

FUNDAMENTAL LIST – 6 of 7

The Church Is God's Agent for Transformation Personally, Culturally, and Globally

September 8, 2024

INTRODUCTION We're asking the question, **WHAT MUST WE BELIEVE IN ORDER TO BE A FAITHFUL FOLLOWER OF JESUS?**

We started week one with this first fundamental.

NUMBER ONE: JESUS IS GOD'S SON AND OUR KING.

It's the one that all the others derive from.

NUMBER TWO: JESUS CAME TO ILLUSTRATE AND DEMONSTRATE WHAT GOD IS LIKE.

Jesus said if you want to know what the Father is like, look at how I live my life.

NUMBER THREE: JESUS DEFINED SIN AS ANYTHING THAT HARMS YOU OR OTHERS.

And the reason is because God is love and God loves you, and He doesn't want you to harm yourself or other people. And He promised that one day He's going to set everything right and there will be a final judgment.

NUMBER FOUR: JESUS PROMISED JUSTICE IN THE END AND INVITES US TO TRUST HIM IN THE MEANTIME.

When things don't seem like they're going the right way in the world, when we feel like somebody needs to do something about this, Jesus says, **"I'm planning to. But because of My mercy, I'm going to delay My judgment."** And in delaying His judgment...

NUMBER FIVE: JESUS DIED FOR YOUR SIN TO RECONCILE YOU TO GOD.

He delayed His judgment, and willingly took on the penalty Himself in his grace, and He paid the payment for us.

In week one, we said that this fundamental, **Jesus is God's son and our King** is the reference point for all the rest. And the question He asks is, **“Who do you believe the Son of Man is?”**

And some think Elijah, and other people think John the Baptist, and some people think Jeremiah, and others believe one of the other prophets.

And then Jesus turned to them and said in Matthew 16:15,

15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Who do you say that I am?

Verse 16, ***16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”***

Verse 17 says, ***17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.***

Basically saying, this is something that was revealed to you and it's foundationally important. He says, **“Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but my Father in Heaven.”**

Verse 18, ***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.***

So, what is the rock? This is a word play. He's using this nickname he's given Simon, and he says, **“Your name is Petros, and like your name, I'm going to build My church on this rock.**

The rock being the declaration of faith that you just made, the fundamental and foundational nature of your declaration of faith in Me as the ultimate authority, as your Savior.

On this rock, on this faith in Me as your ultimate authority,” Jesus says, **“I will build My gathering of followers.”** And that's how it happened.

And the Apostle Paul clarified this. He said this in 1 Corinthians 12:12, ¹²*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.*

He's basically saying, the body of Christ has many parts, and it's unnatural and dysfunctional for the human body to be dismembered. In the same way that that's the case, the same is true of the body of Christ.

And his landing or summary statement is this in verse 27, ²⁷*All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.*

Christ passed this baton not to an individual, He passed this baton to a body of believers who exhibit faith by saying,

“You're the ultimate authority and I'm going to surrender my life to You, not each of us on our own, again, but a collection of people who are gathering together to represent Jesus.”

The absolute center of what God does to help us change is to reveal Himself to us, to give us a taste of what He's really like and to pour His life into us.

And a critical element in the revealing process is to place us in a community of people who are enough like Him to give us that taste firsthand, a gathering. The reason is because...

NUMBER SIX: THE CHURCH IS GOD'S AGENT FOR TRANSFORMATION PERSONALLY, CULTURALLY, AND GLOBALLY.

The church is how we experience Jesus, and we experience Jesus in the body when the body gathers together, because the body gathering together is a representation of Jesus.

So, when we gather in the body, we experience the transformational power of Jesus personally, and as we become more like Jesus in the Body of Christ,

we become agents of cultural and global change in the world around us. It's the way Jesus designed it to work.

In fact, Jesus came to be with us, Emmanuel. This is what we celebrate at Christmas and Emmanuel, God with us. God came to relate and restore and to reconcile and to redeem.

If the physical presence of God wasn't important, Jesus would have stayed in heaven. Why would He have come? Why did He need to come?

It's because incarnation is important, and when Jesus left the Earth, He passed the baton to you and to me, and He sent His Spirit to empower us collectively.

Not just individually, but collectively, to be His representation, to be His agent of transformation for each other in each other's lives,

As we speak truth and we encourage and we challenge and we build up one another, but also His agent of transformation culturally, globally.

But there's been a cultural shift, and many view the gathering or the attending church as non-essential.

During COVID, all non-essential services shut down. So only essential services kept going and the church stopped gathering in-person. And we know we didn't stop gathering. We gathered online.

But that wasn't the perception of many outside and inside the church. It's like, "**Oh, this isn't essential.**"

And there was fallout from that, it accelerated something that was already beginning. In fact, the Barna Group did a study on the state of the church, and they did a study that looked at trends over a 10-year period.

The study was done right near the end of 2020, and they were looking at the period from 2010 to 2020 in America.

They discovered that practicing Christians, who attended church and read their Bible and were in Bible study, and in groups that were active in their faith, actively gathering part of a local church...

practicing Christians dropped from 47% in 2010 to 25% in 2020, almost in half, and in the same period, non-practicing Christians rose from 33% to 43%, and during the same period,

non-Christians, people who said they don't affiliate with faith, shifted from 20% to 32%.

Did you know that for the first time in American history, non-practicing Christians is greater than practicing Christians?

So, after decades of Christians disconnecting from the local church people see the church as being non-essential.

So, the question we're asking is, is the church essential? Here's the thing, is the gathering of the church, is the people attending church, is you showing up here in a local body and interacting with other believers. Is that essential?

I would tell you, because of the way things are trending, it's more essential than ever, and we can't have too many of these churches.

And as we gather together, we experience a transformational power of Jesus. But the next logical question is, with so many people having such an unfavorable view of the church, is the church salvageable?

Here's what Jesus said when he said to Peter, **“On this rock, your confession, this foundational fundamental confession that I'm the authority and people are choosing to submit their life to me on that sort of faith.**

I'm going to build my church. And here's the thing I want you to know. On that foundation, I'm going to build my church, and the gates of Hades are not going to overcome it.”

This is Jesus basically saying, **“The same power that raised me from the dead, will make my church move forward.”**

And against all odds, the first church started amongst the Jewish people. And it spread to the Greeks and the Romans. It transformed, it actually toppled and transformed the Roman Empire.

It swept across Europe, and it shaped the West. It shaped the culture in which we live in now. And it happened as those people who claim faith in Jesus as they gathered, as they continued to show up for one another,

and show up in their communities and show up for people around them, expressing the love of Jesus. Showing up was a core essential in the First Church amongst the first believers.

In fact, that's why the writer of Hebrews encouraged him in Hebrews 10:23-24, *²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—

The habit of meeting together was a central practice. It was maybe the most important practice of the early Jesus followers. It was not optional, it was essential.

They saw the gathering of God's people as God's primary vehicle for building up the body, and reaching out to people who were outside the body. So I just want to push you a little bit today.

Look, if you've gotten out of the habit of meeting together, it's time to change that habit.

Paul is encouraging you, that the gathering is essential to you experiencing the transformation of God in your life.

It's essential. I don't want you to feel like guilt, this isn't me like shaming you.

I'm just saying there's an opportunity, there's an invitation. I don't need anything from you, but I want something for you. And the reality is, gathering with the local church is how God's transformational power gets unlocked in your life.

It's how it gets unlocked in our communities, and the world around us. That's why our mission as a church is to inspire people to follow Jesus, by engaging them in the life and the mission of the local church.

We believe the local church is God's hope for the world.

Engagement in the body of Christ is God's special agent of transformation for those within the body, for our next door neighbors, and for the next generation. It's how he's delivering life and hope and meaning to the world around us.

When you show up for each other, for each other's families, when you show up and just even when you don't know what your part is, the Scripture says you're a part of the body.

When you show up, it matters. When you show up, you fulfill your role as part of the body. God uses people in the body to spur one another on, to encourage one another, to love one another, to care for one another, to build one another up when we can't do it on our own.

He knew we would need each other, and so we didn't leave it up to one person. He passed the baton to a gathering because active gatherings of believers activate God's transformational power in our world.

Miraculous things happen in our lives and the lives of those around us. When we gather and each one plays our part, marriages are transformed and God, through His Spirit, restores families.

Hearts are mended, addictions are broken, purpose is realized, lives are rescued forever, forever. Choosing to show up and engage in the life and mission of the church can make all the difference for you and for somebody else around you.

It has made all the difference for so many, and it will continue to make all the difference in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Because, **NUMBER SIX: THE CHURCH IS GOD'S AGENT FOR TRANSFORMATION PERSONALLY, CULTURALLY, AND GLOBALLY.**

So let's make it a habit of showing up for each other on Sundays. But not just on Sundays, on Monday through Saturday, throughout the week in homes, on Sunday afternoons with students.

Let's make a habit of continuing to show up for our next-door neighbors and the next generation. Let's show up for each other, and I believe each of us will experience the transformation that God has for us.

And maybe just maybe people's view of Christians at least in our communities will be transformed as well.

THE END