

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

What is the church for? – Joss Bray

A couple of weeks ago we looked at what the church was –

There are several pictures the bible uses:

Living stones – built together

A body – working together

A bride – being made ready

We saw that Jesus is the foundation and the head of the church.

We also saw that the church is God's plan – his idea, and he will build it – and that nothing will stop that happening. There is no plan B for the world.

So if the plan is the church – what's it actually for?

Let's look at the three pictures above to try and get some insight –

Living stones

Stones don't amount to much just scattered around – they are a lot more visible and useful when built together. They get strength from each other and being interlocked or cemented. And it doesn't matter what shape they are – they can all be used in some way.

Buildings tend to contain things and also reflect their designer and builder. So the church will demonstrate the glory of God, his love and mercy, and should be filled with his spirit.

What does this mean for us now? –

Together we are stronger. We can support each other and each has a place. We can reflect more of God to the world. As the church is built up – just like the big cathedrals – we will make an impact on the world. This will be a solid and lasting impact that can withstand enemy action. We don't want any stones be knocked out of the wall – which would leave holes.

And because the stones are living, they are mobile – we won't be just stuck in one place like an earthly building. We are built to move forward and take ground. We are a mobile and growing building!

So if we sense that someone is getting a bit battered and loose – we as living stones should hang on and support them even more.

A body

The parts of a body do not function well on their own – they need to be connected. That's what they are designed to do.

If one part suffers, the whole body feels it. If one part is dying or diseased, it affects the whole body. Some bits of our bodies need special care and sometimes parts need time to heal – like a broken leg for example.

The head of the body is Jesus – he serves the body by leading it. He is responsible for it and takes the responsibility for it.

What does this mean for us now? –

We are all different – although there will be more than one hand for example! Difference is good and essential. All are equally valuable – we don't want any bits of our body to fall off or to be non functional.

Sometimes, some of us will need protection, support, rest or healing or just building up. Actually that will apply to all of us probably at some time. It is to be expected. Things go wrong with bodies as we know.

We also need to work in a coordinated way – always looking to Jesus for guidance and help as the head. He is also the nourishment through his Holy Spirit to feed us and give us energy and power to love and serve. We are also nourished through the word of God - the bible which is also there to build us up.

A bride

Being made ready. This is a picture of the kingdom of God being near and a reflection of the great and glorious wedding feast there

will be when all things are made new and we get to live in the New Jerusalem – the city of God – as we read about in Revelation.

The bride (the church) is enjoying the love of her bridegroom (Jesus) now and looking forward to the consummation of that love when they will be one. That is when we will live with God forever – and there will be no more crying or pain. In fact, there will be no more church in the sense we know it because there will be no more need.

What does this mean for us now? –

The bride loves the bridegroom – so we should love Jesus. We need to be expectantly waiting for him to come back again to earth in glory. But it is not the sort of waiting that means do nothing. It is getting on with what he told us to do and being ready and expectant. It is more than that – it is longing for the wedding day and making all the preparation needed – to be presented as the bridegroom would wish for.

Jesus gave us some instructions as to what to do

It's not rocket science! We don't need to be constantly asking God what he wants us to do if we haven't even covered the basics. So what are the basic things we should be doing individually and therefore as a church? The pharisees asked Jesus:

MT 22:36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: " `Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: `Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

So the foundational principles that everything else rests on are –

- **Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind
- **Love your neighbour** as yourself

Pretty straightforward. Jesus also said this:

MT 28:18 "...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

So we have:

- **Make disciples** (followers of Jesus) of all nations
- **Baptize them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
- **Teach them** to obey what Jesus has commanded us to do

There were some more things to do that Jesus told the 12 disciples he sent out to do:

MT 10: 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. ⁹ Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; ¹⁰ take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

So here there is:

- **Preach the kingdom** of heaven is near
- **Heal the sick** and cleanse the lepers
- **Raise the dead**
- **Drive out demons**
- **Give freely**
- **Expect God to give you what you need**

But – note that Jesus had a bit of a warning to those who focussed too much on what they did rather what God had done for them:

LK 10:20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

That is important because churches - and individuals – can get preoccupied with one particular aspect of ministry or activity, but miss the central foundation of who they are in God.

We must not take our eyes off Jesus and start to look more at works, plans, strategies, and other activities. Even successful ministry can distract us from our foundation in God.

We are who we are because of him, and we can only do the things we have been called to by his power. The glory goes to him – if we rely on our own understanding or strength then we will get into trouble:

AC 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So there are some promises:

- **We will receive power**
- **We will be witnesses**

The Gateway Church Northumberland mission is to:

Love God, Love one another and Serve the community.

I think that covers what the church is for.

First of all we should love God – everything follows from that.

Then we love each other – that will be demonstrated in all sorts of ways – and has been over this last year.

Then we serve the community – by loving action wherever we are – including being witnesses to what God has done in our lives, telling people about the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near, encouraging them to believe in Jesus and give their lives to him and turning away from sin. Baptizing and teaching, healing the sick, casting out demons and even raising the dead, giving freely and receiving freely from God. All in the power of the Holy Spirit.

These should all be characteristic of normal church life – what God has called us to and what equips us for. The emphasis is not on “doing church” but “being church” together.

The church is reflection of the Kingdom of God – and it is good news to the poor and needy and lost. It is something worth sharing.