

“CELEBRATING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD, CALVARY ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY”

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We are gathered to engage in the single most important of human activities, the public worship of God. According to the Lord Jesus Christ, because God is a spirit, His worship is to be pursued in spirit and in truth, John 4.24. And because of the sluggish nature of the human heart, and because we are, as the Savior declared in Luke 24.25, “slow of heart to believe,” the public worship of God is rightly prepared for far in advance of our gathering to worship Him.

Experienced worshipers of God have long since abandoned their *decisions* to go to Church to worship God in favor of *habitually* going to Church to worship God, and beyond that, there is the *character and lifestyle* of worshipping God. Worshipers do not *decide* whether to attend a worship service. They execute a decision that they made long ago.

Prayer ahead of worship, planning what to wear to worship, retiring for sleep the night before worship, rising in the morning in time for worship, and a timely departure not to be late for worship, elevate one’s attitude toward God to reflect His importance, His significance, and His majesty in contrast to our humility and relative unimportance. He is high and lifted up. He is more important than anything. And we anticipate our worship of Him, recognizing there is no human activity that approaches the importance of giving to Him the glory that is His due in worship.

As we engage in the worship of God, let us opt for a heavenly, eternal perspective. We acknowledge that God created this universe and all that is herein. However, this universe is not eternal and will come to an end, with a new heaven and a new earth promised.¹ Moreover, the first institution created by God on the sixth day was marriage. An excellent picture of the relationship of Christ to His bride,² let us realize that marriage, too, is not eternal. Being the picture of an eternal reality, marriages and families pass into obsolescence when we move from this life to the eternal state, as our Lord’s response to the Sadducees’ questioning showed.³

There are only two institutions that God has brought into existence that are eternal: the family of God and the Church of Jesus Christ. At present, the family of God and the Church of Jesus Christ are separate and distinct, though they overlap, and in eternity they will become the same. I point this out because today we are observing and celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of one iteration of the second of the two institutions.

¹ Revelation 21.1

² Ephesians 5.22-32

³ Luke 20.27-38

As we seek to both worship God and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Calvary Road Baptist Church of Los Angeles County, on November 3, 1975, let us turn to God's Word to begin a panoramic consideration of God's Plan, Our Past, and Our Purpose as what the Apostle Paul shows us by application to be in First Corinthians 3.16, when he declared to the Corinthian congregation,

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?”

What are we to celebrate, not only as individual believers, but as Church members shown to be a spiritual temple of God, during this time of worship and on this occasion of celebration? I set before you three considerations from God's Word:

First, A CONSIDERATION OF GOD'S PLAN

Psalm 33.11 reads, “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

Because God is not the Author of confusion, First Corinthians 14.33, it is no surprise to those who study Scripture that God has an overarching plan of the ages. Because it is so vast and incomprehensible to the mortal mind, consider some of His unfolding drama of redemption piecemeal.

First, there is God the Father. Not having the time to rehearse with you God's majestic attributes revealed in Scripture, be content with me highlighting His grand purpose, voiced by the elders in Revelation 4.11:

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Because God is sovereign, omnipotent, and holy, everything that has, that is, and that will come to pass in some way both fulfills God's plan and at the same time glorifies Him.

Next, there is the eternal Son of the living God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is that Person of the Triune Godhead who left heaven's glory to be born of a virgin, live a sinless life, die a sacrificial death, and rise from the dead before ascending to the Father's right hand. He is the only Savior of sinner's souls, purposed before creation's dawn to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, Revelation 13.8.

Someone suggested that God's grace is His only attribute that could not be expressed except by saving sinners, and that creating humanity, permitting humanity's descent into sin, and saving some by faith apart from works, wonderfully glorifies God by putting His grace on display, and also exalts His Son, Jesus Christ. Hence, the plan.

Throughout human history, it has been repeatedly shown that humanity fails, ever fails, always fails, and that only divine and gracious intervention by God remedies the cancerous effects of sin. A sinless couple failed in the Garden of Eden, requiring their expulsion. A sinful race failed after that, requiring the Flood and deliverance by an ark with eight souls. After the Flood, our race's headlong rush into idolatry required the judgment of the confusion of languages at Babel. God then selected one man from among the idolaters and promised him. He extended His Abrahamic promise to his son, Isaac, and then to his son Jacob, and the nation they became. Yet those men and the chosen nation they became failed, and failed, and failed again. So, God judged them with division, and then with the captivity of Israel by the Assyrians and the captivity of Judah by the Babylonians.

In the midst of failures, however, God graciously embedded what one described as the scarlet thread of redemption. In the Garden of Eden, God promised One who would crush the head of the serpent.⁴ To His

⁴ Genesis 3.15

chosen embryonic nation in Egypt, God promised their Messiah through the tribe of Judah.⁵ After their arrival in the Promised Land after the Exodus, He promised their Messiah would be virgin-born, Isaiah 7.14, would be born in Bethlehem, Micah 5.2, and would arrive in Jerusalem at a predicted time, Daniel 9.24-27. Then, He sent His Son, miraculously conceived,⁶ to live a sinless life,⁷ and die His sacrificial death in “due time,”⁸ according to His eternal plan.

Overlooked by some and treated as an afterthought by others, it was during His earthly ministry that the Lord Jesus Christ established the second eternal institution. The family of God has existed since shortly after the Fall, and it has ever been God’s purpose to enter into a familial relationship with sinners by means of faith. “By faith Abel,” “by faith Enoch,” “by faith Noah,” “by faith Abraham,” and on it goes in Hebrews 11.

That noted, Father Abraham is the preeminent example of the saving faith proclaimed first by the prophet Habakkuk in 2.4. Quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1.17, Galatians 3.11, and Hebrews 10.38, one’s salvation is secured and entrance into the family of God is and has always been acquired by faith. Added to the family of God, whose membership is attained via the principle of faith, is the second institution, the Church of Jesus Christ. The notion of an ἐκκλησία, a church, was not new. What *was* new was Christ’s notion of “my church.”⁹

If the Apostle Paul, in First Corinthians 12.28, is rightly understood, and Christ established His Church when He called His twelve apostles, then Matthew 10.2 and Luke 6.13 are the record of Christ establishing His Church, referred to by Him as His “little flock” in Luke 12.32. Also, during our Lord’s earthly ministry, He promised to build His Church, Matthew 16.18 (“upon this rock I will build my church”), provided directions for dealing with sin in His Church, Matthew 18.15-20 (“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church”), and prescribed the basis for the ministry of His Church, John 13.34 (“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another”).

Protestantism insists without evidence that the Church was founded on the Day of Pentecost. But if that be so, how is one to explain Christ’s Church conducting a business meeting *before* Pentecost to select Matthias as the replacement apostle for Judas Iscariot in fulfillment of Psalm 69.25 and 109.8? The reality is that the Lord Jesus Christ *created* the second divine and eternal institution during His earthly ministry. It was *discipled* by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. It was *commissioned* by the Lord Jesus Christ following His resurrection. And it was *empowered* by the Lord Jesus Christ when He poured out the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Next, A CONSIDERATION OF OUR PAST

For a while, I will focus on recent history rather than reviewing the New Testament.

In the early 1970s, Harold C. Beigle was pastoring in a Protestant denomination in Michigan. Though he had experienced success in the pastorate, he told me he felt hindered by his denomination and came to California to establish an autonomous Baptist congregation.

⁵ Genesis 49.10

⁶ Matthew 1.20; Luke 1.26-35

⁷ Hebrews 9.28

⁸ Romans 5.6

⁹ Matthew 16.18

I recollect that he held services in South Pasadena and organized the congregation as the Calvary Road Baptist Church of Los Angeles County, with California Secretary of State March Fong Eu signing the incorporation papers on November 3, 1975.

Facing stiff opposition from the city of South Pasadena, Pastor Beigle led the congregation to purchase this property a year later. Originally a building owned by the First Lutheran Church, it was sold to a Church of Christ congregation, then put up for sale and purchased by our congregation.

I became the pastor of this congregation in November 1985. This was about seven months after Pastor Beigle's resignation to establish another Baptist congregation. I do not know the details of Harold Beigle's identification as a Baptist before he came here. Still, one nearby Baptist pastor suggested to me that ours was not really a Baptist Church because the founding pastor was a Baptist in name only, and had not been baptized by Scriptural authority.

When confronted with that, I responded that it did not matter because "I am Barnabas." I was alluding to the group of Christians who had gathered in Antioch, not being referred to by Luke as a Church until after Barnabas had enlisted the help of Saul of Tarsus and properly organized the saints in Antioch following the New Testament pattern, Acts 11.26. This is why I refrain from referring to many large religious gatherings as Churches. They have not been Scripturally organized, are not committed to the New Testament pattern for Churches, and have neither members nor Biblical discipline.

In the forty years I have been this congregation's senior pastor, it has been my goal to move our congregation ever closer to the New Testament pattern for the Church of Jesus Christ. I have sought to do this through a commitment to the Great Commission of disciple-making, equipping Church members for the work of the ministry, impressing upon the congregation the urgency of the hour and the importance of faithfulness, and stressing the significance of the means of grace. We are a Baptist Church, duly constituted and committed to the New Testament pattern, unlike many very large and well-known congregations.

As we approach the end of my season in this Church's life as a spiritual leader, I will recommend my successor for your consideration at this evening's Church meeting. As I have been privileged to serve God by ministering His Word to you, I am excited for him in the role I have occupied.

Finally, A CONSIDERATION OF OUR PURPOSE

When I refer to our purpose, I am addressing our purpose as a Church of Jesus Christ, our purpose as an assembly being somewhat distinct from our purpose as individuals in the family of God. Referring to the two institutions —the family of God and the Church of Jesus Christ —recognizes that they are not the same. The family of God has existed since the time of Abel, and the Church of Jesus Christ was established during our Lord's earthly ministry.

It is by means of faith that one becomes a member of God's family, as we have seen. But that is not how one becomes a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. Membership in Christ's Church occurs when a believer, already in God's family, becomes a Church member through believer baptism. We see this in Acts 2.37-41, on the Day of Pentecost. This is the pattern prescribed in the Great Commission to make disciples by evangelizing, by baptizing, and by training, Matthew 28.18-20. And it is an assignment that was given to Christ's Church, and later by Churches, not an assignment given to individuals in the family of God. Churches have membership.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Peter Masters, *Church Membership In The Bible*, (London: The Wakeman Trust, 2008).

Churches are authorized to deal with sin in our midst.¹¹ Churches are authorized to administer believer baptism. Churches are authorized to administer the communion of the Lord's Supper.

Having distinguished between the two eternal institutions of the family of God and the Church of Jesus Christ, let us focus on our assembly's purpose. We have seen in Revelation 4.11 that the purpose of all creation is God's glory. Both that which is animate and that which is inanimate exist for the purpose of glorifying God in some way. Be they angels or demons, simple molecules or men, existence is for the purpose, knowingly or unknowingly, of glorifying God. That, in addition to you bearing God's image and likeness, adds to your importance in God's grand scheme. That is the *what* of your existence as an individual, whoever you may be. It is the *what* of your existence who are born again into the family of God. And it is the *what* of our existence as members of a Church of Jesus Christ.

God desires that none perish, but that all come to repentance, Second Peter 3.9. As well, He desires that every member of the family of God in this era, who has come to Christ by faith, take the additional step of obedience in believer baptism to become a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. And once a Church member, First Corinthians 4.1-2, to faithfully serve. We must grant that not every member of God's family can become a member of a Church. We will see the repentant thief on the cross in heaven, his salvation assured by his faith in Christ, without the opportunity to ever become a Church member. As well, the Ethiopian eunuch, saved through faith in Christ and then baptized by Philip, we have no further indication in Scripture of him after his conversion and baptism.

Such things granted, God's plan for most who have come to faith and are members of the family of God during this era known as the Church Age, after Christ's resurrection and before His Second Coming, is to follow conversion to Christ by faith with obedience in believer baptism and faithful participation in your Church. Therefore, let us recognize that our purpose as a congregation, as a Church of Jesus Christ, is the same purpose as our purpose as individuals in the family of God. The differences are in what we are called to do corporately, as an assembly, versus what we are authorized to engage in individually.

How are Churches to do what we are all called upon in Scripture to do, which is to glorify God? Individuals in the family of God, believers in Jesus Christ, are called upon to glorify God. And we do so by witnessing, reading our Bibles, studying God's Word, growing in grace, establishing good reputations at work and in the neighborhood, and other such things. Churches, congregations, and assemblies, on the other hand, do so very much more. Members of the family of God witness, but Churches engage in the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers learn, but it is in Churches that gifted men engage in the discipling, training, and equipping of members.

Only Churches are authorized to deal with sin in our midst, Matthew 18.15-20. And it is in Churches that Christian growth and the flourishing of the fruit of the Spirit are best seen.¹² Interestingly, and a truth completely lost on Protestantism, the basis of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ will be faithful service in one's congregation, First Corinthians 3.9-16. Indeed, sanctification of the believer is *best* effected in the body of Christ.¹³ Reaching the lost, baptizing and training converts, establishing Churches, exalting Christ, serving as a preservative in a decaying culture, Spirit-filled Church life is how assemblies glorify God in a way individuals do not and cannot. But there is more.

¹¹ Matthew 18.15-20

¹² Galatians 5.22-23

¹³ See Charles L. Hunt, *The Body Of Christ: Metaphor Not Myth*, (Monrovia, CA: ClassicalBaptist.Press, 2024).

Finally, not a creature but the Creator —the eternal Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus Christ—is committed to glorifying His Father throughout the ages. How has He done this? How will He continue to do this? Allow me to state that the Lord Jesus Christ has always, by His obedience, by His humility, and by His sacrifice, astonishingly glorified the Father. The question for us at this time is how He will continue to do this throughout eternity’s future?

In the Apostle Paul’s prison epistle to the Ephesian congregation, he emphasized glorifying God in the congregation throughout, a total of seven times in eight different verses.¹⁴ However, it is in Ephesians 3.21 that he provided us a glimpse of the Church of Jesus Christ in eternity, what the Lord Jesus brought His Church into existence for, and how He will use us after our time here on earth:

“Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

Recognize that our congregation is a tool in the hands of our Savior, the Son of God. As we yield our lives to Him and comply with His will, as it is revealed in Scripture for our lives as members of His body, we are His implement to glorify the Father, labeled by Paul as “the Father of glory” in Ephesians 1.17. In this world, the family of God and the Church of Jesus Christ are not the same, with the thief on the cross as one example of a family of God member who was not a Church member, not being able to submit to believer baptism. In eternity, however, all of us who are in the family of God, each of us after Christ’s resurrection until His Second Coming, will be incorporated into the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, Hebrews 12.23:

“... the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

In this present era, believers are in the family of God, and believers who are obedient to baptism and congregational membership are members of their local body of Christ. In eternity, however, every blood-bought child of God, baptized or not, will be included in “the general assembly and church of the firstborn.” To what end? That the Lord Jesus Christ will fulfill His personal goal of glorifying His heavenly Father throughout eternity using the instrument He brought into existence for that purpose, and so loved the Church that He gave Himself for it, Ephesians 5.25.

Calvary Road Baptist Church is a congregation of born-again, Scripturally baptized believers in Jesus Christ. On the one hand, we, along with other believers who are not connected to our Church, are members of a spiritual family —the family of God. And we trace our beginning in that family all the way back to Abel.

However, as believers who have taken the step of obedience to Christ’s directive to follow Him in believer baptism and to live in and serve in the body of Christ, we are additionally positioned this side of eternity to be effectively used by the Lord Jesus Christ to glorify God.

In eternity, the situation will be somewhat different. Everyone who has come to Christ during the Church Age, whether they were members of an assembly or not, will be incorporated into “the general assembly and church of the firstborn.” Throughout eternity, we will be used by our glorious Savior to glorify the Father.

Think about that glorious prospect. I am persuaded that on this fiftieth anniversary of Calvary Road Baptist Church of Los Angeles County, we not only have much to be thankful for, but we also have much to look forward to.

¹⁴ Ephesians 1.6, 12, 14, 17, 18; 3.13, 16, 21