

(Presenting Christ #1) the Need for Fullness

by Dana Congdon

Dana Congdon explores the theme of fullness in Christ, emphasizing the gathering of believers under His lordship and the significance of spiritual blessings.

Duration: 1:06:31

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-5, Ephesians 1:7, Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 1:11, Ephesians 1:13

Topics: "Fullness Of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being gathered by God and understanding His purpose. They express a desire for the church to be recovered and actively involved in gathering others. The speaker shares their experience of preaching the gospel in Russia and witnessing the work of God there. They also mention the significance of technology, such as the internet and the Jesus movie, in spreading the message of Christ. The speaker encourages believers to recognize the responsibility they have been given and to see Christ in His fullness and the work of the cross.

Transcript

Good evening, brothers and sisters. It's a wonderful blessing to be here and to share together with you in this family conference. I've received so much help myself here at this conference over the years, and feel it's a privilege to be able to share as well, even this year.

And as you see tonight, we've changed things around, we're hitting the ground running here. Usually you have an evening to sort of snooze and catch up from the day. I know my wife and I, we drove down here, took seven hours, and we relaxed along the way as best we could.

So I'm wearing my wake-up shirt. Actually, Polo makes this, as you can see. It's a Lance Lambert line.

It's a special wake-up shirt. And Lance has one on tonight as well, as you can see. His is in green.

And actually, Lance will be sharing most of the evenings during the week, but they decided not to go with him tonight because, you know, with the unstable weather in the past, we've had electric outages, we've had the tremendous thunderstorms, just when Lance gets up to speak. And perhaps even earthquakes. So they've asked me to sort of more gently begin the whole process.

Let's turn to the scripture in which we find these words regarding the summing up of all things in Christ. And of course, we know that's in Ephesians chapter 1. And let's read the first fourteen verses together, as

actually, grammatically, they're all together in one great sentence. Ephesians chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on 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 on us.

In all wisdom and insight he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his kind intention, which he purposed in him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined, according to his purpose, who works all things after the counsel of his will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of his glory.

Let's just have a word of prayer. Our Father, we gather together tonight in the name of your precious Son and of our Lord Jesus. We thank you for all the events of our history that have gathered us to this moment and realize that your ongoing purpose has called for this meeting together.

And so we lift our hearts to you, O Lord, perhaps even in tiredness, in minds that are tired as well, and ask that by your Spirit you would quicken our mortal bodies and give us a hunger for Christ that would overcome our physical fatigue and that you would give us to recount together the fullness and the summing up that is found in him. Lord, we ask for the help of the Holy Spirit, without which all we can do is share words tonight. But you can move us beyond words into a realm of reality by your Spirit, into the very presence of our Lord.

We thank you for his presence here tonight. We pray in everybody's life it would be known as we're together in this place. We just thank you for this time.

We set it apart for your purposes. In the precious name of our Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.

Now tonight I realize it's the first of the messages and people have been coming, traveling, perhaps some of you. So we won't take a full time, I hope. I hope to be a little more brief.

I actually have some audiovisuals to perhaps help the drooping eyes and this shirt. I'm hoping it will be useful. Anything we can.

Because we come into something that's described as a mystery revealed. Something having to do with the fullness of time. A summing up of all things of Christ, both of things in heaven and things on earth.

Paul is speaking from a mature heart. He's speaking from a great spiritual experience. As most of you know when he wrote this letter to the Ephesians he was at the mature age of having had several years of preparation and then a number of years of ministry and now in jail, in prison, the bondservant of the Lord.

And I'm sure without him realizing it, he was in the process of fulfilling his most fruitful time of ministry. Now I have no doubt that even though he was in prison, his prayers and his wrestling for the Ephesians and the Colossians and the Corinthians and the others was affecting greatly the life of the Lord in the midst of those dear saints. He carried these saints on his heart.

He prayed for them often. And there as he languished in jail, I'm not sure how much he realized the value of those letters he was writing. But they have become our treasure and a way for us to come to know something of Christ and all of his size and wonder and fullness.

How magnificent a Christ Paul was apprehending. Talking about the fullness of Christ. What I don't know if you're aware of this, but until he wrote these two sister letters, Ephesians and Colossians, he hadn't used this word fullness before.

It's possible and I believe true because it's true with all of us as Christians that as we go on with the Lord and grow in the Lord, we grow in our understanding of his greatness. And Paul was in this mature time in his life finding spiritual words to interpret spiritual intuition that he's had for a long time. I don't know when he first began to use this word fullness, nor do I know when he began to use this term summing up of all things in Christ.

But here is the first time we have it on record. And as you know as well, he mentions fullness in the book of Colossians. But even though he's just using these words now, late in his ministry if you want to say that, the wonderful thing about the reality in Christ is from the very first Paul experienced the fullness of Christ.

And from the very first, from the very moment on the road to Damascus that he met the Lord, he saw in a flash something that now for the rest of his life he was finding words to express. Those matters of fullness. Why he saw that there in that blazing light on the road.

He saw something of the dimensions of Christ. Can you imagine the Shekinah glory of heaven hitting you there on the road? I mean he had just a sense in his spirit of the immense person he was dealing with, this divine person. And then of course when he heard his name was Jesus, well Jesus exploded from that human being he was persecuting into this tremendous Lord who was speaking with a voice from heaven.

I mean just the largeness of it you could just imagine. And even from that moment of his arrest on the road to Damascus, he himself was already in the process of being gathered up into Christ, summed up into Christ. I often tell the young people that from the moment you get saved, the Lord puts a big funnel over your head.

Now that big funnel comes down and you think you have a lot of room to move. I can move to the left, I can move to the right, I can go here, I can go there. But as you move up in Christ it gets narrower that way, it gets narrower that way and you find yourself being drawn up under the Lordship of Christ.

You see this is in part what this word summing up means. This is the second time Paul uses this word, summing up all things in Christ. Let's look at the first time just so you can see another context.

It's in Romans chapter 13 where he uses this word and you see it in verse 9 and it makes sense as soon as you hear this. He's speaking about the law and he says in Romans 13 9, for this you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up, that's the word, the same Greek word. It is summed up in this saying, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Well now there it's used in a very simple way. He's saying that all those commandments given in those ten commandments could be summed up with this one word, love your neighbor as yourself. But we know from the Greek that this word summing up actually means heading up.

And so some translations actually put it that way. The heading up of all things in Christ. And immediately that gives you some sense of the intent of Paul because as you see as he carries on with this idea of headship at the end of chapter 1 and speaks about Christ being head of his church, you see this implied.

And also in Ephesians 4 when he talks about the church coming to maturity, growing up in all things into the head. This is this very same process that we have used here in the term summing up. There's a tremendous process going on.

And yet you know, here's the just amazing thing. A believer can be a Christian only six months and yet be very much a partaker of this gathering process. It's a matter of your heart.

It's a matter of your will. It's a matter of your yieldedness. And you know, even though a brand new Christian, just not very far along, but yet fully partaking to the degree that you're able of fullness.

So we have a strange paradox, isn't it, in the Christian life. We have some old Christians who have been Christians for a long time like me who may not be full at all, nor really be in the gathering process. And then you find some brand new Christians just hardly still wet behind the ears.

They've just been baptized and they're just growing. But you know what? They're in the gathering process. Then you can see the Lord kind of drawing them.

And you can see them experiencing the fullness to the degree that they're able to understand. So you see, these are very dynamic things. Although Paul is using these phrases to express something he is seeing at the most mature time in his Christian experience.

He's finally found the words. Ah, I can almost see him in that jail saying, ah, that's the word. That's how I describe what God is doing.

It's a summing up of all things in Christ. Ah, I got the word. You see, Paul had to find those words.

Have you ever had an experience with the Lord that you just couldn't quite explain for a while? But he gives you the words with time. He gives you the understanding. And yet, right from the very beginning of Paul's life, there was a fullness in Paul.

I don't have to argue the case. I know you would agree that right from the moment Paul was captured and made a bond slave of Jesus, he was full of them. He was full of himself, too, you know, at the beginning.

But he was full of the Lord. Oh, he gossiped the gospel and preached and witnessed everybody and got in trouble everywhere he went. He was experiencing a fullness.

And we want to look at that a little bit in these days, what that means. And also, there he was feeling like he was far behind his brethren because of his late capture. And yet, we can see the Lord funneling him up under his headship, giving him to understand things which eyes have never seen and ears have never heard, had never entered into the heart of man.

And yet, the Spirit was revealing them to Paul. And Paul was in a process of being gathered. I hope you can see that simple picture of being gathered.

Body, soul, and spirit gathered under the Lord. Now, you see that this gathering has many dimensions to it. So I'm just going to try to present a gathering Christ tonight, really.

And then our brother Stephen is going to share on the need for this recovery. Because, you know, that which is of fullness and that which is being gathered can lose its way. Saints lose their way.

They get distracted with things. Assemblies get distracted with things. We'll look at an example in the most simple way tonight in this introduction.

But we can get distracted from fullness, though we think we're experiencing fullness. And we can find ourselves resisting being gathered up, even though we're living busy lives as Christians. So we need to understand a little bit of this.

But Paul, for certain, was experiencing this fullness. And he was experiencing this summing up process, which he says that in the fullness of times, and now that's where our brother Lance will be sharing. Because this verse is talking about something that will happen in the fullness of times when all things are summed up under Christ.

You know, since the cross, the cross was the great moment when the electromagnet was turned on and everything is now being sucked up under the headship of Christ. That's another example I use with young people. I tell them, you know, you've been magnetized.

You're an iron filing. And he goes, and you're being drawn. You're being irresistibly drawn.

And in the end, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Things in heaven, things on earth, things under the earth. There is going to be a heading up that is complete in the fullness of times.

But isn't it wonderful? And I just ask you at the start, are you part of that gathering process going on? Do you feel yourself being gathered into something? You know, as you go up in that funnel, you also get squeezed together with other brothers and sisters. Now, of course, you and I will have to look at this some more too as we go along. But this matter of fullness does not have to do with me being filled up.

Thank you, preacher, very much. You filled up my gas tank. And I go on my way a full Christian.

Well, you can't have corporate fullness without individual fullness. But this fullness that is talked about here in Ephesians is a corporate fullness. There's something that has to happen, not just with you, but with you and I together.

That is a fullness that the Lord is looking for. And again, isn't that amazing? People can gather together in a new way and be assembled together, just 11 people and sense fullness. And yet, on the other hand, you can have 2,000 people and the church not be full at all of his presence and of all that this fullness means.

So you see, we're dealing with two very dynamic words here, fullness and the summing up. And it should lead us to ask ourselves, are we being gathered by the Lord? Now you see, part of this things being summed up is this whole process of being gathered up. You remember how the Lord said that I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me.

Now we know from the record, we'll look at this the next time I share, Lord willing, from the very beginning of time, God's been gathering together a people, gathering together history, gathering together a revelation of himself, gathering people into this revelation, gathering people into covenants with himself, gathering up judgments. He's been gathering and gathering. But at the cross, this gathering was intensified.

The electromagnet was turned on and there was a gathering not only of Jews, but there was a gathering of Gentiles as well. The far reaching range of this drawing and gathering could be seen to the ends of the earth by the gospel. This gathering is going on today, but it's a spiritual gathering as well.

And when we look at this first sentence, and mind you that which we read there, those are just one sentence, and just about the longest sentence in the whole Bible. I don't think there's a longer sentence. You know, Paul just couldn't stop.

And in Greek he didn't have commas, so he just went on and on and on and on and on because he was expressing a full thought with Christ at the very center of the thought. Now can't you almost feel yourself getting drawn by the Lord Jesus as you see these wonderful aspects, these wonderful dimensions of the Christian life that are mentioned in passing in these verses. But the point is that we're to be drawn to Christ.

Now, the thing that I think probably we don't see at first, but we need to see, is that when we're talking about things being gathered unto Christ, the first and most simple vision that I see of it is this, that Christ is the stackpole around which everything is collected. Now, a stackpole, what is a stackpole? Well, I wish I could say, well being a farmer, but I'm not a farmer, but a stackpole was used in the old days of farming because here's what they did. Before they had combines that could make a bale of hay and tie it up and throw it out, people used to have to go and make bales of hay.

Well, now how do you do it? Well, now if you cut down the hay in the field, you know, with a nice size like this and you cut it all down, now it's just laying out in the field. Now, how are you going to gather it up? I know, let's make a pile. So you take pitchforks and you start making a pile.

Now you can throw it over here and you throw it over here, but you never make a pile. It just spreads out bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. It never piles up.

And then one day, perhaps somebody by accident, I don't know, but I suppose necessity was the mother of invention, somebody came up with it. Or maybe somebody by mistake started throwing hay up against a pitchfork that was already stabbed in the ground. But they said, hey, looky here.

Why, when you throw hay up against that pole, it starts to stack up. So they started throwing the hay up on the pole and the thing would stack up like this. They'd get a whole bunch and they'd tie it up and they'd take the pole out of the middle.

But you see, without that pole, it never stacks. It just lays flat and it's kind of horizontal. It's hard to make a bale like that.

And Christ is the stack pole of our whole Christian life. Now with that in mind, let's go back into this Ephesians chapter one and I'll try to explain what I mean. Our temptation sometimes is to make the aspects of our Christian life the stack pole instead of Christ as the stack pole around which everything coheres.

So let's just see as an example. Well, now in verse three, we've got blessings. Oh, blessings.

I'm so thankful for blessings. We should make a stack pole of blessings, don't you think? This is the church of the stack pole of blessings. If you come here, you're going to be blessed.

It's all blessings in Christ. Now you have to throw the blessings up against the stack pole if they're going to be all together in your life, you see. Or in verse four, you've been elected.

You've been chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Now talk about being gathered. You were gathered before you were stuffed.

Think about that. Now here's a God who chose you before you were born. Now maybe we should stand right here for a while and think about this whole matter of our election and predestination and all, but no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

We're chosen to be before him. Ah, you see, that's when election really makes all the sense in the world, you see. Oh, but verse five, we've been predestined to the adoption of sons.

Oh, it's sonship. That's what we need to talk about. Sonship.

Let's stack it up around sonship. That's where we're going. We're going for the sonship thing.

No, no, no, no, no, no. It's not sonship. It's sonship together with him.

Or how about, oh, there's so many things here. In verse seven, our redemption. Now, brothers and sisters, you know, back many centuries ago, when I was a young minister, I worked as a pastor in a church, and this was our stackpole, the redemption stackpole.

Well, it was. We preached the gospel, and people got saved, and we didn't know what to do with them except throw them up against the redemption pole and talk about the redemption. It's a wonderful thing, isn't it? Our redemption is wonderful.

But you see, it's only if we stay with any one of these aspects, we don't come to fullness. Because what Paul is seeing in the middle of this whole thing is Christ. It's a redemption through Christ.

It's our sonship with Christ. It's our being chosen in him. It's everything.

It's Christ that's the center, you see. And all of these things become marvelous in the light of that. Or how about this there in verse nine, making known to us the mystery of his will.

Oh, maybe you like a good mystery. And maybe you like this mysterious wisdom and the thoughts of revelation and all of these marvelous things talked about in verse nine. And even this matter of the summing up, it's all a marvelous revelation.

Let's study more revelation. Let's get revelation. Let's sit around in a room until we receive revelation.

But you see, if you get too revelation conscious and not Christ conscious, you're going to get a crazy revelation eventually. Oh, and verse 11, we've obtained an inheritance. Now, we should definitely talk about that.

Or how about in verse 13, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit. Oh no, there's a stack pole. But no, no, no, no.

You see, all of these things take on their proportion. These things all thrown against Christ, as it were. This is what it talks about, the summing up of Christ.

Look at all these dimensions. Look how all these things point to Christ. All these things reveal the kind intention of our God's purpose and will for us.

So when we come to look at fullness and when we come to look at summing up, we need to see Christ in his fullness and what he's doing with the cross. Now, the Lord is gathering in these days. He's gathered us together for this time.

He's doing a great work of gathering in these days. Are you aware of it? I cheat. I have to confess, I cheat because, actually not of my own will almost, but I got talked into going to Russia a couple of years ago.

And ever since then, I've been cheating. It's because I get to go to Russia and see some amazing things. And then I come back like a spy and report on them.

Our God is doing a great work of gathering. And actually, what I would like to do tonight, in a very simple way, just taking Christ as this matter of the Spirit being sent out now. You know, the Spirit is out in the highways and the hedges and is compelling people to come in.

The Spirit right now is gathering people unto Christ in an amazing proportion, perhaps more than you realize. And I want to share with you a little bit of good news tonight, if I could. Now, I went to some very stodgy technical books to discover this good news, but it's about our God, the Lord of the Harvest.

He is gathering in a mighty, mighty way. We should glorify our God. He has never stopped sending out faithful servants of the gospel and gathering people to Himself.

There's a great work going on. So, I want to share some of this good news with you tonight. Now, you know, do you know what evangelicals at the theological level are talking about today? I'm talking about at their schools.

Now, I'm talking about Gordon Conwell's seminary up in Boston, the Dallas Theological Seminary, or the wonderful seminary there outside Chicago. What are the evangelicals talking about at Fuller Seminary these days? Surprisingly, not the megachurch, which has caught the fancy of a lot of pastors, of course, but it's not the megachurch. Nor are they talking about the role of women in ministry and these kinds of things.

There is a buzz about one thing, what God is doing in this gathering process. Now, I want to show you this. So, now we're ready for, I just have a few overheads.

As I said, I'll try to keep you occupied with audio visuals here just for a second. Now, just so you, when I give you the statistics and things, just so you don't think I just made them up or went to some sort of a Christian comic book, I just want to give you the sources. Now, can you, okay, so I made this too big, okay.

I used two major sources to gather the information, and actually the first one there, which is called the World Christian Encyclopedia, it's a \$350 book that you can get. It's this thick. It's a very technical, expertly

done collation of figures, facts, and statistics of global evangelism around the world.

It has not only Christian statistics, but the statistics of other world religions and how fast they're growing, people, groups, countries. It's an amazing, amazing book. And by the way, being used by missiologists all over the country today as a basis for understanding what's going on.

It's thrown everybody into confusion. When this book came out in 2001, it threw people off. And then also the International Bulletin of Missionary Research comes out of Gordon Conwell Seminary, where they have a special division called something like the Resources for Global Evangelism in the World, evangelization, global evangelization, something like that in Gordon Conwell.

And so I got statistics from these things. Now, I hope this encourages you or perhaps even amazes you, but something's been going on from 1970 to 2000. The Lord of the Harvest mega-gathering from 1970 to 2000.

Now, most of you have been alive since 1970, right? Now, we got junior high kids. No, you weren't. But many of you have been around for that long.

Do you know what's been going on while you've been sleeping in Sleepy Hollow? Well, let's just take a look. Okay, let's get to the first chart. And you might have to move it around just a little bit, because in order to see everything, I think, okay, you can almost see that.

Now, here's some statistics, just so you get an idea of what's going on today. The world population has grown from 1970 to 2000 from 3.6 to 6 billion people, or 64% in 30 years, or 2% per annum. Okay? This is the growth rate of the world population.

The world population. Okay. Catholics and Orthodox have grown from 804 million to 1.26 billion, or they've grown 56%.

They haven't kept up with the birth rate. That's not good. Usually, in evangelism, you count your own kids.

The Protestants and Anglicans together have grown from some 258 million to 422 million, or 63%, just about at the birth rate. Okay? The Evangelicals and Independents have grown from 1970 to 2000 from 98 million to 225 million, a 130% increase, or 4% per annum. The Pentecostals and Charismatics have grown from 72 million to 527 million, or 631% in those 30 years, or 21% per annum.

Now, what the missiologists have done, feeling it's unfair, because it's hard to categorize somebody, I say, are they an Evangelical, a Charismatic, a Neo-Charismatic, which is only the phrase, or the old-line Pentecostals? Because a lot of the old Pentecostals are actually out of the big growth curve. But the Neo-Pentecostals, the Neo-Charismatics, and the Charis--well, anyway, it's a long story. So they've come up with a catchphrase term, Great Commission Christians, meaning people who take seriously this matter of going out with the gospel and gathering people in with the gospel of salvation.

And that includes the Evangelicals and Independents and the Pentecostal Charismatics. Okay? That's all that bottom one is. It's the addition of the top two just above it.

Okay? You understand what I'm saying? Okay. We've got 170 million in 1970 to 752 million in the year 2000 for a 342% increase, or 11% per annum. The world is becoming more and more Christian, percentage-wise, because of this global mega-gathering by our faithful God.

Now, that's an amazing thing. Okay, now let's look at some other interesting statistics that also come out in this study. I'll just throw them out to you so you can see.

And all we're trying to see is the dimensions of what God is doing that have been tabulated, and the half has not been told. In 1970, Western Evangelicals outnumbered non-Westerns two to one. In the year 2000, non-Westerns outnumber the Western Evangelicals four to one.

When they have an Evangelical convention, as they had in Lausanne to discuss global evangelism, it was filled with people from India, Asia, Africa, South America. The bishops of the denominations are from Africa and other places, because that's where God is doing an amazing, amazing thing. Another fact, since 2000, more missionaries are now being sent out from non-Western nations than Western nations.

Did you know that? Now, Western nations spend the most by 20 times for missions work, and their results don't touch what the mission work going out from other countries is doing. But that's why they're so concerned. That's why missiologists are concerned by all these statistics.

6,000 Christians will be added to the kingdom of God by the time I finish this message. Pentecost, 3,000 people were saved. 3,000 are saved every half hour right now in this world.

There is a harvest going on of mega proportions. The five nations with the highest per capita growth by counting baptisms, Bhutan, Mali, Mongolia, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia. Now, this does not mean these are the fastest growing, nor does it mean these are the ones that have the most baptisms, but this is more an indication of where the present harvest is beginning to be seen.

You understand? If you have a per capita of 26 Saudi Arabians, and 12 get baptized, you've just, per capita, you've had an amazing thing. But this is a statistic which is making them wonder and in amazement what God's doing even in Muslim countries. More evangelicals now attend church in Latin America than Catholics.

Now, can you believe that? I mean, we're talking Mexico and South America. Of course, the population of Catholics, combined with the population of evangelical, of Great Commission Christians, is more than the population of the countries. Now, that's because Catholics don't take you off the roll.

But on any given Sunday throughout Latin America, there's been such a defection and such a moving, and so many people saved, that the evangelicals more attend than the Catholics. And last year, 171,000 Christians were martyred. It started in the 1970s when 340,000 were martyred.

And we know that's all about China, it's all about Nepal, it's all about some places. Now it's just down to 171,000 Christians a year being martyred for their faith, being martyred for their faith. Then the last little page has to do with how these evangelical seminaries and everything are trying to interpret what's going on in these days.

This mega-gathering is just throwing everybody off. We don't know what to do, what's going on. So here's just some things that they're noticing.

The most rapid growth segment is in non-established churches. That's throwing them off. That means these are unaffiliated indigenous assemblies with non-professional ministries meeting in houses or rented buildings.

This is what the evangelical missiologists have found out by counting beans. This is not a wacko study. They're saying, wait a minute, we're pouring all this money into missions.

And what God has done in the last 30 years is raise up a rapidly growing gathering of people that aren't aligned with any denomination. We don't get it. What are we doing wrong? You see what I'm saying? This is the thinking.

The Great Commission Christians now outnumber traditional and denominational Christians. They now outnumber them. And the continued defections from the older churches into these new frameworks is redefining 21st century Christianity.

20th century Christianity was all about what denomination you were in. 21st century Christianity is not about that anymore. Now it's also caused, I didn't put it down, but it's caused a tremendous shakeup within the denominations.

Some of the churches turning and really examining themselves and repenting and getting down to the business of being part of the gathering. Others are slowly melting away and will not be around with much significance much longer. The figures of global evangelism for this period are conservative because of the unofficial and isolated nature of the groups involved.

The half has not been told. You see, as an example, for most of you, some of you know about Chinese figures, their figure here is 71 million as of the year 2000. Some people say there's 135 million.

But you see, this is just those that they could count the beans. And it doesn't even include any evangelistic crusades. Billy Graham's crusades have been over 120 million, just as an example, not to mention other crusades that have been going on and go on right now throughout the third world.

They don't even count those numbers. Neither did they count radio and TV, which is claimed to reach over 40 million. And I just put the internet in there because that's not even a category yet.

And yet is one of the most significant means of outreach across the world right now. Neither does it include the Jesus movie, where 15 million people have reportedly confessed Christ after seeing the movie. Now, brothers, now sisters, what can we glean from all of these things? Okay, well, now let me just tell you what I think.

Number one, I don't know about these statistics. I'm sure they're not as accurate as they could be, but they weigh on the conservative side. And so I would say this.

If we use these statistics as statistics are used in the book of Acts, I'm sure it wasn't 3,000 people who were saved on the day of Pentecost. It was about maybe 3,012. But statistics were used in the book of Acts to show the mighty working of a resurrected Lord who was gathering people through the gospel.

And I think if we have eyes to see and ears to hear what's been going on as recorded in a feeble manner, this is a sign to us that God is moving in amazing ways. He's a miracle working God. He's a gathering gospel guy.

He is a God of Jesus Christ who's bringing people to himself. People we don't even know about are being gathered right now at this hour. 6,000 people.

Praise God this hour. And I believe that. It's hard to get a hold of, especially if you live in a dead zone like I do.

I live in Manhattan. I live in Greenwich Village. It's a dead zone.

But around the world, God is moving faithfully. And that's the first thing. Do you believe it? Or do you just want to argue about statistics? Whatever the statistics are, God is doing an amazing thing.

He's gathering something up toward an end. And we need to praise God for it and worship him for being a mega gathering God. He is the Lord of the harvest.

And he is gathering in people for himself. Number two, I know there's, I can only imagine how many problems there are among those being gathered. How many conflicting problems there are and conflicting elements and much that is unknown.

I, but all of that aside, if the Lord is gathering multitudes even now into his kingdom, cannot we believe he's also gathering them into fullness? Do we only have the word on that? Because as I said at the start, there's a sense in which intuitively you can live in a fullness, even though you don't understand what that word means. Even though Paul never put that word yet in one of his letters until he came to Ephesians and Colossians, but he's been living in it. And do we think that our God, the God of the harvest is going to gather people and then gather them and put them in some kind of Guantanamo Bay? Surely he's got greater purposes and desires to gather people in a fullness, you see.

And I think we need to be aware of that. Also, looking at the world, looking at the church around the world, we also have to acknowledge that some of these aspects we were reading here, you know, redemption, Holy Spirit things, the Lord is recovering some of these aspects within the church around the world. Now, do you believe that? All I can say is, in 1964, when I was saved, I was saved in a Southern Baptist church.

If they saw what's going on today that is called worship in present Southern Baptist churches, they wouldn't have believed it. We sang nothing but hymns, nothing. Scripture choruses were unheard of.

But now in New York City, the Southern Baptists have snuck in, calling themselves under some other name. I forget what it is, Horizons or something like that. And you know what? They're worshiping God.

I mean real worship. I know that, I'm not talking about necessarily a worship pep rally, but there's real worship being recovered around the world. There's real evangelism and burden evangelism being recovered around the world.

There's a real sense, a recovery of spiritual power, the gifts of the Spirit, and not just used in exhibitionism, but being used under the control of the Lord. There's a recovery of intercessory prayer. Out and beyond us, brothers and sisters, there's people who are learning how to pray and lay hold of things that are dramatic and real and coming from God.

It's a tremendous recovery going on now. And not to mention aspects of body life. Oh, how wonderful.

How wonderful our God is working. But now I come to number four. Because our God is not gathering people toward no end.

And it is true that the need for recovery in the church is grave. Because many people don't know what they're being gathered to. They don't know the who that they're being gathered to.

And that's why number four, I want to say, if we read these statistics are right and have a heart that's willing to be gathered by God Himself and be exercised about what God is doing today, then I tell you, brothers and sisters, we have a great responsibility as those who have seen something of fullness and something of Christ as the sum of all things. We have a very important part to play in God in the fullness of time, summing everything up. You know, when I get the chance to go over to Russia and I get to preach the gospel and I see a whole mess of people say, that's a wonderful thing.

But I come back with my heart burning back to the United States because I see what needs to happen here. We need to be recovered in this kind of thing. We need to be those who are being gathered as well as gathering people.

We understand some things that people, I go over to Russia and I just talk to people and they're saying, wow, oh wow. Oh, it's not like almost like hippies, heavy man. Oh, just talking about such things as fullness as this summing up of all things.

You see my Russian brethren over there in Russia, they see this summing up processes, God gathering in the multitudes and getting them saved. So when I said to them, you know, there's another step in on this thing. And they said, what is that? I said, you know, it's not just seeing Christ summing up all things.

It's seeing Christ as the sum of all things. And they said, well, what do you mean by that? I said, when you see, you know, the righteousness that we're preaching, I said, you know, did you ever realize that it's Christ who is our righteousness? It's not a thing we have, nor is our, uh, our power, a thing that we have, nor is our wisdom, a thing that we've gained. But Christ is our wisdom.

And Christ is our righteousness. And Christ is our power. And Christ is our gospel.

You see, to understand that Christ is the sum of all things, puts the capstone on this summing up process. And they say to listening, the ears are bugging out. The ears are burning.

And then they say, oh, this is wonderful. We never knew that. And they immediately start taking Christ as my life.

Christ is my provision. And we sit around sometimes and we sing this song. Once it was the blessing.

Oh man, I wish I could sing that in Russian. They'd be stomping their feet. Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord.

That's a discovery. For I'm going to be bold and say, for 80% of the Christians today in this world, they don't know Christ our life. They know the Christian life.

That way of life where you live and behave and do what one is supposed to do as a Christian. But to know Christ our life, how many know that? But you and I, we know this. How we need to share the gospel.

How can things come to a fullness if people don't understand that they're being summed up right into the life of Christ. Not just into a pole that they bump up against. That's where the stackpole analogy dies.

It's not a pole you're being knocked up against. It's a person you're being united with. And when we talk about fullness, you know, I don't know, these brothers I work with in Russia, they're all bigger than me.

Can you believe it? Usually I'm the big man, you know, these guys, big guys. And I talk about fullness and say, fullness of spirit. Well, they are full of the spirit, praise God.

And they manifest it by boldness of preaching in difficult situations, by standing for the Lord against the government itself, by doing all kinds of things and seeing miracles happen. They are full of their spirit. But when I share with them about the fullness of the church, they say, oh, yeah, yeah, we tell all people they should come to church.

I don't know. There's something more. There's exercising member of an anointed, living, organic, earthly expression of Christ.

They say, nobody ever told them the church was a living organism and that fullness is realized when we're part of this organism that's vibrant and organic and is sensing a mutuality and sensing a fullness in everyone's contribution and all of these kinds of things. You can't just do that by throwing people together in a place and say, that's it, fullness is when everybody goes to church. No, it's when we enter into something that Paul calls fullness.

Can you believe that he calls the church the fullness of him who fills all in all? We're going to have to look at that once more, the fullness of him. This is a wonderful statement. Even today, in these last days, we don't know how much longer things are going.

The gathering process is moving apace. His last 30 years have been amazing years and it's been since 1970. I don't know why 1970 was the starting point, because if you took the statistics back to 1960, you wouldn't see much change those first 10 years.

But 1970, something happened and the Lord's gathering like crazy. Millions. Can you handle it? You have over 600 million new brothers and sisters.

Some have gone on to be with the Lord, gained in this last 30 years. And yet I tell your brothers and sisters with all my heart, God is looking for those who can evangelize with the end in view. Oh, that's who you are.

God is looking for people with prophetic ministry who can explain the mysteries of Christ. Exactly what we're talking about here. The mysteries of Christ, this next prophetic understanding.

See, if I say, oh, we need a prophetic understanding of the word, the Russian brothers say, ah, we love prophecy, say it the Lord. I stereotype how they speak. But to understand that prophetic ministry is to understand these mysteries.

And you understand the mysteries. And we need shepherds and teachers who can lead God's children to the heart, to the heart of the Lord. Isn't this, isn't this a wonderful opportunity? Imagine the fullness of such, of God's people that can be led to the heart of God through the shepherding love of brothers and sisters.

And the world is looking for assemblies that are living in the reality of these things we're talking about. All four assemblies are really lived in the fullness where the dynamic is really there, where they're being gathered up and they're not just talking and squabbling and all this kind of divisiveness. We know the enemy has set against fullness and we know he has set against the summing up of all things.

We know he's trying to grab every piece of our fallen nature to cause divisions, to cause schisms, to cause us to become irritated with one another, to prevent that wonderful fullness that can only be experienced when we're, we've come from the unity of the spirit to the unity of the faith and we've grown into a mature man. Into the measure of the stature pertaining to the fullness of Christ. Oh, this is, this is, this is our life.

This is what we need to be before the Lord about. Oh, how, how saints would respond if they saw a testimony. Maybe they would malign you because of the life we have.

But I do believe the hungry ones could only respond. Well, I just want to end with this sort of challenge then. Very simple.

Are we in the drawing process or are we over on the side? Are we experiencing fullness together as God's people or is the, when we come together, is it less than the sum of our parts individually? Oh, the Lord wants to do an amazing work and I have a feeling that as far as we're concerned, you know, it isn't a question of how many people you bring to the Lord, but it's a question of being part of the gathering. I, I believe as well as I believe that the Lord is gathering many people together and that his desire is to gather them unto himself into a fullness and to sum up all things in Christ. This wonderful mega gatherer wants to gather children to himself.

I believe that. I believe God's doing it today and I also believe that among us, God must shake us up. Has to get us out of the, you know, there's a, there's a flood tide over there and sometimes we're in a backwater over here and we need to be in the flood tide.

I don't know how God gets us there, but it's by being part of the fullness, by being part of this gathering process, by being gathered ourselves into the Lord's fuller purpose for our lives. I end with this little example from the Bible. You know, this, this spring I've been studying the book of Genesis and it's been a real blessing to me.

And I remember that in the story of Isaac, you know, I, I, I don't know that much about Isaac. I mean, I've been studying it. We don't know much about him, but I have a feeling he was a bit of a mystic or let's put it this way.

He wasn't an initiator. He's a little bit passive, you might say. And so his dad had to send the servant out to find him a wife.

You know, I think some of the brothers here are also that chicken. They can't find them a wife. They have to send somebody out, you know, but whatever.

And, uh, of course, Rebecca came back and Isaac was very happy. And, you know, Isaac met her at this, uh, uh, a beer La Haroi, you know, this place where Hagar had a revelation of God, this well, a beer that this well of revelation of, uh, of seeing God was the place that Isaac loves. He loved to live by the well of revelation, you know? So he married Rebecca and had his kids.

Most of the time he lived around there, you know, just living around the well of revelation. It's this wonderful place, but God wanted to bring him into fullness. And Isaac was just in a backwater.

Do you know where beer La Haroi is? I mean, it's so far down in the desert. That's beyond the desert. I mean, it's just way down, just down places.

Even Lance doesn't go. It's way down. And, uh, the Lord had to get Isaac out of there.

And so, you know what he did? He caused a great famine. The great famine led him finally toward Egypt that he got as far as Gerar, which is in Philistine territory. And the Lord said, no, no, no, no, no.

Just sojourn here and I'll be with you. And it was there in the midst of opposition and there having to dig his own wells that he came into a fullness of all the blessings. He had, he had all the blessings.

Abraham gave him everything, you know, squint, Jillian dollars, sheep, camels. He was already rich. And you'd think blessing blessed, but until he dug wells for himself, he didn't live in the fullness of it.

And he finally got to be a Sheba and dug that well again. And then the water spurred up the water must've been good and beer sheep in those days, there was a place of blessing. It was a place of fullness.

It was a place where God really showed himself again to Isaac. And he came into a fullness. And I have a feeling sometimes, you know, in our life, it's easy for us to sort of dam up the situation and get into a little backwater where it's all nice.

Well, may the Lord knock those dams out, send in the beavers, whatever it takes to get us to where we can be part of this gathering. We can be part of this summing up. I tell you, it's a, it's an awesome responsibility.

It's an awesome stewardship and to whom much has been given much is required. We cannot just sit passively and neither is it our role to judge what's going on. Oh, you don't have to look far, whether you're go to Russia or wherever you go.

And the Lord seems to be moving in an amazing way. You don't have to look far to find many things to find fault with, but after all, is that our role would rather we can bring in something of the Lord and let them see more of his size and more of his dimensions and more of his greatness, more of his fullness and more of his gathering power. I, you know, I have to believe that saints having seen the greater will put away the lesser, but we begin with ourselves.

You're part of those statistics. Probably one of those numbers of somebody who got saved between 1970 and 2000. Praise God.

Is the Lord still gathering you? Oh, may the Lord gather us. We need such recovery from our passivity and in light of the end times coming in the fullness of times, he has designed an administration that is the summing up of all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, even in him. May the Lord help us be part of this living process.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, as statistics do not change our lives, but we know the conviction of the Holy Spirit can change us in a moment. Oh, when we know when God moveth, none can stay his hand.

And when the father draws people, they cannot be held back. Lord, we believe in thy great power and we give you praise and thanks, praise and humble thanks that it's being seen upon this earth today. Oh, praise God.

We give glory to you. Oh Lord, you are our stack pool. Oh Lord, you are the one who is magnetizing us all irresistibly toward yourself.

And father, you have an immutable purpose that all things be summed up in Christ and it will not be denied. And every enemy will be a footstool under his feet. Lord, we just come to you.

Oh Lord, grant us in these days to be part of the fullness. And part of the gathering. Oh, that which we experienced even early in our Christian life.

Lord, if we need to recover that first love and find that new gathering and find that new ground. Oh Lord, we don't want to just rot away until we die. Lord, surely there's a purpose for all these things that you've placed in our hearts, all these mysteries that you've unveiled, all the beauties we've seen of our Lord.

Forgive us Lord, when we've taken some lesser aspect and gone and circled around it. And all the time your spirit has been drawing us unto yourself. Oh, gather us Lord, gather us, gather us unto thyself.

That we may be part of a heavenly statistic that cannot be known by men, but people under the headship gathered up, summed up in Christ, where Christ is our sum and our all. Teach us Lord and may the youngest Christian here enter into that fullness, into that grand summation, even in him. We pray for Christ's sake.

Amen. Amen.

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