Valley View Chapel
August 7, 2016
Believe, Part 6
“The Church”

I BELIEVE THE CHURCH IS GOD’S PRIMARY WAY TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES ON EARTH.

Introduction

In preparation for today’s message, I went through my file searching for items about the “Church.” Here’s a sampling of the headlines:

“Church Membership Slips”

“Dwindling Congregations”

“Presbyterians Slash Budget $7 Million”

“National Council of Churches Faces Uncertain Future”

Congregation Says Goodbye...Uptown Church Closes After 92 Years”

“Report Says Church Attendance Is Half What Studies Claim”

Empty Pew Syndrome Growing”

In a study entitled “What the Polls Don’t Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance“, three scholars in the fields of sociology and religion uncovered some shocking statistics. Kirk Hadaway of the United Church Mission Board for Homeland Ministries, Penny Long Marler of Samford University and Mark Chaves of Notre Dame discovered that only approximately 20 percent of Protestants and 28 percent of Roman Catholics attend church in any given week. This seriously contradicts the work of pollster George Gallup whose surveys indicated that 45 percent of Protestants and 51 percent of Roman Catholics attend church services at least weekly.

Hadaway, Marler and Chaves claim that the discrepancy is easy to understand. Gallup simply asked people whether or not they attended church while they actually measured hard data on church attendance.

The survey results revealed that many people in America are “turned-off” on church. Something happened between the first century and the twenty-first.

In the first century, the church was the most dynamic, relevant, and transformational movement in the world. That can hardly be said today, at least in the western world.

Is there hope that the church might regain her place of leadership, influence and authority?

Let’s repeat today’s essential doctrinal truth together:

I BELIEVE THE CHURCH IS GOD’S PRIMARY WAY TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES ON EARTH.

The Importance of the Church
To answer this question, we need to take a look at what the Bible says about the church.

The Greek word for church - *ekklesia* - means “those who have been called-out.” I Peter 2:9 describes what this means: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

The church consists of men and women, boys and girls who have been chosen by God, called out by God as his people and belong to God. Members of Christ’s Church have abandoned the darkness of spiritual error and entered the kingdom of God’s truth.

The New Testament never used the word “church” to mean a building. The church always meant people who identified themselves with Jesus Christ through conversion and baptism and with one another through commitment to a local church.

The “Church” in the New Testament meant two things.

First, there is the universal church which is comprised of every person - past, present, and future - who belongs to Christ.

But when the New Testament used the word “church,” it most often had the local church in mind. In fact, 9 of Paul’s 13 epistles were addressed to local churches. The local church is where God intended for most of the spiritual action to take place.

The New Testament taught a strong commitment to the local church by those who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ.

One of the verses that ought to shape the core values of Valley View Chapel is Acts 2:42, a verse that we heard last week in Pastor Andrew’s message on the vision and values of Valley View Chapel: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

The word “devoted” means “to be earnest towards,” “to be constantly diligent.”

The first-century church that turned the world upside down for Christ did not consider times of worship, teaching, prayer and fellowship to be optional. Commitment to the church was not something “fit-in” around the other responsibilities and interests of life. Rather, other responsibilities were “fit-in” around the purposes and mission of the church.

Hebrews 10:25 urged the people of God: “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 Bible never suggested that we have the right to be careless toward church services and fellowship opportunities.

After more than 42 years as a pastor, I have observed without exception that one of the first signs of spiritual decline in a Christian’s life is when he or she misses the public services and fellowship times of the church. People who are growing, fruitful, and excited about their relationship with Jesus Christ rarely miss an opportunity to worship, pray, learn, and serve together with those who love the Lord.

Winston Churchill was once asked: “Are you a pillar of the church?” He replied: “I’m more
like a flying buttress. I support it from the outside."

Nobody supports the church “from the outside.” A professing Christian without a committed relationship to a local church is like an organ without a body, a sheep without a flock, or a child without a family.

In his best-selling book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Rick Warren wrote: “You were called to belong, not just believe.”

If you only attend Valley View Chapel occasionally, I invite you to become fully involved in the exciting and eternally meaningful life that we share together. Commit to weekly attendance at public worship. Join a small group or Bible study. Become involved in a ministry. Invest your tithes and offerings in the work that God is doing through this fellowship. Identify with us fully in church membership. If you believe in our message and in what we’re doing, then go all the way! Discover the satisfaction of total commitment to a people and to a cause that is greater than yourself.

**The Identity of the Church**

We have seen the *importance* of the church from the Word of God. Let’s look at the *identity* of the church as it was articulated by *The Apostles’ Creed*.

First, the church is called “holy.” There are two kinds of holiness in the Bible.

First, there is *positional* holiness.

Positional holiness is inseparably linked to the doctrine of *justification*. The Apostle Paul wrote extensively about the correlation between positional holiness and justification. I only have time to cite two references.

Romans 5:1 – “Therefore, since we have been *justified* through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....”

Galatians 2:16 – “Know that a man is not *justified* by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be *justified* by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be *justified*.”

When we repent of our sins, trust in the work of Christ on the cross to pay for our sins, and ask Jesus to come and live in our hearts by faith, God removes our sin and replaces it with the righteousness, the perfection, and the holiness of Jesus Christ. So, judicially, legally, and positionally, we appear in the sight of God just as if we had never sinned. That is called *justification* or “positional holiness.”

But Christians are also called to *personal holiness*. Our outward conduct should give evidence of the presence of Christ in our lives. Paul constantly urged the recipients of his letters to maintain a high level of personal holiness.

Ephesians 5:3 – “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s *holy* people.”

Colossians 3:12 – “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, *holy* and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”
1 Thessalonians 4:7 – “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a *holy* life.”

To be “holy” means that have been “separated” by God from other people to live uniquely for him. “Holy” people live differently from those who are not holy.

“Holy” people live by the principle of purity instead of license; by the principle of selflessness instead of greed; by the principle of humility instead of pride; by the principle of servanthood instead of self-interest.

The Apostles’ Creed said that members of Christ’s Church are “holy.” It also says that we are “catholic.”

Many Christians don’t want to be called a “catholic” because they associate the word with “Roman Catholic.”

But “catholic” (small “c”) simply means “universal” or “pertaining to all.” Christians belong to the universal Church of Jesus Christ. We join heart and hands with everyone – past, present, and future – who has trusted in Jesus alone for forgiveness of sins and a right relationship with God.

The word “catholic” simply means that the Church of Jesus Christ is not an exclusive club. The Church of Jesus Christ isn’t just for people who identify with the Christian and Missionary Alliance or Baptist or Assembly of God or Methodist or Presbyterians or Roman Catholics. The “catholic” Church embraces everyone who has called on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

There can be and there are differences of opinion among Christians concerning certain doctrinal issues.

We can differ about the timing of Jesus’ Second Coming; about the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts; about the importance and relevance of signs and wonders; about whether a believer is eternally secure or can lose his or her salvation.

But there can be no difference of opinion on this fundamental truth: *Jesus Christ alone is the Savior of the world.* With Peter, we join with all other Christians of every denomination who can say: “Salvation is found in *no one else,* for there is *no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

The church is “holy.” The church is “catholic.”

Lastly, the church is “the *communion* of the saints.”

The word “communion” means “fellowship” or “sharing.” The Church is a fellowship who shares a love for love Jesus Christ and for one another.

There are over 50 references in the New Testament to the words “one another.” Christians live in a relationship with “one another.”

Here are a few examples.

*We’re told in Romans 12:10, “Be *devoted to one another* in brotherly love. *Honor one another* above yourselves.”*
In Romans 13:8, Paul said to “love one another....”

Paul commanded the believers at Rome to “accept one another....” in Romans 15:7.

In Romans 15:14, he told them to “instruct one another.”

In I Corinthians 1:10, the believers there were exhorted to “agree with one another....”

To the Galatians in 5:13, he counseled them to “serve one another....”

Paul reminded the Thessalonians in I Thessalonians 5:11 to “encourage one another....”

Christ meant his Church to be an object lesson to the world of the beauty, joy, and power of his supernatural life.

The late Dr. Richard Halverson once said that many human relationships are like “balls on a billiard table. We ricochet around and bump into each other, but rarely have any meaningful, lasting connections.”

God had something better in mind for his people than superficial, surface relationships. We are “the communion of the saints.”

**The Imperative of the Church**

Christians living in communion with Christ and one another will be committed to two things to which Jesus is utterly, irreversibly committed.

First, we will be committed to The Great Commandment. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-39, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

If we love God as he deserves and demands to be loved, we will love others - those in the church and those not yet in the church.

Second, we will be committed to The Great Commission. Pastor Andrew reminded us last Sunday that Jesus’ last words to the church were recorded in Matthew 28:19-20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Valley View Chapel exists to love God, to love others and to tell the message of salvation to the world. We should measure everything we do as a church by this yardstick.

Frederick the Great, the King of Prussia from 1740-1786, once won a strategic battle with comparative ease and little loss of life. He was asked to explain the resounding victory over a formidable foe. Frederick replied: “The enemy had 7 cooks and 1 spy. I had 1 cook and 7 spies.”

The enemy majored on minors. Frederick majored on majors.

There are only two “majors” for the church: *The Great Commission* and *The Great Commandment*. 
Conclusion

There is no higher calling and no greater privilege than to be members of “the holy catholic church, the communion of the saints.”

May we represent well our Savior and Lord both within the family of God and outside in a world of lost people who desperately need the church to be what the church was redeemed to be.