

MBC – 8/31/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson – final Message  
***“The Church’s One Foundation”***  
 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

This morning will be my last sermon at MBC, for a while anyway. My first sermon was on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1990 - 32 years and 4 months ago. The Sunday before that, I preached my last sermon at The Shepherd’s Community Church down in Woodland Hills, where I had served as the founding pastor for 6 ½ years. The next Sunday I was here – I didn’t get one Sunday off!

And this has been our family ever since. Pastor Martin from the RAV church said, “You’ve been here for almost half your life!” And it’s been my life – our lives – for Janice and me, and even our grown kids still say MBC is their home church since they grew up here and made lifelong friends here. My kids were all baptized here, I married my two daughters here. One of my grandsons was dedicated here – before he was sprinkled. . .

And we’ve been here for holidays, weddings, births and burials; a lot of laughing, and some crying; floods and fires and evacuations. We came before cell phones and the internet (you young people think that was before the Great Flood). There was just one stop light in town – no Wal-Mart, no HVL Hardesters. Our sanctuary here was just an octagon with no lobby – the bathrooms were where the sound booth is – and yes, you could hear the toilet flush during sermons.

We didn’t have the high school classrooms – that whole area was just a gravel parking lot for the Cobb folks! There was no pavilion or lawn – it was all dirt and star thistle. No message sign. We had no sound system – there was a small speaker in the podium I preached from and we recorded the sermons on cassettes with a Sony Walkman that sat on the podium, and I usually knocked it off while I was preaching!

We communicated a lot, but it was very different: The prayer chain was a telephone chain – we all used landline phones. We had a printed monthly newsletter – no website or email. Instead of our nifty online church directory, we had an Olan-Mills pictorial directory, and Caryn Rivers and I both used a Rolodex to find church numbers!

We’re going to share more memories after lunch. A lot has changed over the 43 years since MBC started, but the foundation has remained the same. I want to talk about the church’s one foundation this morning—

- 1 Corinthians 3:9–17 <sup>9</sup>For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building. <sup>10</sup>According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup>each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has

done. <sup>14</sup>If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

The building Paul is talking about here isn't bricks and mortar or 2X4's and glue-lams, it's the most precious building imaginable: *God's building*, His church: "*God's temple is holy and you (plural) are that temple!*" In Solomon's Temple, God's shekinah glory hovered above the mercy seat, in between the two golden cherubim on the ark of the covenant. But now His personal presence dwells in this flesh and blood Temple we call *Middletown Bible Church*.

Beloved, this is where God hangs out. Amazing.

Paul says that he laid the foundation for the church at Corinth, and that foundation was Jesus Christ – he means the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified, risen and ascended into heaven for sinners. This is what creates the church, it literally brings it into being, amen? The preaching of the Good News about Jesus Christ is what brought MBC into existence. We love to sing—

The Church's one foundation, is Jesus Christ her Lord,  
She is His new creation, by water and the Word.  
From heaven He came and sought her, to be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.

In Cor.3, Paul's concern is that the church at Corinth would continue to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ. And beloved that is my concern for this dear church, as we move on from here: things will continue to change in the years to come – prayer requests will probably be sent telepathically, or something. And that's OK as long as you *continue to build* on the foundation of the Gospel of Christ. And MBC will rise or fall, will suffer loss or receive reward on the Day of Judgment, based upon how you continue to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

\*It's as though, on the day that God judges our works, He will put a match to all this church has done. Some of it won't survive, but what is it that will withstand the holy fire of God's scrutiny on that day?

- What is the silver, gold, silver and precious stones that fire *won't* destroy? If preaching Christ is what laid the foundation for this church, then preaching Christ is the way you will continue to build on it. You don't move on to another building material. You must keep preaching Christ. And what is built on the Gospel of Christ is what will survive on that day.

And what is not, won't.

Now I know that some people hear this and think, “That sounds nice, but you don’t really mean that people should come to church Sunday after Sunday after Sunday and hear Jesus, Jesus, Jesus? Oh, that’s exactly what I mean, because this is the way that Paul himself built on the foundation of Christ that he had laid. Preaching Christ wasn’t just his philosophy of church-*planting*, but it was also his philosophy of church-*building*:

- 1Co 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,
- 1Co 2:2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Several months later Paul wrote the Corinthians again. He repeats himself:

- 2Co 1:19 . . . the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you,
- 2Co 4:5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

This wasn’t just homiletic hyperbole. He meant what he said: every aspect of His ministry revolved around preaching and teaching the message and meaning of Jesus Christ crucified; and how to live out the implications – that *was* the ministry to Paul, nothing more, and nothing less.

\*We’ve said many times that in most of Paul’s letters, the first half deals with the indicatives of our faith: the meaning of Jesus’ atoning death for sinners; and the second half of his letters deals with the imperatives of our faith – how we should live in light of our glorious salvation. But it *all* relates back to Jesus.

- I have to be honest: I kinda scratch my head when I read about churches having all these plans, goals, programs and visions for the church. From what I read in Scripture we’re simply to be faithful to preach and teach Christ and let God do the rest.
- Remember what Paul said to the Galatians – his ministry there consisted of “placarding Christ crucified” – painting the picture of the crucifixion and explaining the meaning of that crucifixion, over and over. With Paul it was “all Jesus, all the time.”

Let me give you 3 reasons why—

### **I. Because Jesus Christ is the theme of all Scripture.**

And because this is true, then expository preaching equals *preaching Christ*. Jesus told the Pharisees, those masters of minutiae--

- Joh 5:39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.

And this wasn't just an offhand comment, Jesus was giving us a comprehensive hermeneutical key: *The key to unlocking Scripture is to understand that all of Scripture bears witness of Jesus Christ.*

- Listen to Luther: "Jesus Christ is the center and circumference of the Bible, and to miss Christ as the center of Scripture is to remain in darkness and ignorance. Those who miss Christ in the Scriptures understand no article of Christian teaching: what sin is, what man's ability is, how one gets rid of sin and becomes righteous, what Law or Gospel is, what faith is, what good works are. . . [such a man] should let the Bible rest in peace. This is my advice. He will certainly take offense and become blinder and madder the longer he studies."

You can preach the Bible and be un-biblical. You can teach Bible stories and Bible doctrines, and be thoroughly un-biblical if you've missed the main point of the Bible, which is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Jesus told those Pharisees that they understood nothing of the Scriptures because they missed Him in the Scriptures:

- Joh 5:46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me.

But it wasn't only Moses who bore witness of Christ in the Scriptures—

- Luk 24:25-27 Jesus said this to those two on the road to Emmaus: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning himself. [a little later He was with His disciples--]
- Luk 24:44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Jesus was referring to the entirety of the OT Scriptures: From Genesis to Malachi. Beloved, Jesus gives you and me permission to see Him in all the Scriptures, *and we are called fools and slow of heart if we don't.*

You remember the story of Philip meeting up with the Ethiopian eunuch who "coincidentally" was reading from the scroll of Isaiah at what we call ch.53, written 600 years before Christ?

- Act 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him *the good news about Jesus.*

Well that's not hard when you are in Isa.53. But the implication is that you can begin with any Scripture and get to *the good news about Jesus*, because He is in all the Scriptures.

\*The longer I preach this book, the more of Christ I see in its pages, and that's because He is there. Look with me at—

- 1Co 10:4 speaking of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness - For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

Paul saw presence of the pre-incarnate Christ Himself caring for those Israelites, but look at—

- 1Co 10:9 We must not put *Christ* to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents.

Some Gk. mss. say "Lord," but the earliest mss. say "Christ." When they grumbled against God, they were grumbling against Christ. Amazing. And let me show you one more:

- Jud 1:5 Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that *Jesus*, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

Again, the best mss. don't say "Lord," they say "Jesus." He was there at Creation, there in the Garden, there at the Passover, there when the bronze serpent was lifted up in the wilderness; He was there in every facet of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple; there in every feast, in every sacrifice – from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Malachi, and in the NT, He is there from His birth in Matthew to His return in Revelation, where John writes—

- Rev 19:10 "*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" Or as the NLT puts it: "The essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus." The Bible is the Jesus Book, and every story whispers His Name!

Then how could you accurately expound the Scriptures and *not* speak of Him?

- A pastor friend of mine lamented to me that he preached an entire series on Nehemiah and never once mentioned Jesus Christ except when he closed in prayer. Another pastor told me that after he had preached on the attributes of God for six weeks one of his elders came to him and said, "Are you aware that you haven't mentioned Jesus once?" But how can you preach God's attributes without mentioning the One who is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature? The One in whom all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form? The One who said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father?"

Beloved, if Christ is the theme of all of Scripture, then preaching Christ *is* expository preaching. *He is the context of every text.*

Second, preach Christ—

## II. Because preaching Christ edifies the saints.

Sometimes I think we give the impression that we start the Christian life with Jesus and the Gospel, but then we move on to deeper things. But Paul says to keep building on the foundation of Christ. When I was preaching through Romans here, years ago, God stopped me in my tracks right in the first chapter:

- Rom 1:15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

I thought, “But Paul, they’re already saved. Shouldn’t you move on--do F.O.F. or something?”

No, Paul meant what he said: He was never finished with the gospel of Christ. Nothing was more edifying to the saints, nothing was deeper or more profound, and nothing would do more to produce Christians who look like Jesus than the Gospel of Christ. Look with me at the end of Romans—

- Rom 16:25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ . . .

Nothing will strengthen your faith and your joy like hearing again and again, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in all its richness and fullness and depth.

- Col 1:28 Him we proclaim, (Jesus) warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature *in Christ*.

I.e., We preach and teach Christ to produce people who walk and talk and love like Christ. So if the *goal* of our ministry is Christ-likeness, then the *content* of our preaching must be Christ. Where are Christians to look as they run the race set before them?

- HEB 12:2 “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith,” [the beginner and the finisher of our faith.] Fix your eyes on the One who saves and sanctifies, the One who made atonement and now makes intercession.

So if our people need to look to Jesus, then it’s our job to hold Him up so they can see Him; set Him forth so they can behold Him. I love how Paul put it in—

- 2CO 2:14 when Paul and the others came to Troas, their preaching “spread the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.”

It was a strong smell, this fragrance of Christ, for unbelievers it was *a fragrance from death to death*, but for believers, it was *a fragrance from life to life*.

\*Sunday mornings at MBC should be a time when God’s people see, hear, and even smell the fragrance of Christ in the words that come forth from this pulpit. The flock will be edified when they see Jesus as *their* living water, *their* Bread from heaven, *their* Good Shepherd, *their* sympathetic High Priest interceding on *their* behalf to the Father. This congregation needs to say your new pastor, “*You can have all this world, but give us Jesus.*”

Third, continue to preach Christ—

### III. Because revealing Christ is the Holy Spirit’s purpose in all of Scripture.

It’s the Holy Spirit who put Christ in all the Scriptures. In 1 Peter 1, Peter says that it was the “*the Spirit of Christ,*” that led the prophets to write of His sufferings and the glory to follow. Jesus told His disciples that through their inspired New Testament writings, the HS would *testify* of Him, and *glorify* Him. I.e., the Holy Spirit’s purpose *in all of Scripture* is to bear witness of Jesus Christ, and glorify Him.

\*Let me tie this into expository preaching. Expository preaching is finding the Holy Spirit’s purpose in the text and preaching that purpose. *So unless we preach the Scriptures in a Christ-centered way, the Spirit’s purpose and power in the Scriptures will elude us.*” (repeat)

- J. C. Ryle, made this bold statement: “The cross of Christ is the strength of the minister; it is the heart of the gospel. I would not preach a sermon without preaching Christ crucified. I would feel like a soldier without a weapon, like an artist without a brush, like a ship without a rudder, like a laborer without his tools . . . This is the lever which has turned the world upside down. . . This is the only message which can give peace to a troubled soul. . . This is the preaching the Holy Spirit will bless. He honors those who honor Christ crucified.”

Years ago I preached a chapel at the Master’s Seminary down in L.A., I got to preach it from John MacArthur’s pulpit – quite a privilege. And I preached to those seminarians on preaching Jesus in all the Scriptures. It stirred up quite a storm there! Many men came up to me and said the message really moved them, but others said, “We went back to class and our profs said that you were wrong: we should only preach Christ if He’s in the passage.”

But He is there, Jesus said He is there, because the Holy Spirit put Him there! In some way, every passage of Scripture is either *predictive* of the work of Christ, *preparatory* for the work of Christ, or *reflective* on the work of Christ. But cut the Bible anywhere and it bleeds Jesus.

- It’s like this: you can say a lot of things about an acorn: it’s brown, has a little cap, it is gathered by squirrels--but if you never relate an acorn to an oak tree, you haven’t really explained an acorn. And until you explain how a passage relates to the over-arching theme of God sending His Son to rescue lost sinners, you haven’t adequately explained that passage and its place in the Word of God.

I want the search committee to pay attention to this quote from Bryan Chappell, because you need to make sure that any candidate you interview understands this: “Faithful expository preaching unfolds every text in the context of its redemptive import. The success of this endeavor can be assessed by a bottom-line question every preacher should ask at the end of each sermon: ‘When my listeners walk out the doors of this sanctuary to perform God’s will, with whom do they walk? If they march to battle the world, the flesh, and the devil with only me, myself and I, then each parades to despair. However, if the sermon has led all persons within sight of the Savior and they now walk into their world with His hand firmly in their grasp, then hope and victory brighten the horizon. Whether people depart alone or in the Savior’s hand will mark the difference between futility and faith, legalism and true obedience, do-goodism, and real godliness.”

- *People should leave church not so much gripped by what they must do, as they are empowered by what Christ has done.”*

Beloved, that’s how MBC will continue to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones – keep preaching Christ.

\*And let me say this: A church is not necessarily building on the foundation of Christ just because it’s a movin’, grooving, place – packed with people, growing, everyone involved, programs for old people, young people and everyone in between – I read these comments from some teens who couldn’t be more happy with their church—

- **Stetson S.:** There’s so much to look forward to and so much hope that the gospel brings into our lives.
- **Parker J.:** With the gospel, you feel a lot of joy. You’re just happy and you feel like this is the place where you need to be.
- **David L.:** There’s such a good group of friends, and I know I’m not going to be exposed to anything I’m not going to be comfortable around.
- **Dalton T.** I really love that we know where we’re going—that everything doesn’t just end at death. There is life after death, and we’ll be able to see our loved ones again.
- **Erin P.:** Whenever I have a trial or a hardship, I know it’s sent to me for a reason and it’s meant for me to become stronger.

We would *love* to hear our teens say these things about this church! But these teens were saying it about the Mormon Church – and as happy as they are with their church, if they follow its teachings they will lose their souls.

Building on the foundation of Jesus Christ will not necessarily look successful or exciting, or big. It might not attract much attention this side of heaven—

- Isn’t it interesting that wood, hay, and stubble are all above the ground where everyone can see them. They catch the eye. Gold, silver and precious stones are all below the ground, unseen to the human eye. But in the day when God judges how churches have



built, much of what was flashy and popular and *mega*, will go up in smoke – while the faithful, consistent proclaiming of Christ will last for eternity. Jesus called that *“fruit that remains.”*

The deed to this property was signed over to us in 1984 by Howard Peterson. It’s ours until Jesus comes back – unless we stop preaching the Gospel, in which case it reverts back to Machinery Credit Corporation of California. This brick building and this campus will probably be here in another 43 years – but will it still be a church of Jesus Christ? That depends completely on how you continue to build. A pastor friend of mine wrote this years ago—

- Art Azurdia: “Preach Christ Jesus the Lord. Determine to know nothing among your people, but Christ crucified. Let His name and grace, His spirit and love, triumph in the midst of all your sermons. Let your great end be, to glorify Him in the heart, to render Him amiable and precious in the eyes of His people, to lead them to Him, as a sanctuary to protect them, a propitiation to reconcile them, a treasure to enrich them, a physician to heal them, an advocate to present them and their services to God, as wisdom to counsel them, as righteousness to justify, as sanctification to renew, as redemption to save. *Let Christ be the diamond to shine in the bosom of all your sermons.”*

Middletown Bible Church, if you stay committed to this, you will be building with gold, silver, and precious stones. And what is built here will remain for eternity because it was built on *Christ*.

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- Matthew 7:24–27 <sup>24</sup>“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup>And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup>And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. <sup>27</sup>And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”