going to be part of it, too, and balance it all out.

All of those ideas are contrary to the biblical understanding of the church. The church, being part of the church, being part of the body of Christ, it means being vitally connected to the head, being under his authority, submitted to his instruction, allowing him to lead and guide your life, and just basically understanding that the reason you're here is because he made you and he redeemed you for his purposes and not for your own. Peter tells us that we spend enough of our past lifetime doing the will of the Gentiles, doing our own will, doing our own thing.

That's what we did before we were Christians. Have we come out of that? Are we living to do his will now? That's what the church is to be, a community of people living for the will of God, to praise him, to build one another up, and to get his message out into this world. That's the church, the church over whom he is the head.

He is the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him all the fullness should dwell. Paul is just, you know, putting forth Christ as Christ is the ultimate.

Now, for some people, they say, now, you know, this is sounding fanatical. What about my hobbies and what about my leisure and what about my career and what about all those other things? Hey, listen to what the Bible says. Christ is the ultimate.

He's the preeminent one. In him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. You now answer the question, what about all those other things? They're meaningless.

Who cares about them? I'm not saying that you can't do them, but what is the place they hold in your life? Are they so important to you that you're going to take away from that which belongs to Christ to fulfill your desire toward those things? As Christian people, we have got to understand Christ is preeminent. The whole universe is winding down to him. What are we doing with our lives? We're part of this thing we call the church.

What does that mean? Are we actually part of it? Are we truly fulfilling what it was created to be? Jesus is the beginning of the church. He began this church for what purpose? As a community of people that would testify to him. He said to the apostles, as the father has sent me, so I send you out into the world.

And that same word that he gave to them is passed on to each and every one of us. As the father sent him, so he's sending us. He's sending us out to do his work.

And we all have a different task to perform. We all have a different purpose in one sense. There are people that I'm going to reach that you're not going to reach.

And there's people that you can reach that I'll never reach. There's people that you can testify to that I'll never get an opportunity to do. And vice versa.

You see, it's this body all working together, each person doing its part, and God getting his work accomplished. You know, when I think about the whole missionary call, really, the Great Commission, you know, as you well know, I'm more and more compelled in that area. But you know, I often, I just sit and I think about things like, you know, all that we have and all that others don't have.

And I wonder quite often, what are we doing? Why are we hoarding this to ourselves? And why aren't we getting it out? Why don't we have a greater missionary vision? It's because we don't see things biblically. We're trapped by the world that we live in. Why is it that we give so little of our financial resources to getting the gospel out, and so much of it goes in our pocket to feed our own lust? I mean, that's the truth, isn't it? I'll be blunt and honest here this morning.

That's the way it is. We give a little bit here and there. Oh yeah, those missionaries, we got to make sure they've got a buck or two.

But we hold on to the majority of what we got for ourselves. Oh, I can't give too much because I've got to do this, and I've got to do that, and I'm not going to be able to go on vacation here. And where are we at? It just shows you that we're not understanding the purpose of the church, and our part in it, and what we're here in the world to do.

We have been deceived by the world to think that we're here to have a good time. We're here to enjoy life. We're here to just basically be as content as we possibly can.

And sure, we want to do a few good things. We want to affect a few people here and there, and help a homeless person out, or go down to the church and volunteer some time. I'm afraid that's the thinking of much of American Christianity.

God is calling us to something else. And I've said it a million times, and I'll say it again. We cannot for one moment expect any change until we're willing to change.

We cannot expect the world to lay hold of Christ if we, his people, are not willing to lay hold of him entirely. How is it possible that we could expect the world to be any different? And you see, that's the curse when it comes to the religious right and the whole, this American traditional Christianity. That's where the curse lies.

The church itself wants to have its cake and eat it too, basically. We want to live out what the forefathers had planned for this country. We want to live in this utopia.

We want to live in this capitalistic society, free enterprise, and all of this kind of stuff. We want to do that. So what? So we can enjoy life.

But remember the words of Jesus, he that hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. Oh, that's a hard word, isn't it? But it was said by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. What does that mean? That means that we leave those things behind.

Those aren't the things that are important. We can't expect any change to come. And I'll tell you right now, Bob Dole can get into office, the Republicans can rule this country, and nothing's going to change.

Nothing's going to change at all until God's people, the church, become who and what we are supposed to be. And then things will change. Things might not get any better.

We might never get back to being able to live out the American dream. It might be just the opposite. It might be persecution and suffering and all those kinds of things.

And why not? They've happened historically. When you study the history of the church, most of the Christians throughout history have suffered for their faith. And we've been living in this interesting period of time where there's been little to no suffering for the faith.

And it's quite possible. I'm not saying it's going to happen, but I think you've got to be a fool to think that it couldn't happen, that there could be a great persecution against the church. Well, what would that mean? What would that mean for us? Where would we go? What would we do? Are we ready if those kinds of things happen? The only way we can be ready for them is to be right with the Lord right now, to be freed from all of this stuff, to be released from it, to not be bound.

We need a vision of what the church is to be, and I hope that today you've gotten a little bit of a better perspective on what it is. This is the church. Do you belong? Are you part of it? Are you a member of Christ's body? If you are, are you trying to attach yourself to the world? Are you looking for a city whose builder and maker is man? Or are you looking for a city whose builder and maker is God? You realize that this world is going down, and there's only one thing to do, and that's serve the Lord with all your heart and draw as many people as possible into His kingdom.

And as I said earlier, the vacation is coming. We're all working hard toward that great vacation that the Lord has planned called the millennium, a thousand years of joy and feasting. And oh man, talk about a vacation.

We haven't known anything. You know, how many of you have gone on a vacation and got home and said, that wasn't what I was hoping it would be? You know, our best vacation, sometimes we come back disappointed, or we're just frustrated because it was so short. The Lord Jesus has a thousand-year vacation coming up for His people.

That's what the millennium is. It's a time of just rejoicing and feasting and glorying in the victory of Christ, and our work is done, and now we rest. But we don't rest today.

The church is an army marching through the world. Are you part of that army? That's why Paul could say to Timothy things like, no man who goes to war entangles himself in the affairs of this life. No man who goes to war.

What is he talking about? Timothy, you're in a war. This is a battle. Don't entangle yourself in civilian affairs, but rather live to please the one who called you to be a soldier.

That's his admonition to Timothy. And that admonition comes down to us today. Endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

And he talked about the athlete who did not obtain the prize unless he competed according to the rules. The prize is coming in the future, but there's certain rules that we've got to live by now. He talked about the farmer who would eventually partake of the crop, but before he could partake of the crop, there was labor involved.

And in each of those things, Paul was illustrating what the Christian life is all about. It's like being a soldier. It's like being an athlete.

It's like being a farmer. There is labor, there's intensity, there's warfare, there's difficulty, but there's a victory at the end. There's a reward at the end.

There's an enjoyment at the end. We're trying to enjoy the victory before we've won the battle. We're trying to enjoy the reward before the race is over.

We're trying to eat the fruit before we've got the crop planted. See, that's what's happened to the church. We need help.

And you know, I'm a human being like all of you. And I'll tell you, I can get stirred up and determined, convicted, and committed, and yes, that's right, and I'm gonna. And three days later, I'm right back where I was before.

But you know what I've discovered? Every single day, I have to determine, I have to commit, I have to submit myself to following Jesus that day, every day. Because I know if I'm trying to live off Sunday morning's excitement, I'm not gonna make it through the week. It'll wear off.

It's just human nature. We just gravitate toward the flesh. We gravitate toward the things that are pleasing to us.

And so Paul said, I die daily, and we're beginning to understand why he said things like that. Every day, we've got to determine this is what I'm gonna do. And that's what I want to exhort you with today.

Maybe you're getting stirred up, maybe some of you are fed up, and you're saying, I'm not coming back here. Because I want to have fun, and I want to live, and I want to be on vacation. Well, you can do that.

You have the right. You are a free moral agent, and you can do that if you want to. But know this, when the judgment comes down, you'll have no place in what's gonna remain.

But if you're stirred up and you're saying, yes, I want to change, don't just go out of here with that. Go out of here with the determination that, Lord, yes, every day, God, deal with me. Begin to ask the Lord about your life.

What are you doing? What are you involved in? What do you have? All these things. Lord, what about these things? You know, I gotta make a confession here. You know, with the prospect of us possibly moving and so forth, I was cleaning up the house yesterday, and I cannot believe how much junk we have in our house.

I mean, absolute junk. You know, you're walking around with junk, looking for a place to put it. Now, I want to put it in the trash can.

That's where I want to put it, but my wife has a hard time with that. She's getting much better. But I just want to put it all in the trash can.

But I just think, where did we get all this stuff, and why do we have it, and what does it mean? But you know, it's just like you just accumulate stuff, and you obviously don't need it because you haven't seen it for two years, and now you find it and you go, oh, wow, I better put this away. You know, I found a couple things under the couch yesterday, and I looked at them for a minute. I thought, man, there that is.

And then I'm throwing this in the trash. It's been in the couch for a year. I haven't missed it.

Why bother to put it away? But you know, this is what happens to us. We just, you know, we're earth dwellers. We're here.

Oh, yeah, our citizenship is in heaven. We know all that theoretically, but we don't live that way. We just accumulate stuff, and we got more stuff, and oh, my goodness.

God, help us. So when it comes time for the Lord to say, hey, I want you to do this or change here and go there and that, oh, but Lord, what about all this stuff? We're weighed down. We're earthbound.

We are the church, the church, this majestic thing, this glorious community. At the head of the church is Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe, the God of all creation. He's at the head of the church, and he's saying, come on, let's go through the earth.

I want to take my message. And there we are with our tent stake driven so deep in the ground we can't even pull the thing up. It's a sad picture, and it needs to change, and it needs to change with us.

It has to start with us right here today, a determination on our part to follow the Lord, to follow him completely, and to be done with this world, to let it go. Because it's vanishing, it's perishing. Soon it's going to be gone, and only those who do the will of God, they're the only ones that will go beyond it into the kingdom of God.

Let's pray.

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