

The Birth of a Church

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Preached on: Sunday, October 19, 2014

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Well, we are here this morning to inaugurate Truth Community Church. It's been a while in coming, in one sense, you might say, but if you think about it, really it takes some time for these things to take place. We don't expect a baby to be born until nine months have passed after conception; we don't expect a cake to come out of the oven until proper time has been given for it to rise and develop and so here we are in the perfect timing of God after we first started meeting as Truth Community Fellowship and there was a sequence to what we did over time. We studied out of the book of 1 John what it means to be a true Christian; we studied out of the book of Titus what it means to be a young and growing church; we did a series to establish exactly what the doctrine of our church is from the Bible to end times, and those things take time to come to pass and to be established all with the design to come to this particular day, and this is a joyful time for us to express our commitment to Christ and to his church. So the question might be asked: how did we ever get to this wonderful point, this day of such wonderful joy together? I mean, think about it, three years ago most of us did not know each other at all and yet here we are coming together to form a church body and to commit to Christ and to one another. Well, on a human level, a few families started meeting and eventually called a man to be their pastor. We began meeting and by word of mouth people joined together around the word and fellowship. That's on a human level, but this is no human achievement that we celebrate today. We have come to this wonderful point through a work of God and Scripture tells us the story of that work.

Let's take it from the beginning. Before the foundation of time, before God created the heavens and the earth, God the Father determined to give a redeemed people to his Son, a people who would love his Son and glorify his Son forever and would act as a bride for his Son. So God created the world and placed man in it knowing in advance that man would rebel and fall into sin against his very Creator. And when man fell, God carrying out this eternal plan that he had established from the beginning, promised in Genesis 3:15 to send the seed of a woman to crush the head of the serpent who first tempted man into sin. Sin then became the occasion upon which God began to display his grace and his mercy to undeserving men; those whom he had created and yet forfeited the privilege of fellowship with him became the objects of God's unmerited favor and goodness.

Cycles over generations of sin, judgment and grace followed, and in Genesis 12, God called a man named Abram out of paganism and promised to make him a great nation and to bless all the families of the earth through him. The descendants, the physical

descendants of Abraham, multiplied over the following generations and they eventually found themselves in slavery in Egypt where God sent them a leader named Moses. And through the leadership of Moses, God rescued those people and brought them out of their bondage in Egypt and revealed his law to them through Moses. He gave them a system of animal sacrifices to show them the need for a blood sacrifice to have fellowship with him. Those sacrifices when offered with the proper heart, were God honoring, but they only served to show that they still needed a final deliverer because the blood of an animal, the blood of a bull could never take away the sin of a man. So the cycle of sacrifices, the repetition of that, simply ingrained in the consciousness the need for a substitute, the need for shed blood, the need for a final sacrifice but yet obviously this animal that was being slaughtered was not the final answer.

So with that set in place, God established the descendants of Abraham as a nation in the land that he had promised to them but they proved that they were unable to obey. They sinned. They died. Generation after generation. They sinned and they died. Their failure was repeated. Their failure was embedded in them and the surrounding nations were even worse. There was truly, humanly speaking, no hope to break this cycle and so what happened? God sent prophets, God sent psalmists to his people and they told the people to keep looking for the promised Redeemer. God had not forgotten in the ensuing thousands of years what he had first promised to man in Genesis 3:15, "I will send that one to crush the head of the serpent." And while from a human perspective things looked very bleak, while from a human perspective it seemed like God may have forgotten, if you were only looking at the outward failure of his people, the timetable of God was perfect. Things were unfolding exactly to the plan and so these prophets said, "Keep looking for the Redeemer," and the words of Isaiah serve as a representative sample.

Turn to Isaiah 40, if you would. This is a message without formal points today, just a narrative to prepare us and to set our day to day into a context of redemption history. Isaiah 40:10, the prophet said, "Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes." Israel, God's people, keep looking. The Redeemer is coming.

And as you continue reading Isaiah's prophecy, you come to the magnificent chapter in Isaiah 53 where you learn and find that this Redeemer will himself become the final sacrifice. There would be a substitute offered for sin. Isaiah 53:2 looking prophetically toward the coming of Christ, being spoken in a still further future time where Israel looks back on what God did with their Redeemer, Isaiah 53:2, "He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him." Beloved, there was a reason why we corporately prayed together that just a few moments ago where we said, "God, we ask not for the approval of men." We follow a Savior who did not have the approval of men. We follow a Savior who was not attractive to men in their sin and their willingness to judge by outward appearance. So we are indifferent to

what sinful outside men think about our ministry. It's not them that we are trying to please.

Isaiah goes on in verse 3, he says, "He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." Verse 4, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." Adam sinned. Isaiah now writing there thousands of years after Adam about in very round, rough terms 1,500 years after Abraham, not quite 1,500 years, but you see millennia passing by as God is unfolding his plan, all on God's perfect timetable. And so thousands of years, thousands of years after man first fell into sin, hundreds of years after Isaiah said, "Look for this Redeemer. Look for the one to come. He will be the substitute for our sins," at last he arrived.

Turn to the book of Galatians 4:4-5 where the Apostle Paul, that unique representative of Christ appointed by him said, "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." And so Christ came not as a conquering military hero as the Jewish kinsmen wanted in the first century; not as a conquering hero, not as a political deliver, but one who was the promised one to be the spiritual deliver who would crush Satan's head; the one who would be the sin substitute; the red thread of his shed blood is woven through Scripture from beginning to end. He came as a babe born to a virgin, kept in a manger. The point is that the time was right. The appearance of Christ for 30 years after his birth, he lived in obscurity and worked as a carpenter but eventually he was publicly manifested to the world and his forerunner John the Baptist dramatically announced his coming.

Look at the Gospel of John 1:29, "The next day he," meaning John the Baptist, "saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' He's here! The culmination of thousands of years of expectation were now finally on display in front of them. In this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the man sent from heaven, the man God in the flesh and yet born to a virgin, here he is. The promised Redeemer is now on the scene.

And what did he do? Turn over to the Gospel of Matthew 4. What did he say? This was a big moment. There are thousands of years that have gone into the preparation for this time. In Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" He could say the kingdom of heaven is at hand because he is the King and when the King is present, his kingdom is at hand. He is right there with them. He comes bringing the message of the kingdom and says, "For those of you who are sin, the kingdom of heaven I proclaim to you. Repent so that you may enter in." And so as to show that he was no imposter, Jesus began to manifest through his earthly

ministry the fact that he indeed was the Redeemer; he indeed was the one to be trusted; he indeed was the one who was the end of the searching. In Christ, the final culmination has come. No more prophets pointing forward. No more psalmists longing for the day. Christ is now here.

And how would you know? How would you know that he was the one if he had no appearance by which we would be attracted to him? If he was not a conquering hero, if he was not a conquering soldier, a big political leader, how would you know to follow him if there was nothing about his appearance to attract you? Verse 23 of Matthew 4 gives the answer, "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." Jesus shows up and starts to do things that no man can do, that no one before him had done, so as to distinguish himself by his attesting miracles that he indeed deserved the label which John the Baptist gave him, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

The crowds were astonished at his authority. Look at the end of Matthew 7, verse 28, "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." The testimony of Scripture by those who heard him speak, who heard him teach was, "Never have we heard a man speak like this man speaks." His very teaching distinguished him from everything else, and as he went about his ministry teaching, he showed repeatedly that he was unlike any man that they had ever seen. This Lord Jesus Christ made lame men walk by speaking a word. This Lord Jesus Christ by speaking a word calmed stormy seas. He gave sight to men born blind. He raised the dead to life. In the presence of many witnesses, without an orchestrated stage presence with people with earpieces in the back giving signals to the man on stage, not in the manufactured fake way that we see today, the Lord Jesus Christ did real miracles in real time and space and manifested for all to see that he was the unique one. He did things which only God could do, so much so that he even presumed to forgive sins and men said, "Who is this who forgives sins. No one can do that but God alone." So by his teaching, by his miracles, by his spiritual authority, he manifested the fact that he alone is King; that he is the promised one that the long wait of humanity for their Redeemer was over. He was now here.

In the midst of his earthly ministry, his earthly career, if you don't mind using that term, Jesus promised something further. He said, you're in the book of Matthew, turn to Matthew 16; he said in Matthew 16:18, actually let's slow down just a tad and go up to verse 13 where having displayed his power in so many different ways, he wants to draw out the faith of his disciples and so in verse 13 he asks his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'" Jesus, they see something special about you but there is a conflict of opinion about exactly who you are and Jesus says, "Let's get more personal. Who do you say that I am?" Verse 16, "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" Jesus, you're the Messiah that the prophets foretold. We have in front of us God in human flesh. You are the Son of the living God. You share the nature of God with him. This is a high point of faith. This is a

crystallization of it all. Redemptive history was moving toward that moment and Christ had been identified correctly by one of his disciples, and yet it was more than simply a human recognition. Jesus said in verse 17, "Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock,'" he's not saying, "Not on you, Peter. Not on your person." He's not establishing a papacy here. He's saying, "On the immoveable rock of the confession that you just made, I am the Christ, the Son of the living God, on that rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Jesus said in a word of recognition at a time where he had been recognized, "And here's what I'm going to do. I am going to build my church." We read about that in Ephesians 5 as we opened the service when it says that he loved the church and he gave his life for it, to sanctify it and to present it without wrinkle. "I will build my church."

And think about it: first century humanity had God in human flesh on earth with them, first century humanity had the very Christ in front of them and what did they do with him? What would you expect them to do in light of the history of man? They rebelled again. They hated Christ's authority. They hated his teaching. They hated his righteousness. Everything about him convicted them, exposed them as sinners, exposed them as having no authority of their own, exposed them as having no righteousness of their own. The presence of the purest light from heaven in bodily form exposed the darkness that dominated earth.

So what did they do? They killed him. Those with whom we share humanity killed the Redeemer. They nailed him to a cross in utter disgrace. They mocked him while he died. They buried him in a grave. They sealed it and set army troops to guard it. Man had done his best to terminate the saving intentions of God.

But God, Ephesians 2:4, but God. You see, God never submitted his redemptive plan for the approval of man and, watch this, get this, God never depended upon man to implement it. This work of building his people, this work of redemption was a work of God from beginning to end. Christ said, "I will build my church." This is something that Christ does. He builds his church. And so because it was not dependent upon man, the worst that man could do could not terminate the program. Death could not hold Christ. He rose from the dead on the third day. He appeared over 40 days to his disciples and over 500 witnesses who saw him bearing his wounds. He who had been publicly crucified, publicly buried, was now publicly alive and there was no denying it.

And what did Christ do? He sent those disciples out to be his witnesses, first to Jerusalem, then a little further to Samaria, and then to the remotest parts of the earth. He told them to go and teach and make disciples of all the nations. And what did they proclaim? What did they teach? They said, "This crucified and risen Jesus Christ is the divine Redeemer. This Jesus is more than a teacher. He is more than an instructor in outward morality. He is God in human flesh and he is the only Savior of mankind." They taught that this Christ had taken away sin for all those who would ever believe in him throughout the course of history.

Turn over to the book of Acts 3:17. Peter is preaching to the Jews who he said in verse 14, "disowned the Holy and Righteous One and put him to death," verse 15. And he says to them in verse 17, Acts 3, "now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return." Notice that Peter is preaching the same thing that Jesus did when he opened the message, when he opened his kingdom, when he inaugurated his public message, "Repent and believe." Peter says, "Repent and return." It's the same message. "Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time." Stop there for just a moment. Peter is connecting the recent historical events in his time with the prophetic testimony that had preceded centuries earlier. It connects all the way back to Genesis, things that God had announced beforehand. There is a continuity going on. God had established his planned before time began and he's implementing it now over the centuries. Peter is saying, "What this Christ is that you crucified whom I call you to repent and put your faith in, this Christ is the outworking of the redemptive plan of God from all of history." This is no minor matter.

And he quotes Scripture to support his point in verse 22, Acts 3, "MOSES SAID, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. And it will be,' verse 23, "'that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days." Peter says, "I'm just declaring to you what our prophets have been saying throughout the centuries. There is no change in the message, we've just reached fulfillment now that Christ has come. I am declaring to you that you are seeing and what you are bearing witness to is the fulfillment of what has been promised to our people from God from the beginning of our nation. A divine Redeemer has come to take away our sins." Verse 25, he says, "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

And so, think with me here, beloved: throughout the course of humanity, men and women, boys and girls have rebelled against God and rejected him, and in the great climax of that rebellion, they crucified the Redeemer that was sent to save them. That's how manifest, that's how deeply embedded sin is in the human heart and Peter says, understand what's happened now, although he doesn't directly allude to Isaiah 53 that we read earlier here, he is saying that for you the substitute has come, for you the substitute has been slain. Christ has served his Father with this work of redemption. In fact, he says if you go back to Acts 2, go back to Acts 2:22 for a moment, just to help set the context. He says, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you

by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know - this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." Peter says, "Men of Israel, the plan of God has moved forward in a significant way in the coming of Christ and now repent and believe because he is the servant that God has sent to bless you and to turn you away from your wicked ways so that you might be reconciled to this God that you have rebelled against," Peter says. "He sent this servant to bless you. I call on you to repent and to receive this divine Redeemer for your salvation so that your sins might be washed away and that you might be fully reconciled to God." And in the book of Acts as you continue to read the narrative, thousands believed. Thousands were saved. Thousands were brought to new life through the simple power of the Gospel message.

Now, there's something else that I want you to see about this. As that message went forth in that first century culture, turn over to 1 Corinthians 1, if you would. Just to be clear on this foundational day for our church, for us to clearly understand that what we proclaim, the Gospel that we proclaim was not popular in the first century, it was never intended to be popular among wicked people. It was never intended to be popular and something that is publicly acclaimed by unrepentant men. Think with me, beloved, how could that ever possibly be the case? Throughout the course of time, all that man has done is rebel against God. They have sinned and rejected and culminated their rebellion when they crucified Christ. What makes us think that the message that prompted them to crucify Christ would now suddenly become something popular that unrepentant people would gladly gather around and hear? That's foolishness to think that the world would receive the Gospel. It's not supposed to be that way. And in 1 Corinthians 1:18, the Apostle Paul makes this clear, "the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Verse 21, "since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness." "Jews and Gentiles reject our message," Paul says. For Jews it's an occasion for them to sin because once again they reject their Redeemer when they turn away from the Gospel. To Gentiles it's foolishness. They want fancy oratory. They want human eloquence and Paul says, "That's not what the Gospel is about. That's not what the Gospel is about. We preach Christ crucified."

Verse 24, he says, the Jews and the Gentiles reject that, "but to those who are called," those whom God works in their heart and attracts them to this message, "both Jews and Greeks," this message is, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Our message wasn't meant to be popular. Our message was meant to be faithful. The Gospel was not meant to affirm unrepentant men and make them feel a little bit better about life. It was designed to expose their sin and convict them so that they would repent and come to Christ for salvation they could never earn on their own, and in the power of God, in the outworking of his redemptive plan here in the book of Acts, many believed.

What happened next? Well, those who believed told others and some of them believed. Do you know what they did? They told others and some of them believed. And they told others and some of them believed. And they believed and told still others in a cycle that repeated itself in varying degrees of success over the ensuing 2,000 years. What does that all have to do with us today? Eventually in our generation, in our lifetime, that message reached our ears. God brought the Gospel to us in our individual lives. Someone told you, a faithful parent, a friend in school, a radio program, written material. Someone had been ordained and appointed by God to be the instrument who received in a succession of faithful men, they received the Gospel and somehow God orchestrated and put that person, that pastor in your life and he explained the Gospel to you and the Holy Spirit did a work in your heart, imparted life to you, and you believed.

One verse crystallizes it which we could quote by memory but we will turn to and have the text in front of us, John 3:16, which I find as I stand here a little context of redemptive history makes so much more powerful. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world," God was so graciously and favorably disposed toward sinners that he did something, "He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Why are we as Christians here today? Because in the outworking of an eternal redemptive plan of God that he was orchestrating throughout the ages through many different means and men, as part of a complex majestic plan which we could not begin to comprehend, somehow God in his grace included us, and God appointed us to believe and that has now come to pass in time. By the grace of God alone, we have received this crucified and risen Savior.

That's what happened to us individually. Then through an intricate providence that no man could orchestrate, God led our lives one by one to Truth Community. He united us around Christ, around his word, around the grace of the Gospel. This body which will in a few moments transform from Truth Community Fellowship to Truth Community Church, is a microcosm of what God has planned from eternity past. God in his grace and boundless love and mercy, God in his supreme love for his own Son, determined to build a worldwide people over the ages of every tongue, tribe and culture who would be redeemed, who would love his Son, who would worship his Son forever as that people who uniquely belong to Christ.

God, those of you who are about to become members of our church, God appointed you for eternal life. God named you by name. Christ died for you by name: first, middle, last name. The Apostle Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "He loved me and gave himself up for me." You and I were chosen by God to be included in that great redemptive plan and now he has brought it about in time, brought it about in our lives, and brought us together so that together we might be a people in the sphere of geography, in the sphere of relationships that God has given us, to do our part in the relay race. Having received the baton of the Gospel, we run our few steps and do our best to hand it to those who come after us. We are here by the plan of God and we are a part of an unbroken succession of the purposes of God being worked out in time that far transcend our individual lives. We celebrate a wonderful, great, momentous day for our church today, one that I trust we will remember for the rest of our lives, but there is a context; there is a great redemptive

context of God loving sinful men and showing grace to them and that's what we remember. That's what we celebrate here today.

As we inaugurate Truth Community Church then, we deny any glory for ourselves. We remember not human interactions. We celebrate not what the works of our hands have done. We bow before the cross of Christ. We bow before the risen and ascended Lord of heaven and say, "You are the one who has purchased a people for yourself. You have bought them with your own blood and therefore they belong to you and the glory belongs to you as well." No glory for us. And what we are doing today is we are only establishing in a formal way the pre-existing work that Christ has already done among us. God has brought about in time, in a way that we recognize on this day, God has brought about in time what he planned before time began and on this day, we commit ourselves publicly, openly, gladly, to this body with the desire to be faithful to him who called us and bestowed such unspeakable grace upon us.

Please bow with me in prayer.

Our Father, truly indeed we honor you and give you the glory. We bow in wonder and in awe at the greatness of your plan of redemption. We pray that you would prepare our hearts as we make that love and commitment public in what is about to come. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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