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## The Journey We're On

I just finished a lengthy series on knowing the Lord – specifically what it means to know Him in His death, to be conformed to his death. We spent several weeks on that. And that whole series wasn't just something I decided to teach about, it came out from a personal dealing of the Lord with my heart in this last couple months. Its always like that. And so while I was teaching through that subject I began to be confronted with a number of questions having to do with church. What is church? What is it really? I know what we do, but what is it really? Why do we gather? And personally, for us as a body, where are we going?

I suppose it's a good time to talk about this. We're trying to buy this new building and move the location of our fellowship here shortly. We've been transitioning out from one comprehension of the gospel into a far more real comprehension for over two years now. I thought it would be a good idea for me to share a little bit about what I think church is and where I see all of this going. Kindof like a "state of the church address". This journey we are on. A lot of what I want to say has come out of facing some of the reality of this death that we've been talking about.

And I know that many of you have already come to these conclusions already, but let me just speak my heart nonetheless.

Let me start by sharing with you a bit of my journey over the past couple years. Because it will lead me to what I want to say. I would bet that many of you can relate to some or all of this.

When I started as a Christian and, in fact, when I started as the pastor of this church, I had enormous spiritual ambition, spiritual lust for greatness in the sight of both men and God. I wouldn't have called it that. I couldn't see it. It just was what it was. I called it zeal. I called it devotedness. I called it radical Christianity. I called it everything according to my comprehension of it. Let me say again, I couldn't see that that is what it was, not until the light of His life began to shine in the dark recesses of my heart where all motivation had its seat.

Anyway, when I began to comprehend the reality of the cross – Christ and Him crucified, and us with Him in death, and Him in us in life, and all of that...all that we have been proclaiming and teaching for these years – when I began to comprehend and see the cross everything began to change.

I remember the day that I was pacing in the lobby praying about all of this. I remember the Lord dealing severely with my heart that day. And what I had begun to see started to dramatically change everything. The first cut that it made in my life, my ministry was the realization that all growth was the increase of Christ in His body. And that I could never ever in a million years produce that in me or ANYONE no matter how hard I tried. I could not build this church.

Now, if I employed certain appeals to natural appetites, I knew that I could increase the number of bodies in this room....but I began to know with a certainty that even if I did that 1000 fold, it would not be considered growth without the increase of Christ.

At the time the church was growing in numbers, (remember those days?)...but I suddenly saw that really had nothing to do with the growth that comes from God. He alone could do that. Growth, he showed me, was not the increase of the dirt, but the increase of the Seed. And my ambitions to build a ministry, a church, a name, a reputation, a title, an anything...went right out the window in my comprehension that Christianity is, in fact, Christ. The Church is Christ. Christ Himself dwelling in a corporate vessel. I could not "build" Him, regardless of my efforts. I could serve Him in His efforts to bring His increase, as one might water a seed, but I could not control anything. I could build a "church", but I couldn't increase His Seed. I could buy a big building and lure bodies into it through a variety of different methods. But what did that really amount to?

My first reaction to seeing this was fear, though later it became rest. But the Lord was not done cutting.

I think it was the exact same hour of that day it dawned on me that not only could I not build His church, but I could not even teach Christ. What do you mean you can't teach Christ? I mean that at best I could speak the truth, I could proclaim the mystery of God revealed in Christ, I could make known what I had seen in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, but ONLY the Spirit of God could make the reality of salvation real in a human heart, and even then, only when He is given that liberty to do so. I couldn't control the heart's actual learning of Jesus nor the heart's desire to do so.

John says "you have no need of a teacher because you have an anointing that abides within you that teaches you all things". Jesus says "The Spirit of truth will teach you all things". He also says "you have only one teacher, that is the Spirit". And suddenly that reality (not that doctrine) dawned on my heart with a pounding clarity. And I didn't know what to do.

Here I was having just started pastoring a church now being suddenly confronted by the Lord with this reality booming in my heart "Son, you cannot build church, because Church is the life of my Son in His body. And you cannot teach my Son, that is the Spirit's job. All that is left to you is "the foolishness of preaching"... to proclaim what you have seen and trust that my Spirit will reveal the things that have been freely given. What do you think of that, Jason? How does that effect your plans?

And some of you know that story. But the Lord was far from done dealing with me. He was not done cutting.

It wasn't terribly long before the Lord began to take the knife deeper. At first, having come over into a comprehension of the cross, I tried to bring over all of my natural ambitions and goals into Him. Yes, I had been wrong about the gospel, about the nature of the cross, about the Seed and the dirt, and all of that. But now this new message was going to be the platform. Now this was going to be the movement that I had longed to be a part of. Now this was going to be the great commission of my life, my church, my ministry – the restoration of this gospel. Here

we go. We'll build the ministries around this. We'll build the model around this. We'll build the worship around this.

And very quickly the Lord appeared with his sword again. Remember when the Lord appeared to David with that sword and he hit the deck? Son, I'm not doing your little movement. I'm not giving you a platform. All of that, in your heart, is still unto your own glory, your own name, your own purposes, your own end. You have seen something of my truth, and are still trying to use it, use me, use my cross, for yourself. That's how bad it is.

I remember one time when I was praying about a certain difficult situation in the church and asking the Lord to change that situation. I was reasoning with Him that if He changed this situation then this fellowship could be a much more sleek and effective ministry of truth. It seemed like a pretty persuasive prayer. And the Lord again dealt with my heart "I don't want to build a well-oiled ministry machine. I have what I want already. I just want you to know the truth, the finished work of God in Christ, and become the expression of it". You don't have to run out and finish anything for me. You just have to know and manifest what I have finished.

I could tell so many stories like this. But let me fast-forward to what has been going on in my heart this year. This year the cross has been cutting even much deeper than all of this. Now it's not just the control that I loved and protected. Now it's not just the reputation. Now it's not just the goals, the ambitions, the desires. Now it's the very person at the root of all of that. This year the cross has been confronting the source of all of that - me.

And it has been showing me that there has always been something of self-gain behind every excitement of my heart. I never would have known that. But underneath every rock of motivation was me. I was behind everything seeking my own gain. And that gain was my excitement.

You can't see this until He shows you, but it's there. And some of you have begun to see it with greater and greater clarity. And you are surprised and amazed and confronted and confused that self has been behind so much. And some of you, and I know it to be true of myself as well, have not faced this as much as is needed. The layers and layers of self begin to be exposed. You think you've seen how bad it is, and then that was just the top layer. It's tremendous.

And suddenly the reality of Jesus' words take on entirely new meaning. "Unless you lose your life, you won't find it". Suddenly you see that it's not what you do, it's what you are. It's not that you sin, it's that you live. And you see that only in your absence is He present. And in your presence He is absent. And this whole thing is unto the gaining of Christ, but that gain is going to cost conformity to His death. He will never add Himself on to what you already are. He will never share the land with His enemies. He will bring a judgment. And I'm not going to qualify or explain that statement right now. You can go back and listen to the series on knowing Him in His death for all of my explanations and qualifications. Suffice to say that I'm not talking about going out and suffering for Jesus. I'm talking about Light destroying the darkness that you are, and you letting it happen.

And as I began to see how huge this is, how huge this death is, how necessary it is, that is why I started my series on knowing Him in His death. And that is also why I started that series with the couple sermons on having a heart to know Him.

**Because a question inevitably comes up when you begin to see how much of self gets cut away from the cross. What question? The question of whether you're still interested.**

The first reaction of any Christian is "of course I am! I'm with you Jesus no matter what the cost"...but those are words that Peter proved often have no value when we stare into the face of death. And frankly, that is what the gospel is – staring into the face of death.

Death to your control? – ok, I can deal with that. Death to your reputation? – well, that was hard, but I'm still in. Death to your ambition, goals, dreams? – man this is starting to lose some of its excitement. What about death to you and all that that is from you, for you, and to you? Christian religion, unfortunately, offers many alternatives to this. And they are there for the picking. Religion offers a treaty with the judgment of Christ. The judgment of the cross. Religion offers terms of peace. But the cross knows nothing of peace with the natural man. It is war. It is judgment.

Consider this verse for a minute.

**Luk 14:26** If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his *own* life also, he cannot be My disciple. ...**Luk 14:31** Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not first sit down *and* consult whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace.

And I now know that, despite my zeal and ambition, all of my life has been an attempt to send a delegation out to ask for terms of peace. I'll be radical, I'll do this, I'll do that, I'll do anything, just don't kill me.

I told you that I have been thinking a lot about church. What is it? What is it for? Where is it going? Let me tell you what I have been facing.

We have been noticing that the more of the cross we see, the more of the reality of being in Christ, the less we are pushed and pulled by religious motivations. I'm very glad for that. I'm glad that people are no longer guilted into coming to church. Guilted into giving tithes. Guilted into attending a life group. That is a huge step in the right direction. Getting the religious monkey off of our backs.

On the one hand, there is no apostolic office awaiting you as a reward for your church attendance around here. No gold stars stuck on your forehead. On the other, there is also no bolt of lightning going to strike you in your bed if you sleep in on Sunday mornings. There is no whip of religion and guilt driving you here, and there is no promise of glory and gain pulling you here. **And so all that leaves us with here is one solitary motivation – a heart that must know the Lord.**

And I guess what I just want to pose to all of us as I look forward from here is - Is that enough? That is my question to all of us. Having stripped away the control, the reputation, the self glory, the spiritual ambitions (which we couched in all kinds of innocuous language), stripped away the hierarchy, the personal rewards, the goals and dreams, and even stripped all the way down to self-gain. Self. You. Having stripped you and left you with nothing. Nothing to gain for yourself, from yourself or

to yourself...except for Him. Except for Jesus. Having faced all of that it leaves only one question. Is knowing Christ, and being conformed to His death to be found in His life, enough for you and I? **What if church is just that?** And anything else is simply what naturally flows out from that.

I told the story on Friday night about a guy that I met with a while back. He was somebody that was very involved in his church, leading some things, involved in many things. And through some good resources, and a few discussions I had with him, this guy began to see the cross. He began to see the contrast between religion and life. And I watched his eyes grow big as he began to comprehend. I watched him respond in a way that I new was the Lord teaching His heart. He began to see that he had done so much for religious zeal, man's glory, man's vision, man's gain. And I was totally expecting this brother to turn his heart to know the Lord and to grow up in Him. He did turn away from dead religion, but very quickly turned towards the world and the flesh and sin, and as far as I know is still there today.

I remember thinking to myself "how could that have happened?...he was seeing the truth!" And the Lord showed me that day something that I will never forget. The truth took away his religious zeal, and that was all the zeal he had. Underneath, he didn't really want Christ. You take self gain or self guilt out of the picture, and you begin to see who wants to know the Lord.

And that is why I'm talking about this. I am not doubting anybody's heart or motivations this morning. This has just hit me with some serious force recently. **And I just want us all to see this together and face it together, and look down the road together with the same expectation, the same goal, the same hope – to know Him.** That's really why I'm talking about this. I want us to look down the road together this morning with the same expectation in mind. One expectation. Many of you are already there. I know that. Some are not, and I want everyone to hear it.

So what is church and where we are going? Despite what we have made it, church is His body, the full expression of Him who fills all in all. Christ all and in all. That is church. And so, despite what some books and broadcasts say, a growing church is a body of believers, regardless of size, growing up in all things into Him – the full measure of the stature of Christ. A growing church is a church that is growing into an expression of the life that dwells within it. **Do you really think that God is so dumb that he confuses the number of bodies in a room with the increased expression of His eternal Son?**

The more people, the merrier, but more people doesn't constitute growth. God desires all men to come to a knowledge of the truth, but Exodus 12 will prove that to you that in God's eyes the size of the house is measured by how many it takes to eat one lamb! Lets have a bunch of people, as many as will hear, but don't be mistaken that growth is Christian bodies in a room. Size is about one lamb filling up the house.

If you have a farmer and he has seed growing in one acre of land and it is increasing. Then he buys 20 more acres of land that doesn't have any growth happening. Is the purchasing of that 20 acres growth? Or is it just acquiring of land in which he hope there will one day be growth. My point is just that a growing church is the church wherein Christ is increasing in formation and expression.

That is the goal of God. Not only the purchasing of 20 acres. That purchase is unto a greater end. A harvest if you will. A harvest of the Seed. Now most of you know this, so I will move on.

But church then becomes that gathering of those who are in Him unto the knowing of Him in truth, unto the formation of His life in our souls, unto the expression of Him unto the Father and to one another. That is, as far as I can see, all that church is. Church is when we who are gathered up in Him, come together in a place, and the only expectation in our hearts is the seeing of Him, the knowing of Him, and the subsequent impact that that seeing, that knowing, has on our souls as those very souls become the expression of what is known. A work that is finished in the spirit, but must be expressed through the soul by way of knowing the Lord, the revealing of Christ, growing in grace and the knowledge of God.

And I'm saying all of this knowing that there are perhaps some people that think that we are going to eventually turn a corner and take this a different direction. That just wont happen.

So, where are we going? We're going further and further into the realization in the soul of what has been finished in the great, unfathomable, inexhaustible work of Christ. We are going to explore and search and see and know the reality of that great salvation unto the conformity of our souls to Christ's image. We are going to, as we have been doing, forever grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus our Lord. We're going to grow in our apprehension of the mystery of God revealed in Christ.

Why? Because we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are changed into His likeness by beholding Him in a mirror. Because we conform to His image when we are renewed in knowledge. Because we put on the new man when we are renewed in the spirit of our mind. And only then does what He has done, what He has finished, Who He has risen from among the dead, have expression through His body. Only then does the Father have his harvest.

So this has just been a bit of a "who we are and where we're going kind of thing". The cross takes out of Christianity everything other than Christ. And many of those things were the things that initially got us signed up. Will knowing Him and being conformed to His image be enough for us. After he has cut away so much, will we still turn and say "where else could I go?".

Because here in this local fellowship that is what we are going to gather unto. That's really what we're all about. And that is what we're always going to do and be about. I think that is what church is – a gathering of those who are in Him unto His increase, and our subsequent decrease, towards the expression of Him. That's the goal here. That's the expectation as I look years down the road with you all. And I just wanted us all to hear and have that one expectation.