

Almont Vineyard Church

Week 2 Sermon Series: Witnesses of the Risen King

April 18, 2026

Opening Monologue

Welcome back to the AVC App, and a special welcome to all our first-time users. The goal of this app is to provide deeper theological and spiritual reflections that flow directly from the sermon. After this opening monologue, you'll find commentary sections and spiritual reflections, along with discussion questions at the very bottom. I hope you take full advantage of everything the app has to offer.

If you followed along last week, you know we have begun a new sermon series titled "Witnesses of the Risen King." If you missed Week One, feel free to use the link below to catch up. The good news is we're only in Week Two.

When we talk about being witnesses of the risen King, we must understand the most important fact of all: the church is not man's invention. Let me say that again—the church is not man's invention. There was no backroom secret meeting where the original disciples of Christ said, "Hey, I have a good idea. Let's start something called the church."

The biblical reality is that Jesus Himself established the church, and He declared that the gates of hell will never overpower it (Matthew 16:18). I don't know about you, but I find great joy in hearing those words from Jesus—especially knowing the many challenges we face in today's world.

Many people make the mistake of thinking the church is supposed to be perfect. The truth is that the church is made up of imperfect people. In Jesus' own words, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." If we're honest with ourselves, there are times when we become spiritually ill and need the Great Physician—Jesus—to heal and restore us.

This is also one of the great responsibilities of the church: to encourage, equip, empower, and build one another up. Yes, this is part of what it means to be witnesses of the risen King. Too often we think the Great Commission is only about missionary work overseas. While that is certainly part of it, we are also called to take care of each other right here.

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Did you catch that? The body of Christ is to be built up! As witnesses of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, let us be a people who encourage those who need the love of Jesus. Let us put away the judgmental spirit that so easily entangles us.

This Sunday we are going to dive deeper into what it truly means to be the church and to be witnesses of the risen King. Scripture tells us, "It's God's kindness that leads to

repentance” (Romans 2:4).

I would encourage you to come join us this Sunday as we explore many biblical truths that will help us become stronger Christians and stronger families.

I love you and your families!

In Christ,
Rev. Pastor Brad

To Listen to this week’s Sermon: “Week 2 Sermon Series: Witnesses of the Risen King” Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Text

1 Corinthians 3:9-11

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%203%3A9-11&version=NIV>

Romans 2:4

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%202%3A4%20&version=NIV>

Ephesians 4:11-13

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%204%3A11-13&version=NIV>

Hebrews 10:24-25

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2010%3A24-25%20&version=NIV>

Commentary, Spiritual Applications, and Theological Reflections

It’s Jesus’ Church - We are witnesses as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be witnesses of the risen Lord. This calling begins with a profound theological truth found in Jesus’ own words: “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against

it” (Matthew 16:18). This declaration reveals that the church is not a human invention or the result of a backroom idea among the original disciples. Instead, the church is built by Christ Himself in His capacity as the Son of the living God. Its permanence flows from its divine origin and sustenance—a gift of communion between Christ and His people. No power of death, Satan, or any annihilating force can ultimately overpower what Christ establishes, because it is firmly rooted in Him, the source of life itself.

This promise is not mere optimistic rhetoric. It demonstrates God’s absolute commitment to His redemptive plan. Through the church, God mediates salvation to the world. The saving presence of God abides in the church through Jesus Christ, making participation in the church central—not incidental—to how God works in history. At the same time, this assurance carries both comfort and challenge. While Christ guarantees the ultimate triumph of His church, this does not mean the church is already perfect in the present. Individual congregations may face struggles or even decline, but the global church continues as a ceaseless pilgrimage. God calls us to faithfulness now, even as He ensures that human rebellion, demonic opposition, and death itself cannot derail His purposes. The church’s indestructibility testifies not to our strength, but to divine determination.

This truth transforms how we understand our role as witnesses. Paul’s vision in 1 Corinthians 3 shows that God alone builds and nourishes the church, yet He invites us into partnership. We are “God’s fellow workers,” while the church itself is “God’s field” and “God’s building.” The emphatic focus on “God” underscores divine initiative and ownership—everything belongs to the Lord. In the agricultural metaphor, some plant and some water, but only God gives the growth. In the building metaphor, one lays the foundation (as Paul did with the gospel), while others build upon it through edification, wisdom, piety, and holiness. Each laborer receives an assignment from God and will be rewarded according to the quality of their work, not worldly measures of success.

This theology beautifully integrates divine sovereignty with human accountability. We do not labor according to our own vision or for institutional success alone. Instead, we participate in God’s construction project, with Jesus Christ as the only foundation. Our work—however humble—contributes to something eternal: the building up of Christ’s unshakeable kingdom.

As witnesses of the risen Lord, we are therefore called to live this out practically. The church, made up of imperfect people like us, exists to encourage, equip, empower, and build one another up. We must put away a judgmental spirit that so easily entangles us and instead extend the love and kindness of Christ that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Being a witness is not only about missionary work far away—it includes caring for one another right here, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all attain maturity and the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). Let us embrace this high calling with joy and faithfulness. The risen King has built His church on a rock that cannot be shaken. As His witnesses, may we labor together as God’s fellow workers, trusting Him for the growth and standing firm in the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail.

[Sources: 1-6]

It’s Jesus’ Church - We are witnesses

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be witnesses of the risen Lord. This calling begins with a profound theological truth found in Jesus' own words: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). This declaration reveals that the church is not a human invention or the result of a backroom idea among the original disciples. Instead, the church is built by Christ Himself in His capacity as the Son of the living God. Its permanence flows from its divine origin and sustenance—a gift of communion between Christ and His people. No power of death, Satan, or any annihilating force can ultimately overpower what Christ establishes, because it is firmly rooted in Him, the source of life itself.

This promise is not mere optimistic rhetoric. It demonstrates God's absolute commitment to His redemptive plan. Through the church, God mediates salvation to the world. The saving presence of God abides in the church through Jesus Christ, making participation in the church central—not incidental—to how God works in history. At the same time, this assurance carries both comfort and challenge. While Christ guarantees the ultimate triumph of His church, this does not mean the church is already perfect in the present. Individual congregations may face struggles or even decline, but the global church continues as a ceaseless pilgrimage. God calls us to faithfulness now, even as He ensures that human rebellion, demonic opposition, and death itself cannot derail His purposes. The church's indestructibility testifies not to our strength, but to divine determination.

This truth transforms how we understand our role as witnesses. Paul's vision in 1 Corinthians 3 shows that God alone builds and nourishes the church, yet He invites us into partnership. We are "God's fellow workers," while the church itself is "God's field" and "God's building." The emphatic focus on "God" underscores divine initiative and ownership—everything belongs to the Lord. In the agricultural metaphor, some plant and some water, but only God gives the growth. In the building metaphor, one lays the foundation (as Paul did with the gospel), while others build upon it through edification, wisdom, piety, and holiness. Each laborer receives an assignment from God and will be rewarded according to the quality of their work, not worldly measures of success.

This theology beautifully integrates divine sovereignty with human accountability. We do not labor according to our own vision or for institutional success alone. Instead, we participate in God's construction project, with Jesus Christ as the only foundation. Our work—however humble—contributes to something eternal: the building up of Christ's unshakeable kingdom.

As witnesses of the risen Lord, we are therefore called to live this out practically. The church, made up of imperfect people like us, exists to encourage, equip, empower, and build one another up. We must put away a judgmental spirit that so easily entangles us and instead extend the love and kindness of Christ that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Being a witness is not only about missionary work far away—it includes caring for one another right here, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all attain maturity and the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Let us embrace this high calling with joy and faithfulness. The risen King has built His church on a rock that cannot be shaken. As His witnesses, may we labor together as

God's fellow workers, trusting Him for the growth and standing firm in the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail.

[Sources:7-12]

The Sick Need the Great Physician

Jesus' declaration that physicians serve the sick, not the healthy, establishes the foundational purpose of Christian ministry: believers are called to participate in Christ's healing mission by meeting people where spiritual brokenness exists. The category of "the sick" designates the privileged recipients of the divine mission, and this transforms how Christians understand their calling to equip, encourage, empower, and build others up.

The sick encompasses far more than physical maladies—physical and mental illnesses symbolize the disruptive impact of sin, which isolates persons from community and threatens their inner sense of integrity and well-being. When Christians equip and encourage others, they function as agents of Christ's healing work. Just as the sick find free refuge, mercy, and healing in a hospital, so people who have sinned and gone astray should be urged to enter the church and repent, because the church is a hospital, not a court of justice.

The church's calling flows directly from Christ's example. Healing formed an essential component of Jesus' redemptive mission and that of his earliest followers, and in sending out his followers to continue his healing works, Jesus establishes the conditions for the creative cultivation and ongoing spread of this new culture in history. His acts of healing commonly had holistic impact—anthropologically, socially, and theologically—being linked to faith and forgiveness, restoration and salvation.

Yet this mission demands spiritual realism. Whenever the church becomes a community of spiritually healthy people, well-fed, all good people, successful people, among whom anyone who does not dare approach them is not truly welcome, then the cause of the gospel is betrayed. Christians empower others by acknowledging shared brokenness and extending mercy. The Lord testified that he came as the physician of the sick, saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners". When believers build people up, they mirror Christ's compassionate diagnosis and transformative healing.

[Sources: 13-15]

It's God's Kindness That Leads to Repentance

God's approach to transformation operates through mercy rather than judgment, and this reality should fundamentally reshape how Christians relate to one another.

Believers are called to "be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"—a pattern that mirrors divine compassion rather than human condemnation. When Christians embody this kindness, they become instruments through which God's transformative power reaches broken people.

The church's leadership structure exists precisely to cultivate this culture of grace. No Christian possesses all the gifts of the Spirit, and believers function as members of Christ's body where each part needs the others. This interdependence demands that

we abandon judgment and embrace mutual building up. Christians are to “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another”—a practice that strengthens community while preventing spiritual hardening.

A constant and helpful concern for fellow Christians represents every believer’s responsibility, making it possible to encourage one another in Christ while maintaining an attitude of love as the goal of all Christian activities. This requires deliberate rejection of judgment. Walking “in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” means demonstrating “all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love”—virtues that directly oppose the judgmental spirit.

The transformation happens through sustained community. The testimony, prayer, and fellowship of believers assembled together provides benefits that should never be overlooked, and though Christians should be willing to stand alone if necessary, God typically brings his children into assemblies where they labor and pray together because they actually need one another. When believers gather with genuine kindness rather than critical judgment, they create space where God’s mercy can do its redemptive work—transforming hearts not through condemnation but through the experience of being loved as Christ loves.

[Sources 16-17]

Matthew 16:18 Commentary Reflection

The commentary from Bruce B. Barton’s Life Application Bible Commentary on Matthew 16:18 provides a helpful overview of the four main historical interpretations of Jesus’ words: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.” It rightly notes the wordplay in the original languages—Jesus first met Simon and renamed him Peter (or Cephas in Aramaic/John 1:42), meaning “rock.” Here in Matthew, He expands its meaning in response to Peter’s confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), a truth revealed not by flesh and blood but by the Father in heaven (v. 17).

To fully understand why the church is ultimately built on Jesus Christ Himself—as the cornerstone, the true Rock in whom we place our trust—we must incorporate the broader biblical witness, especially the passages Peter himself later wrote and those from Paul and the apocalyptic vision of the New Jerusalem. These texts harmonize the role of Peter (and the apostles) with the supreme, unshakable foundation in Christ.

Peter’s Role as a Foundational Leader and Spokesman

Jesus’ statement emphasizes Peter (“You are Peter... on this rock”). In context, Peter served as the prominent leader and spokesman for the disciples and the early church, just as the commentary describes. In the Book of Acts, Peter initiates the selection of Judas’s replacement (Acts 1:15-26), preaches the inaugural sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41, where about 3,000 are added), speaks boldly before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4), and opens the door of faith to Samaritans and Gentiles (Acts 8 and 10). He acts as the

“foundation stone” or forerunner among the apostles because he first confessed Christ’s divine identity through divine revelation.

This aligns with interpretation #4 in the commentary: Peter as leader and spokesman of the disciples, the one who received insight into Christ’s identity. His role was real and significant—apostolic leadership helped launch and stabilize the early community—but it was never supreme in a hierarchical sense of succession or exclusive authority (no New Testament evidence supports that, and it would exclude non-Petrine churches, as the commentary notes). The “rock” language points first to Peter’s confession and his pioneering role, but it does not make him the ultimate foundation.

Jesus Christ: The Chief Cornerstone and Only True Foundation

Peter himself clarifies this in his first epistle, written decades later. He reminds believers that they are “living stones” being built into a spiritual house:

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’ ... ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,’ and ‘a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’” (1 Peter 2:4-8; quoting Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14)

Here, the same Peter who was called “rock” directs all attention to Jesus as the living stone and chief cornerstone. Believers are joined to this building only by faith in Him—the same faith Peter expressed in Matthew 16. Jesus is chosen and precious to God; rejection by men does not change that. For those who believe, He provides stability; for unbelievers, He becomes a stumbling stone. Peter explicitly identifies himself and the other apostles/prophets as part of the foundation layer, but always subordinate to Christ.

The Apostle Paul echoes this exactly in Ephesians 2:20-22:

“Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

The apostles (including Peter) and prophets form the foundational layer—bearing witness to Christ’s revelation—but Jesus Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone. In ancient architecture, the cornerstone was the primary stone that aligned the entire structure, set the direction, and bore the weight. Everything else is “fitted together” and grows in Him. The church is not a human institution centered on one man but a living temple indwelt by the Spirit, with Christ as its unbreakable alignment and support.

Paul reinforces the exclusivity of this foundation in 1 Corinthians 3:11: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Any other supposed foundation—whether personal charisma, human tradition, or even apostolic authority detached from Christ—will fail the test of fire on the Day of judgment. The church age (the “called-out people of God,” ekklesia, as the commentary notes)

exists between Christ's first and second coming precisely because He is building it on Himself.

Finally, the vision of the heavenly city in Revelation 21:14 shows the consummation: "Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

The apostles' names (with Peter first among equals in many lists) appear on the foundations of the New Jerusalem, but the city belongs to the Lamb (Jesus Christ, crucified and risen). The entire structure radiates from Him, the Lamb who is its light and temple (Revelation 21:22-23). This fulfills the promise that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" against the church (Matthew 16:18)—not because of Peter's strength, but because Satan's domain of death was defeated by Christ's cross and resurrection. The church's indestructibility flows from trust in the Rock who conquered death.

Synthesis: Built on Christ the Rock, with Peter as a Key Stone

Integrating these passages resolves the interpretive tensions in the Matthew 16 commentary:

- The "rock" includes Peter's confession and leadership role (emphatic "you" in "You are Peter"), as he was the spokesman who first voiced divine revelation and helped launch the church in Acts. This honors his pioneering place without abstraction.
- Yet Peter himself, Paul, and the broader New Testament insist that Jesus Christ is the true Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4 also recalls the Old Testament rock that followed Israel as Christ), the chief cornerstone, and the only foundation. We trust in Him alone for salvation, alignment, and endurance. All believers, like living stones, are built upon Him by faith—the same faith that led Peter to confess Christ publicly.
- This avoids Roman Catholic overemphasis on Petrine succession (unsupported by the texts) while also avoiding overly diminishing Peter's real, God-given role. The church is "built" by Jesus (the divine architect) on the bedrock of His identity, death, and resurrection, with apostles like Peter as essential but secondary witnesses.

In world religious history, this stands in contrast to systems built on human mediators, priestly castes, or institutional hierarchies detached from the founder. Biblical faith centers on the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord as the unmovable Rock (echoing Old Testament imagery of God as Rock in Deuteronomy 32, Psalms, and Isaiah). As Peter later wrote, we come to Him, the living Stone, and are built together into a spiritual house for God's glory.

The promise remains: gates of Hades (powers of death and evil) will not prevail because the church rests on Christ, who holds the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). Our trust is not in any man—even the great apostle Peter—but in the Cornerstone who was rejected by builders yet chosen by God. All who confess Him as Peter did, by revelation and faith, become part of this indestructible building.

[Sources: 18]

Ephesians 4:11-13 Commentary Reflection

The commentary from Bruce B. Barton and Philip Wesley Comfort on Ephesians 4:11–13 beautifully expands the New Testament vision of the church that begins in Matthew

16:18. There, Jesus declares to Peter, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” As explored previously, this “rock” honors Peter’s pioneering confession of faith (“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”) and his role as spokesman and leader among the apostles in the early chapters of Acts. Yet Scripture consistently redirects ultimate attention away from any single person or office to Jesus Christ Himself as the true foundation.

Peter later clarifies this in his own letter: believers come to the living Stone (Jesus), rejected by men but chosen by God, and are themselves built as living stones into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4–8). The apostles and prophets (including Peter) form a foundational layer, but Christ Jesus Himself is the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Paul states plainly: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). The church is not constructed around a human office, succession, or hierarchy detached from Christ. It is built on the Rock who is the divine Architect, the crucified and risen Savior, the One in whom we place our trust. Everything else—apostles, prophets, leaders—aligns under Him.

The Gifts Christ Gives: Equipping, Not Centralizing Office

Ephesians 4 builds directly on this foundation. After describing the church as God’s household “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20), Paul explains how the ascended Christ gives gifts to His church:

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11–13)

These gifted people are not given to monopolize ministry or create a clerical class that does the work while others watch. Apostles and prophets laid the once-for-all foundation (bearing eyewitness testimony to Christ and inspired revelation). Evangelists proclaim the gospel to new areas. Pastors (shepherds) and teachers guide and nourish local congregations. Yet their primary role is to equip the saints (all believers) so that every Christian can do the work of ministry and build up the body.

The word “equip” carries the idea of restoring, completing, or preparing—like mending a net or setting a broken bone—so that the whole body functions healthily. Ministry is not the exclusive domain of a few “professionals.” As the commentary rightly asks: “How many ministers are there in your church?” The biblical answer is all of them. Every believer is a minister, a living stone, and part of the royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10). We are all called to offer spiritual sacrifices—worship, service, proclamation, acts of love—and to declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness.

This vision stands against any view that reduces the church to a top-down institution centered on one office or succession. It is not about elevating a single “supreme leader” or creating a divide between “clergy” and “laity.” Instead, leaders equip, train,

encourage, and release the entire body so that we all grow. No one sits as a passive observer. Some may preach or teach; others may serve, give, show mercy, or evangelize in daily life. Together, through love and each part doing its work (Ephesians 4:16), the body builds itself up in maturity, attaining “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

This echoes the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20): the church makes disciples of all nations not by relying on a few superstars but as a community of equipped priests and ministers. In world religious history, many traditions concentrate sacred duties in a priestly caste or institutional hierarchy. Biblical Christianity, by contrast, democratizes ministry under Christ the Head—every believer has direct access to God through the one Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) and is called to active service. The Reformation recovered this “priesthood of all believers,” rooted in Peter’s own teaching and Paul’s instructions here.

The goal is profound: unity in the faith and intimate knowledge of the Son of God, growing into mature Christ-likeness as one body. This unity is not uniformity of gift or role but shared confession of Christ, mutual edification, and collective maturity. The church becomes a living temple where God dwells by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:21–22), indestructible because it rests on the Rock who conquered death.

In summary, Matthew 16:18 and Ephesians 4:11–13 together paint a dynamic picture: Jesus builds His church on the bedrock of His own identity and saving work, with Peter and the apostles as foundational witnesses. The gifted leaders He provides equip all Christians to do the works of ministry—encouraging, serving, proclaiming, and building one another up—so the whole body grows into the fullness of Christ. Our trust is not in any human office or structure, but in the Chief Cornerstone. Every believer is called, equipped, and commissioned. What is your ministry? How are you using your gifts to strengthen the body and advance the kingdom?

[Sources:19-21]

Hebrews 10: 24-25 Commentary

Reflection

10:24–25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. The third, fourth, and fifth let us statements appear in these two verses. Believers ought to consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. This word “spur” (paroxysm) means to “stimulate strongly,” “arouse,” or “incite to riot.” Christians need to spur or stimulate each other in two areas: (1) Love: not an emotion but a choice to act regardless of our feelings. We are to act lovingly toward other believers. (2) Good deeds: works done for the good of others, and which attract others to Christ. (For more on good deeds, see notes on 6:10; 13:16, 20–21.)

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Christians are to encourage one another. A word of encouragement offered at the right moment can be the difference between staying strong in the faith or collapsing along the way. Believers ought to be sensitive to one another's needs for encouragement, ready to offer supportive words or actions. The Bible gives several examples of encouragement and commands for believers to encourage each other (verses quoted from nrsv, italics ours):

Deuteronomy 3:28 "But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him. because it is he who shall cross over at the head of this people and who shall secure their possession of the land that you will see."

Acts 4:36 "There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement')."

Acts 15:32 "Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers."

Romans 12:6, 8 "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is ... encouraging, let him encourage" (NIV).

Romans 15:4–5 "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 6:22 "I am sending [Tychicus] to you for this very purpose, to let you know how we are, and to encourage your hearts."

1 Thessalonians 3:2 "We sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith."

1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11, 14 "Therefore encourage one another with these words ... encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing ... encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them."

2 Timothy 4:2 "Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable: convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching."

Philemon 1:7 "I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother."

Hebrews 3:13 "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (NIV).

1 Peter 5:12 "Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it."

Believers also must not give up meeting together. Some Christians (then as well as today) were in the habit of not going to the church meetings. For whatever reason, these believers were trying to survive on their own. This individualistic attitude is prevalent today, as well. God did not design Christians to be completely independent of

each other, however; he designed believers to need and encourage each other. To withdraw from corporate strength is to invite disaster, like a soldier in battle who lags behind the rest of his platoon and becomes an easy target.

Finally, believers must encourage one another. These words reveal that Christians are responsible for each other (a similar theme is found elsewhere, see 3:13). Christians cannot be concerned just for their own spiritual well-being; they must also encourage others to keep fervent in their love and active in their service to God. This encouragement should happen all the more as you see the Day approaching. This “day” (Christ’s return) is guaranteed; Christ will return. Through the centuries, many Christians have been discouraged because they believed that Christ should have already returned. But Christ has not forgotten, and he has not changed his plans. Christians must live as if the Lord will come back at any moment. Christ must not find us lax in our devotion and preparation.

CHURCHGOING

To neglect Christian meetings is to give up the encouragement and help of other Christians. We gather together to share our faith and to strengthen one another in the Lord. As we get closer to the day when Christ will return, we will face many spiritual struggles, and even times of persecution. Anti-Christian forces will grow in strength. Difficulties should never be excuses for missing church services. Rather, as difficulties arise, we should make an even greater effort to be faithful in attendance.

TOGETHER

In a former era, no one tried to compete with church for the Sunday morning time slot, a slot now regarded as open time to be filled by almost any recreational attraction. Yet gathering for worship is both an essential witness to Christ and a valuable time for spiritual nourishment. Want to grow as a Christian?

- Don’t go it alone. You have been called to participate in a wonderful “body,” the church, a large group of brothers and sisters.
- Don’t try to squeeze it in. Worship should be a top priority.
- Don’t rationalize when you skip church. Worshiping God with the body of believers cannot be substituted with personal study or watching a church service on television. Of course, physical limitations could keep you from attending a worship service. If so, ask some believers to come to your home for personal fellowship.

Resources:

Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Commentaries: [1] David R. Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God: An Introduction to Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 315–316. [2] Philip Kariatlis, *Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia* (Hindmarsh, SA / Redfern, NSW: ATF Press, 2020), 58–59. [3] David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today’s World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 208–209. [4] Mark Taylor, 1 Corinthians, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 28:104–105. [5] Robert Scott Nash, 1 Corinthians, ed. Leslie Andres and R. Alan Culpepper, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated, 2009), 112. [6] Fabrice S. Katembo, *The*

Mystery of the Church: Applying Paul's Ecclesiology in Africa (HippoBooks, 2020), 29–30. [7] David R. Bauer, *The Gospel of the Son of God: An Introduction to Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 315–316. [8] Philip Kariatlis, *Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia* (Hindmarsh, SA / Redfern, NSW: ATF Press, 2020), 58–59. [9] David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 208–209. [10] Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 28:104–105. [11] Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, ed. Leslie Andres and R. Alan Culpepper, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Incorporated, 2009), 112. [12] Fabrice S. Katembo, *The Mystery of the Church: Applying Paul's Ecclesiology in Africa* (HippoBooks, 2020), 29–30. [13] Peter G. Bolt and James R. Harrison, *Justice, Mercy, and Well-Being: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2020). [14] Arjan Plaisier, Steve J. Van der Welle, and Sierd Woudstra, *Deep Calls Unto Deep: Images of God's Bounty and Man's Response* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015). [15] Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark (Revised), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 29. [16] Tony Evans, *Horizontal Jesus Study Guide: How Our Relationships with Others Affect Our Experience with God* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2015). [17] Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, Everyman's Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 85–86. [18] Commentary from Bruce B. Barton's *Life Application Bible Commentary*. [19] Barton, Bruce B. 1996. *Matthew. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. [20] Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1996. *Ephesians. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. [21] Scriptural cross-references drawn from the New King James Version and broader biblical context (1 Peter 2, Ephesians 2, 1 Corinthians 3, etc.). Barton, Bruce B., David Veerman, Linda Chaffee Taylor, and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1997. *Hebrews. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Sermon Notes:

Week 2: Witnesses of the Risen King

Good morning and Happy Sunday to everyone... And welcome to those joining us online...

We are in a series titled: "Witnesses of the Risen King."

If you missed the first sermon, you can find it on any of our AVC Connections...
YouTube, App, Facebook/Website

[Let's Pray]

When we are talking about being witnesses of the Risen King... we must understand the most important fact of all...

The Church was NOT man's invention.

Make no mistake about it... Jesus' disciples didn't call a secret meeting and declare they had a bright idea...

Hear me... Jesus established the Church.

The Scriptures declare this over and over again...

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18:

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

- Gates of Hell will not destroy God's Church.

Apostle Paul says it like this: 1 Corinthians 3:9-11

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

- Fellow workers
- Jesus Christ foundation

As we examined last week, the Church started when Jesus came to earth and He called the 12... The Church quickly expanded to 72 and Jesus sent them on a short-term missions trip... (hands-on training to do what He did)

I am going to say what most pastors will never say: The Church is not perfect... No church is...

Some of you look real good on Sunday... but Monday through Friday is not looking so great...

I'm not judging anyone... I am just telling you what Jesus said...

Jesus said: "It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick..."

Can we be honest... We are in church...

Sometimes we become spiritually sick... And we need the Great Physician Jesus to help & heal us.

As "Witnesses of the Risen King" we are ALL called to do the following things:

- Encourage people
- Equip people
- Empower people
- Build people up

Friends... that's the good news of the Gospel... People need help and it's the Church's responsibility...

Spreading the Good News isn't a pastor thing, or are you required to have a Biblical Studies degree... (Almost half of Jesus' disciples were fishermen)

Do you realize what the Bible says:

"It's God's kindness that leads to repentance" — Romans 2:4

[High school cheerleading story]

When I was in high school I played 3 sports — football, basketball & baseball...

Here's the real & raw truth... Jesus doesn't need a bunch of cheerleaders

Jesus needs you in the game... You're all called by Christ to be in the game...

I want to close this morning with a couple of encouraging passages:

Ephesians 4:11-13

"And he gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Hebrews 10:24-25

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

We are ALL called to be witnesses of the Risen King... Amen.

Closing Prayer

Devotional Questions:

1. The Divine Builder

Jesus declared, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18).

How does recognizing that the church is Christ's own creation—not a human invention—change the way you view your local congregation and your personal role in it? In what area of church life do you need to trust more fully in the risen King as the unshakeable Rock and Chief Cornerstone?

2. The Only Foundation

Paul writes, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building... For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:9-11).

Reflect on times when you or your church have unintentionally built on something other than Christ (programs, personalities, traditions, or personal preferences). What practical

steps can you take this week to ensure Jesus remains the sole foundation in your daily life and relationships?

3. The Great Physician and the Sick

Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” The sermon reminds us that the church is made up of imperfect people who sometimes become spiritually sick and need healing.

Where in your own life do you currently need the Great Physician, Jesus, to bring healing and restoration? How can you extend that same grace and kindness (Romans 2:4) to someone else in the body of Christ who may be struggling this week?

4. God’s Kindness Leads to Repentance

Scripture tells us, “It’s God’s kindness that leads to repentance” (Romans 2:4). The commentary emphasizes that we must put away a judgmental spirit and instead encourage one another with the love and kindness of Christ.

Think of a recent situation where you were tempted to judge rather than encourage. How can you intentionally practice God’s kindness this week in your interactions at church, home, or work so that it might lead others (and yourself) closer to repentance and restoration?

5. Equipping the Saints for Ministry

Ephesians 4:11-13 states that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith... to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

The sermon stresses that every believer—not just pastors—is called to encourage, equip, empower, and build others up. What specific gifts or abilities has God given you? How are you currently using them (or how could you begin using them) to equip and build up other Christians rather than remaining a spectator?

6. Get in the Game

Using the high school cheerleading story from the sermon: Jesus does not need cheerleaders—He has angels—but He calls every follower to be “in the game” as active witnesses. Hebrews 10:24-25 commands us to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” and to keep meeting together for encouragement.

In what ways have you been more of a cheerleader (watching from the sidelines) than a player in the mission of the church? What is one concrete way you can “get in the game” this week by encouraging, equipping, or building up another believer?

7. Maturity and the Fullness of Christ

The ultimate goal in Ephesians 4:13 is that we all reach “unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

As a witness of the risen King, how would your daily walk with Christ and your involvement in the church look different if you were intentionally pursuing this maturity together with other believers? What one step of obedience—whether in gathering, encouraging, or serving—will you take this week to help the body of Christ grow toward the stature of Christ?