

THE CHURCH

GATHERING AROUND THE GOSPEL

PART ONE



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How To Use

In GraceCity Church we use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text. We believe it is appropriate to replace “discussion questions” (that focus on the theoretical) with “response questions” (which require participants to personally interact with the central theme of the text).

Context →

1. Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.
2. Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation and Meaning →

3. Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. “for”, “if”, “therefore”),

repetition, dialogue, narrative, and Old Testament quotations.

4. To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author’s purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?
5. Helpful questions to ask include:
 - Who is writing and to whom?
 - What is the situation of the author and of the readers?
 - Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?
 - Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application →

6. Apply God’s word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviours by asking good “heart” questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?
7. Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?
8. Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.



Introduction

Introduction

When Jesus Christ calls us to himself, he calls us into his people (the church). Yet few believers have a strong “churchly” mindset. We don’t pray for the thriving of the church; we don’t appreciate the beauty of the church; and we struggle to persist in the messiness of the church. To remedy this deficiency, this series takes us back to the basics, seeking to build a healthy biblical understanding of the church (ecclesiology).

A Healthy Ecclesiology

Part of loving and following Jesus is loving and valuing his church. But in order to value the church, we need to know what it is and why it matters? There are some people who consider GraceCity to be their church, but who are not meaningfully engaged beyond Sunday mornings. We long for these people to be committed to GraceCity, and to what we’re doing to help make disciples for Jesus Christ. If you’re not committed to this church, we long for you to be committed to another church. A healthy ecclesiology always leads to a healthy commitment to a local church.

We cannot grow meaningfully as disciples of Jesus Christ through a single gathering each week. Meaningful church involves more than Sunday morning attendance.

Most theologians are comfortable saying the mission of the church is to ‘make disciples.’ This simple explanation safeguards the centrality of what the church alone can really do—bring people to faith in Christ. However, a church hasn’t disciplined someone if they have only been equipped to evangelise and bring other people to church. If someone is truly disciplined, they must also be motivated and equipped to love their neighbour, do justice and mercy, and integrate their faith with their work. Some people insist the church’s job is to make disciples, and do nothing to help disciples grow in these areas—even though these areas are clearly part of the biblical job description for individual believers.

**A church hasn’t disciplined someone
if they’ve only been equipped
to bring other people to church**

Placing It in the Bigger Story

Throughout history God has worked in the world in a variety of ways through individuals, nations, and peoples. The focus of God's present work is the church. What began in scripture, as men and women who acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives, continues today as the church.

Not only is Jesus building his church, but it is the primary instrument through which he ministers in the world. This idea of the church being an instrument of God is sometimes met with skepticism. Amid thousands of years of change, which have shaken worldly institutions, the church has also suffered confusion. The resulting uncertainty surrounding the purpose of the church has caused some to turn aside, rejecting the idea of the church as the focus of God's activity in the world. Whilst it is true that certain forms of church life have failed to reflect God's character and purposes, a follower of Jesus Christ cannot profess allegiance to God and at the same time deny his church.

Much of the uncertainty surrounding church stems from the disengagement of its leaders from Jesus and his patterns of church life. Questions as to the nature of the church, the role of the ministry, and the purpose of the existence of the church can only be answered by returning to the Word of God. This is why, in this mini-series, we are looking at four things the bible associates with a biblical church:

- A biblical church is an evangelistic church
- A biblical church is a community of discipleship
- A biblical church is a worshiping church
- A biblical church is a praying church



EVANGELISM

Acts 17:16-34

Acts 17:16-34

Evangelism

Scripture Text

Acts 17:16-34

Big Idea

When Jesus Christ calls us to himself, he calls us into his people (the church). Yet few believers have a strong “churchly” mindset. We don’t pray for the thriving of the church; we don’t appreciate the beauty of the church; and we struggle to persist in the messiness of the church. To remedy this deficiency, this series takes us back to the basics, seeking to build a healthy biblical understanding of the church (ecclesiology).

Overview

Upon arriving in Athens, Paul was provoked to teach because the city was full of idols. He taught in the synagogue and in the marketplace every day. One day, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers brought him to the Areopagus and asked him to explain his message to them, because they were unfamiliar with Jesus’ life. Paul started preaching to them about the true God, the only living God amid all their stone idols and altars to false gods. This God had only existed in their imaginations.

Paul told them the God he served made the heavens and the earth, and was too great to be contained in a temple constructed by men. He described God as the Father of all mankind who gives and sustains life. Being the offspring of such a great Father, Paul encouraged the Athenians not to think “that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone” — an image formed by the imagination of men. Paul explains the need to repent because a judgement day is coming. Some of the Athenians mocked Paul’s message, others were curious., and a few became believers (including Dionysius and Damaris).

Observation and Meaning

1. Why was Paul's spirit provoked (v.16)? What did Paul do in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there (v.17)?

Paul's ministry in Athens began in the marketplace, where he encountered some Athenian philosophers (vv.16-21). This encounter led to a more formal presentation to the Areopagus — The Court of Areopagus had authority over the civil and religious life of Athens (vv.22-34).

2. What was the inscription Paul found on the altar (v.23)? What did Paul begin by saying about this unknown god (vv.25-26)? After beginning with creation and God's sovereignty, Paul goes on to talk about God's presence and knowability. What words does Paul use to express these truths (v.27)?

Although rooted in Old Testament ideas, Paul's address appealed to Greek philosophers by interacting with their thoughts and ideas.

3. Who wrote the phrases 'In him we live and move and have our being' and 'For we are indeed his offspring' (v.28)? What conclusion does Paul draw from these two phrases (v.29)? Paul ends with final judgement and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How does Paul express these truths (vv.30-31)?

Although Paul quotes pagan poets in a positive manner, it doesn't imply he approves of other things they might have written. The first quotation is from a hymn to Zeus (Paul quotes from the same hymn in Titus 1:12). The second quotation is from the poem 'Phanomena' by the Stoic poet Aratus (315-240 BC).

4. What were the three different responses to Paul's proclamation of the gospel (v.32-34)? Who among Paul's hearers became believers (v.34).

Notice some people heard about Jesus rising from the dead and thought Paul was being foolish. These people mocked Paul. Other people wanted to hear more from Paul. Only some people joined Paul. These responses to Paul's proclamation, are the same responses we receive today.

Application

- Is your spirit provoked by the idolatry around you? How might a better understanding of other people's idolatry help to increase your compassion for them?
- Who are the poets and song writers who express the emptiness people are experiencing in their lives? What films have you watched that contain redemptive themes?

As a church, we start from common grace and not from confrontation,¹ we see evangelism as a process and not as an event, and we want to make Jesus and his resurrection the central issue.

- When it comes to evangelism, what would it mean for you to start from the common expressions used by song writers and famous films, and not from a posture of confrontation? How does viewing evangelism as a process and not an event help you? How can you make more of Jesus and his resurrection?

¹ By common grace, we mean the undeserved blessings God gives to all people, both believers and nonbelievers. John Murray defined common grace as "every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God."

a biblical church is an evangelistic church



DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 28:16-20

Matthew 28:16-20

Discipleship

Scripture Text

Matthew 28:16-20

Big Idea

When Jesus Christ calls us to himself, he calls us into his people (the church). Yet few believers have a strong “churchly” mindset. We don’t pray for the thriving of the church; we don’t appreciate the beauty of the church; and we struggle to persist in the messiness of the church. To remedy this deficiency, this series takes us back to the basics, seeking to build a healthy biblical understanding of the church (ecclesiology).

Overview

As the resurrected Lord, Jesus calls upon his followers to make disciples of all people groups through the preaching of the gospel. In his risen state, Jesus exercises absolute authority throughout heaven and earth (which shows his deity). His authority has been given to him by the Father, which indicates that he remains subject to the Father.

The imperative to ‘make disciples’ (to call individuals to commit to Jesus as their Lord and Master) explains the central focus of the Great Commission. The Greek words, translated as ‘go’, ‘baptising’ and ‘teaching’ describe the process involved in making disciples.

Jesus’ ministry in Israel was to be the beginning point of what would later be a proclamation of the gospel to all the peoples of the earth (including both Jews and Gentiles). Teaching is a means by which disciples of Jesus are continually transformed in order to become more like Christ (see Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Jesus concludes with the most crucial element of discipleship — the fact that God is with us (see Matthew 1:23).

Observation and Meaning

1. Who went to Galilee (v.16)? Who appeared to the disciples (v.17)? What two responses did Jesus' appearance elicit (v.17)?

Jesus is speaking to the eleven disciples. These disciples worshiped Jesus, but some of them doubted. Notice Jesus sent out people who were both worshipful and doubtful.

2. What did Jesus say about himself (v.18)?
3. Where did Jesus tell his disciples to go (v.19)? What did Jesus tell his disciples to make (v.19)? What activities were the disciples to be involved in (vv.19-20)?

We're not meant to wait for the world to come to us. We're meant to go to the world. The word 'nations' is a general term referring to 'all kinds of people'. It not only refers to countries, but also to all the sub-cultures in our communities. The word 'disciple' means 'apprentice' or 'learner'. This implies an intentional willingness to follow Jesus Christ.

The word 'observe' means to 'fulfil' or 'keep'. It's the same word Jesus uses when he says, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). It doesn't tell us to teach people to have bible studies and great exegesis. It tells us to teach people to observe all that Jesus has commanded.

4. What words of comfort did Jesus leave his disciples with (v.20)?

Jesus will be working through his church to bring people to faith, baptism, and obedience until he returns.

Application

- What is your next step when it comes to making disciples?
- The most important disciple-making tool a person has is their own life. How might you invite others to follow you as you follow Jesus Christ?
- Using the row labeled 'the discipler' (on the chart below), decide which model (the TRY model or the BELIEVE model) best expresses how you feel when discipling others.

The **TRY** Model (seen at its worst)

The **BELIEVE** Model (seen at its best)

THE MAIN FOCUS	Behaving (the outside of the cup); change at the fruit level; "getting my act together"	Believing (the inside of the cup); change at the root level; obedience from the heart
THE CHIEF GOAL	Outward holiness, discipline	Love (1 Timothy 1:5; Galatians 5:6; Matthew 22:40) Love of God and love of others
THE POWER	Human effort (Galatians 3:3); moral willpower; "To obey, I try"	Faith in Jesus supplies the Spirit (Galatians 3:5); "To obey, I trust"
THE DYNAMIC	Buck up! Try harder; get committed. "I'm a disappointment"	Believe more; submit; trust. "I am God's child"
THE PRINCIPLE	My obedience to God leads to a relationship with Him	My relationship with God leads to obedience to Him (John 15:5)
THE MOTIVATION	Duty. Guilt. Pride. "I am determined to be right and look good"	Love. I am passionate for the glory of God
HOLINESS IS	Keeping the rules; doing more for God and doing it better.	Loving as Jesus loves, as I believe the gospel more and more (John 13:34; Romans 13:8)
THE FLESH IS	I assume that my flesh can be conquered through self-discipline	I know that my flesh never loses its power, but gospel faith conquers it.
THE DISCIPLER	Must model success and competence; must appear strong and well-disciplined	Models repentance. "I will boast in my weakness so that the power of Christ might rest on me" (2 Corinthians 12:9)
THE DISCIPLE	We're perfect models of how to do more and do it better: "Mr. Dudley Do-Right and Mrs. Suzie Sunshine"	Since I'm the chief of sinners, I'm a big repentor – loving, bold, gracious, and full of faith (1 Timothy 1:15)

The formula we use in GraceCity Church to describe how we make disciples is:

gospel + community + time

- The gospel is what we centre our lives around.
- No one matures in isolation.
- Sanctification isn't instant and requires time.

Our discipleship strategy is:

**to immerse people in
a gospel saturated community over time**

This sounds simple, but people can easily become distracted by other things. Our children's ministry, missional communities and church retreats exist in order to make disciples. We mustn't miss the point of why we do what we do.

a biblical church is a community of discipleship



WORSHIP

Psalm 96:1-13

Psalm 96:1-13

Worship

Scripture Text

Psalm 96:1-13

Big Idea

When Jesus Christ calls us to himself, he calls us into his people (the church). Yet few believers have a strong “churchly” mindset. We don’t pray for the thriving of the church; we don’t appreciate the beauty of the church; and we struggle to persist in the messiness of the church. To remedy this deficiency, this series takes us back to the basics, seeking to build a healthy biblical understanding of the church (ecclesiology).

Overview

This Psalm celebrates how God’s kingship over all creation means that all kinds of people should love and worship him. The psalm has three sections, each beginning with a command:

- **sing** (v.1)
- **ascribe** (v.7)
- **say** (v.10)

Each of these three sections refers to the Gentiles:

- ‘**all the earth**’ and ‘**the peoples**’ (vv.1-6)
- ‘**families of the peoples**’ and ‘**all the earth**’ (vv.7-9)
- ‘**the nations**’ and ‘**the world**’ (vv.10-13)

God called Israel to be a vehicle of blessing for all mankind; bringing them knowledge of the one true God for whom all humans yearn. This psalm keeps this mission prominent in the Israelites’ view of the world and their role in it.

Observation and Meaning

1. What verbs does the psalmist use to describe the activities associated with worship (vv.1-3)? What reason does the psalmist give us to engage in these activities (v.4)?

This psalm includes verbs such as 'sing,' 'bless,' 'tell,' and 'declare' as a way of indicating worship is active. We do these things because God is great, and greatly to be praised (v.4).

2. How does the psalmist describe the other gods people worship (v.5)? When contrasting these gods with the one true God, what does the psalmist tell us about the Lord (v.5)?

The word for 'glory' means 'weighty'. When this psalm was written the other gods were pagan gods. In our day, the other gods include things like money, power and freedom. Christian worship puts the other gods alongside the one true God, and invites people to consider which is weightier.

The other gods don't have the ability to hold every aspect of a person's life together. By contrast, the one true God 'made the heavens' (v.5).

3. Who is meant to ascribe glory and strength to the Lord (v.7)? As well as ascribing glory and coming into God's courts, what else is the psalmist calling people to do (v.8)? Who is meant to worship the Lord and tremble before him (v.9)?

God wants all nations and all peoples to see his goodness and to worship him. As we give God the glory due his name (v.8), we also invite our neighbours and colleagues to join us in ascribing glory to God.

4. What causes the trees of the forest to sing for joy before the Lord (v.12)?

If you have ever been wronged or taken advantage of, the good news is that the Lord 'comes to judge the earth' (v.13). This means the harm that we have suffered will be avenged, the evil which has been done to us will be judged, and the brokenness in our lives will be healed. Christian worship looks forward to this day.

God is coming to judge the earth, and this includes believers. He comes to judge the wrongs committed against us, and the wrongs committed by us. But Jesus stood in the place of his people and took upon himself the judgement that awaits them. Jesus clothed believers in his righteousness, and because of this they can celebrate and look forward to what is coming.

As believers we worship with assurance of faith, knowing that what awaits us on judgement day fell upon Jesus at the cross. We no longer fear judgement because the day of judgement will be a day of glorious reconciliation.


Application

- Are you coming to church primarily for horizontal relationships? Or are you coming primarily to ascribe glory to God?
- When we turn up to church week after week, worship can sometimes feel like a routine. How might you renew and strengthen your vision of worship?
- How might you better prepare for Sunday worship?

Take time to consider and discuss the flow of our Sunday services (see the diagram below).

a biblical church is a worshipping church

Sequence	Elements	Purpose
<p>Adoration</p> <p>The gospel first affects the heart by enabling us to recognise who God is, such as his character and attributes.</p>	<p>welcome</p> <p>call to worship</p> <p>singing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepare hearts to worship (introduce 'welcome card' to visitors). God calls us to worship Him, and we respond by ascribing Him greatness and drawing attention to His attributes. begin by praising and worshipping God for who He is.
<p>Confession</p> <p>When we truly understand the glory of God's holiness, then we also recognize who we really are and confess our need of him.</p>	<p>confession and prayers of assurance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the truth of the gospel exposes our sins and need for ongoing repentance, and at the same time assures us of God's forgiveness through Jesus' finished work on the cross. Lead people to repent of their failure to trust God, and anything else the Spirit might lay upon their heart, whilst leaving them feeling Christ is bigger than their sin. Demonstrate what it means to pray with assurance in Christ, and not confidence in ourselves.
<p>Assurance</p> <p>The gospel then assures us of the grace that he provides,</p>	<p>singing</p> <p>testimony</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> songs of response to gospel assurance. having assured people of God's mercy, allow opportunity for people to express gratitude through scripture and testimonies: a) testimony not about ourselves, but about what God has done. b) only 1-2 minutes so others can share. c) only church members to come forward.
<p>Thanksgiving</p> <p>and our hearts respond in both thanksgiving</p>	<p>offering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognising God as provider of all things and our role as stewards of all He has given to us.
<p>Petition</p> <p>and humble petition for aid so we can give proper devotion to him.</p>	<p>pastoral prayers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> having thanked God for his grace and affirmed our trust in him, we encourage people to request further grace in their own lives and the lives of others. Prayers for God's kingdom to advance in us and in the world — seeking God to provide for our needs as a church, for specific church members, and for our city.
<p>Instruction</p> <p>In response to our desire for his aid, God provides his Word.</p>	<p>announcements</p> <p>sermon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> developing a welcoming culture, and a chance to meet new people so that we can continue to edify one another after the service. to teach and edify the body through the Word. The sermon, as an exposition of God's Word, is a bestowing of grace from God to us.
<p>Charge and Blessing</p> <p>We heed his instruction, knowing that we are both charged to do so and have the promise of his blessing as we live for him.</p>	<p>singing</p> <p>response</p> <p>benediction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a song which draws attention to God's commitment to his purposes, his people and creation a time of silence, following the song, as a way of drawing near to God and making a personal response to the sermon. invite people to go out into the world and live in response to the gospel, reminding them of the grace which enables them to do so.



PRAYER

Acts 4:23-31

Acts 4:23-31

Prayer

Scripture Text

Acts 4:23-31

Big Idea

When Jesus Christ calls us to himself, he calls us into his people (the church). Yet few believers have a strong “churchly” mindset. We don’t pray for the thriving of the church; we don’t appreciate the beauty of the church; and we struggle to persist in the messiness of the church. To remedy this deficiency, this series takes us back to the basics, seeking to build a healthy biblical understanding of the church (ecclesiology).

Overview

Peter and John return to their fellow Christians and reported the Sanhedrin’s injunction against preaching the gospel. In response the Christian’s prayed, asking for the power to witness even more boldly.

In their prayer, the believers affirm both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. They see all of the evil rejection, false accusations, miscarriage of justices, wrongful beatings, mockery, and the crucifixion as being predestined by God. But at the same time, they see those who did these deeds as morally ‘lawless’ (see Acts 2:23, 36). They were responsible for their own evil deeds (see Acts 3:13-15), and needed to ‘repent’ (see Acts 2:38; 3:19). Their prayers include both an acknowledgement of human responsibility and a trust in God’s ability to direct events.

Their prayer for ‘boldness’ shows a determination to disobey the command of the Sanhedrin. Instead of praying against those who persecute them, they pray for their own faithfulness witness.

Observation and Meaning

1. Where did Peter and John go after they were released by the Sanhedrin (v.23)? How did the believers respond to their report (v.24)?

When God's people experience difficulties or confusion, they pray. Instead of starting with their horizontal circumstances, they begin their prayer vertically by referring to a 'Sovereign Lord' (v.24).

2. In the prayer, how did the believers express their view of the persecution they faced (vv.24-26)? How did the believers use the Psalms in their prayer (vv.25-26)?

In this prayer, these disciples praise God for who he is and quote scripture (Psalm 2) as a way of reminding themselves what God has said. One of the main purposes of prayer is to remind us of who God is. We don't pray only to ask God for a list of things. Prayer is a way of orientating our lives towards the character of God.

3. How was God's hand in all that was plotted and done against Jesus (vv.27-28). How would God orchestrate the destruction and defeat of Jesus' enemies (vv.28-30)? What did the Christians ask God to do (vv.29-30)? How would the believers be enabled to carry out God's work (v.30)?

The believers read where God said the kings and rulers gathered together against his anointed, and concluded this is what happened in Jerusalem a few weeks earlier. Not only do they believe this is what was happening when Jesus was crucified, they also believe God has a plan that he is working out through all of this. Outside of Christianity most prayer is transactional. Most religions use prayer as a way of getting god to accomplish their own plans. Christian prayer acknowledges God already has a plan and is already active in our world.

4. What was the effect of the believers' prayer (v.31)? What did the Christians experience and do after they finished praying (v.31)?

Having specifically asked God to give them courage, the Spirit enabled the believers to speak boldly.

Application

- What keeps you from prayer? What, other than being busy, hinders you from turning to God in prayer?
- What keeps us from prayer? What keeps us as a missional community group (and as a church) from praying together?
- What might God want to do amongst us and through us? What might happen if we had a deeper hunger for the presence of God?

**O God, you are my God;
earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land
where there is no water.**

— Psalm 63:1

**a biblical
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praying
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<https://www.gracecity.jp>

