

The Church and Its Mission - Part 1

by Ern Baxter

Ern Baxter explores the definition and mission of the church, highlighting the importance of local congregations and the role of prayer in fulfilling God's purpose.

Duration: 22:38

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 4:23-24, Acts 13:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Topics: "Missions"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of prayer and the power of speaking in tongues. He explains that while he is speaking in English, his spirit is constantly praying in an unknown tongue. He also mentions that prayer should be an ongoing and constant practice, and that it is through prayer that believers can receive clear direction from God. The speaker then discusses the persecution faced by the early church and the importance of prayer in fulfilling the mission of the church. He concludes by mentioning a leadership conference that took place in Seattle in 1973.

Transcript

We don't choose our topics in these workshops that are assigned to us. So I want to do two, I want to do three things in talking about the church and its mission. I want to define church and I want to talk about the experience of the first church, touch a little on apostolic teaching and then we'll do some prayer.

In defining church, I'm probably being rather courageous to attack something like that in such a brief time. But when we're speaking about church, we're not speaking about kingdom. You don't preach the church.

Nobody in the New Testament ever preached the church. They preached the kingdom. John the Baptist preached the kingdom, Jesus preached the kingdom, the apostles preached the kingdom, and the last word we hear of Paul was he was preaching the kingdom.

Now kingdom, like church and other religious words, have taken on so many diverse connotations that when you say church, some people think of a building, some people think of a denomination, some people think of a theological viewpoint. When the Bible says church, its simplest definition is found in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, it's all those in every place who call upon the name of the Lord. That's the simplest definition of a church.

Now there's a lot more to it than that, but it's all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord, and it's important. When you're talking about church in the New Testament, there are just two kinds of church. There's the church in the locality, or the church which is cosmic, not just universal, cosmic.

Some of the church is already in heaven. Some may not have been born yet. That's the vast cosmic congregation of Christ.

When you're speaking about church in terms of the earth, there's only two biblical ways of speaking of it. One is the church of the locality, the church of Rome, Philippi, Thessalonica, whatever, are the churches of a province. The churches of Samaria, the churches of Judea, the churches of Syria, the churches of Galatia, quite a number of them.

These are churches plural. There's no such thing as a national church. There's no such thing as a world church.

Now when you want to speak of all God's people at any given time in the earth, you want to speak of them in aggregate, then you speak of the kingdom of God. They preach the kingdom. The kingdom is the government of God.

The government of God is bigger than the church. The government of God takes in nations, takes in all moral intelligences, it takes in creation. Now to cut through a lot of this, let me simply say that the church to which you belong in your locality, that body of people is the local expression and deposit of the authority of King Jesus.

Now if you heard that, that will affect your praying to a great extent. When you realize that the church of your locality, all those in that locality will call upon the name of the Lord, that that is a local depot, that is a local representation of God's government in that locality. So that the mission of the church, when you use it scripturally, is really the mission of the local church.

Now if you're talking about the mission of the kingdom, that's into something much larger. I would say this afternoon we're not gathered here as a church. We're not even, we're gathered here as a part of the cosmic church, but we're gathered here more in terms of the kingdom of God.

We are born into the kingdom, we are members of the kingdom, we are here as fellow citizens of the kingdom. I probably, well of course, I don't belong to your church. I belong to a church in Mobile, Alabama.

That's where I am church. Here I'm a Christian with fellow Christians in a kingdom context. Praying in your local church is very important because the sphere and the scope of your influence mainly is your community.

You will affect Ephesus if you live in Ephesus, you will affect Mobile if you live in Mobile. Now in the larger sphere as a kingdom citizen with other kingdom citizens, you will affect the whole world. Now maybe I shouldn't even attempt to that without being more specific and dealing with it more in depth, but I want us to see this afternoon that we're not here primarily as members of a church.

We're here primarily as members of churches who are gathered in a kingdom context, and we would pray in a kingdom context. However, going back to the matter of the church and its mission, I'm going to talk mainly of the local church because that's where the activity is. The activity is where you are going to church.

It's like the word covenant. People talk about us being in covenant relationship, and they get unhappy about that. They think we've made some special covenant.

No, when we talk about covenant, we're talking about working out the same covenant that all Christians are in. I'm in the blood covenant of Jesus Christ with Chinese Christians, but I'm not functioning in it as I am with the Christians in Mobile. Now it's the same with prayer.

My most specific kind of praying goes on where I live and where I have influence and where I have sphere responsibility. It simply raises the point that you live where you live, not primarily because you chose to live there if you're a Christian, but because God put you there. And if God put you there, he wants to make you a community of kingdom authority there so that your prayers will affect the place where you're living.

All right? Our second point. When we talk about the early church, so often I think we're kind of talking vaguely. The early church, and by that we mean the whole generation of Christians in the first century.

But the early church, as we find it dealt with in the scriptures, is really the church in Jerusalem. That's the first church. And that's the church where most of our prayer material comes from, at least in the first twelve chapters of the book of Acts.

The first twelve chapters of Acts, as you know, is largely taken up with Peter in Jerusalem. And the rest of the Acts is taken up with Paul in the world. And when you get into Paul in the world, you move from Jerusalem to Antioch, and then to Greece, and Asia, and all over the place.

So we're going to be talking mainly about the church in Jerusalem because it was the first church. The beginning of a matter is very important. How did the first church treat prayer? Well, the first church, the first nucleus of Christians and believers, was the place where the Holy Ghost came.

And they preceded that great event by a prayer meeting. And so Pentecost and the whole new age, in a very real sense, was born in a prayer meeting. Charismatic and Pentecostal people are inclined to start the book of Acts with chapter two.

They forget there's a chapter one. But if you turn to chapter one very quickly, and verses thirteen and fourteen, remember our Lord had descended out of this site, told them to go to Jerusalem, carry, wait, don't go anyplace until the Holy Spirit came. And so we read in verse thirteen, and when they reached the city, they went into a room upstairs where they were staying, both Peter and James and John and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Lotis, and Judas the brother of James.

They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. Everybody was there. They were all there.

The most important people in the nucleus were there, and they were in a prayer meeting. And the whole thing is, from the human standpoint, was birthed in a prayer meeting. After the day of Pentecost, they didn't stop praying.

Now we've heard some of these things already, and the person who talks about the third or fourth day of a conference finds himself synopsisizing everything that's been said. But having started the whole matter in a prayer meeting in the upper room, we turn to Acts chapter two after the day of Pentecost, and we find that they continued steadfastly in prayer. So prayer became a part of the liturgical life of the first church, as it

should be part of the liturgical life of every church.

We read in verse 42, And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, and in koinonia, or sharing the common life, and in the breaking of bread, the celebration of the Eucharist, and in prayers. Prayer became part of the permanent liturgical life of the first church. And if the first church is any example, then that tells us that we not only pray once, but we are constantly praying.

In fact, the man who understands prayer knows that it is the very life breath of the Christian, and he never does say a final amen. Sometimes I don't say amen to my prayers, because really all I've done is articulated something that's going on in my spirit. First session to ask about the value of speaking in tongues, and constantly pray.

So many times people think I don't know how to say amen. They didn't phone their senator. They didn't call in a civil servant.

We have to pray. Independent, unilateral, only God. You who rule over this.

We recognize you as our brother. They immediately go to the creation motif. Isn't that interesting? People say that believing in evolution is not important.

Oh, yes, it is. I believe that God created two disconcurrents of atoms. I'd feel very funny saying, oh, God of a fortuitous concurrence of atoms.

That wouldn't give my faith any springboard at all. But once you recognize that, then they speak thy word. Somebody says, that's silly.

That's what got in the first place. The Gentiles are raging. We'll just do some more of that too, Lord.

The place was shaken where they were continued in prayer, and in crisis, they went to prayer, and they got some shaking answers. All right? The word continually is stressed. The final thing that I find in the first church, to me is of significance, is that they prayed in mission.

We need to understand that the fulfillment of our task must come out of prayer. In 1973, I believe it was, I happened by the providence. And we're asking, I've carried on my heart for years a concern.

I've lived a lot of years, and I've been waiting on God and hear a directive voice from God. Do you think that Paul and Barnabas had any question? He didn't tell us confusion. And if we can plug into God, this is what the quick, we have to sit there, do anything.

We can't stand the silence. He knows what to do. Filling the air with words to say.

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