

# Happy Church

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[ 0 : 00 ] Today we're talking about happy church. Just in my devotions this morning in 1 Thessalonians, in the last chapter 1 Thessalonians,!

Christ more than Christians equals happiness. And again, remember, it's not either or. It's not black and white.

It's not Christ instead of Christians. It's where do we put the emphasis in our relationship at church? And Dr. Murray says we need to put our emphasis not on Christians but on Jesus Christ.

And I guess let me ask you why that is. Why should we, why when we come to church do we need to be thinking more about Christ and less about Christians? And in our relationships and the way that we look at the body.

Kind of what did we talk about in our memory verse? So why do we need to put the emphasis on Christ instead of the Christians around us? Dale?

[ 1 : 23 ] It seems to me that Christian can become just a philosophy. It's something that we can agree on. How about Christians? Huh?

Christians. Oh, I thought you said. Sorry. I'm sorry. I would throw out everything. Yeah. Christ more than Christians. I apologize.

Yeah. Christians are broken. And? Amen. Amen. Amen. Christians are broken. Recovering. Christ is not.

Churches, the best churches are full of imperfect people. And so instead of Christians being our focus, Christ himself needs to be our focus.

Churches, every member's potential membership class that we go through, every membership class that we take the potential members through, we have a whole class on how to deal with differences with each other.

[ 2 : 29 ] And the reason we have to do that, and the reason we do that, is because there's going to be differences. Things are going to rub us the wrong way, and we need to learn to live with each other patiently, gently, humbly.

And the key to all of that is not becoming obsessed with the Christian himself, but on Jesus Christ. So it's Christ more than Christian. So what does a happy church look like? What does it look like to have sort of, to have Jesus priorities and Jesus at the center?

And today we're going to just look at five features of a happy church. And in a very real way, it begins with pastors.

It starts with pastors. And the reason it starts with pastors is because what we focus on in our preaching, in our teaching, and in our counseling, and sort of just the ethos of a church, it can be positive or it can be negative.

[ 3 : 40 ] It can be Christ-focused or it can be Christian-focused. And so if it's Christian-focused, we're going to be always looking for faults, and we're looking for things to fix or to look at in people instead of Christ.

And so five features, this is what we're going to talk about, five features of a Christ-centered, Christ-reflecting ministry. And so it starts at the head.

It starts at the top, at the pastoral level. But it goes all the way down. It goes into families. It goes into Sunday schools. It goes into how we talk about, talk with one another in the lobby, how we encourage one another.

And how we do that can either lead to greater happiness in the church or less. And so five features. And the first is more salvation than sin. More salvation than sin. And again, we're talking about relative weight here. This is sort of like five equations.

[ 4 : 45 ] And we're all talking relative weight. We're not pulling a Joel Osteen where we don't talk about sin. Or we don't talk about things. We just talk about happy things. Well, the gospel doesn't make any sense if you don't talk about sin.

There's no gospel necessary. There's no gospel without sin. And the very name Jesus means he shall save his people.

The Lord saves. The Lord will save his people from their sin. And so a lot of churches want to downplay sin to minimize God's law and soften God's anger.

But the gospel message must begin with, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But just because there's no need for the gospel without sin doesn't mean that we have to linger over sin.

And so I want you to imagine you go to the doctor and he just lingers over your sickness. And he just wants to talk all about your sickness and your disease.

[ 5 : 56 ] And he diagnoses and he diagnoses and he diagnoses. And he's like, let's pull up WebMD and go to all the possible things that could go wrong.

If you went to a doctor like that, where all he did was diagnose sickness, what good does that do you? Not much.

How do you feel after you leave the doctor? Pardon? Hopeless. Yeah. Like, okay, thank you. He's really not a doctor worth going to.

You're despairing. You're depressed. You're hopeless. And sadly, that's how some preachers, some churches, some teachers, some parents are.

David Murray puts it like this. They love to dwell in the smoke and fire of Mount Sinai more than the love and grace of Mount Calvary.

[ 6 : 57 ] They want us not to only see and smell the prodigal's pigsty. They also want us to wallow in its gruesome details. Now, some Christians' idea of a good sermon is that was convicting.

And that's good. That's good. I want to preach convicting sermons. But if all I do is preach convicting sermons, and the only sermon you think is a good sermon is where you feel cut to the heart, that's a problem.

Then really, I failed because the Bible isn't about sin full stop. It's not about conviction, and that's where we end.

The Bible is about full salvation of sinners. And so, how did, remember in Acts chapter 2, Peter preached to, on Pentecost, to thousands of people in Jerusalem, and how did they feel three quarters of the way through the sermon?

Do you remember what it says? They were cut to the heart. But did Peter end there? No.

[ 8 : 12 ] No, he didn't. He said, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And so it ended with good news. It ended with hope. It ended with, there's a possibility for us to be forgiven, for us to start over again, to have the Holy Spirit, to have God with us.

And so it ended with salvation. And so we saw this a couple of weeks ago. God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

And so we have to get to Christ. And so we, as a church, have to major on salvation. And not on sin.

Not on human failure, but on divine grace. Because grace has that last word. We sing it. It's greater far than all my sin and shame.

[ 9 : 15 ] And so that's the first thing. Again, don't hear it as either or. But the majority of the way, where we're headed, has to be salvation and not sin.

And that's the way you can have a happy ministry. Happy church. Now, second, more wooing than warning. More wooing than warning.

Now, again, is there a place for warning in preaching and teaching and parenting? Is there? Yes. Definitely. Yes.

But the more regular note should be wooing. Because the gospel is good news. It's good news.

And so we need more of the beauty of holiness. More of the goodness and glory and the wonder of Jesus. More of the goodness of God than the ugliness of sin.

[ 10 : 21 ] More of the wonderful joy of heaven than even the fear of hell. More of the goodness of the kingdom. What we saw a few weeks ago from Stan Strabatovich.

More of the goodness of the kingdom than the ugliness of the world. Again, it's not one or the other. It's not all or nothing. But Jesus is a willing and able savior.

He desires to save. And he wants to save. God is patient to save. It's not just warning, warning, warning. Listen again to Murray.

It's often said that Jesus preached on hell more than anyone else. And that's true. But he didn't preach on hell more than anything else.

You get the difference. He preached on hell more than anyone else. But he didn't preach on hell more than anything else. Yes, he warned a lot. But he wooed.

[11:24] And he won even more. So what was he doing when he was going around doing good? He was wooing sinners into the kingdom.

He was saying, this is what the kingdom of God is. Repent. And that was good news. Repent. And come into the kingdom. He was wooing sinners. He was wooing people into the kingdom.

He was enticing them. And he was saying, this is how good the kingdom of God is. So you want to come in. Come in. Come in. And I'm asking parents, are you doing that with your children? Or is it just warning, warning, warning?

Are you showing them, no, this is the good life. This is the kingdom of God. It's a happy place.

That's how the Sermon on the Mount begins. With blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed.

Happy, happy, happy. The kingdom of God is a happy place. And Jesus was preaching a gospel message. So more wooing than warning.

[12:24] Warning and stern. Wooing is pleading. It's inviting. Third, more victory than struggle.

More victory than struggle. I'm going to give you some Christian words. Trial. Struggle. Backsliding. Pain. Defeat. Those are all Christian words. They're all Christian realities. But here are some other Christian words.

Victory. Growth. Maturity. Progress. Usefulness. Fruitfulness. Service. Encouragement.

Those are all Christian words too. And so Paul wanted to know what it was to have fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. But is that where he ended? No.

[13:28] He said, I want to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. But he also wanted to know the power of his resurrection. And so Paul could say, I can do all things through Christ Jesus who gives me strength.

And so some people say, the church is a hospital for sinners. It's a hospital for saints. And you know what? Thank God it is.

Thank God that when we've had been bruised and battered and broken and hurt and discouraged. Throughout that week we can come here and we can be fixed up.

But you know what? The church is not just a hospital. That's one picture. But that's not even sort of the biggest picture.

It's a boot camp. It's a Navy SEALs training facility. It's a victory march. It's an army bold whose battle cry is love.

[14:32] How does an army bold ring in your imagination? Are they all broken down and injured and discouraged and telling each other how bad it is?

No, they're an army bold. They're encouraged. It's a group of more than conquerors. In Revelation, it's a choir singing with loud songs to their king.

It's those who can say, where death is your victory? Where, oh, death is your sting? Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we face death day by day. And yet we can smile because we know that our Lord has crushed death to death.

And bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave he arose. And as he stands in victory, sin's curse has lost its grip on me, for I am his and he is mine.

[15:35] That's the church. That's the church. And so, you know what, from time to time we do sing in a minor key. We sing our sad songs.

But the church as a whole, the church predominantly is not a dirge. It's not a funeral song.

It's a victory march. And we have to focus on that because that is true. We have to focus on that because that is true.

And we will, if we do focus on that, we will be a happy church. If we don't get stuck in the rut of the discouragement, but we go on to the victory.

Fourth, more celebration than lamentation. So, again, this is sort of related to what we just talked about. More celebration than lamentation. It's easy for Christians to go through life moaning and groaning, saying our culture is so bad.

[16:39] I'm so bad. The news is bad. Everything is bad. And you know what? There is a time to mourn. But there's also time to laugh.

And so, I guess my question is, which note is going to predominate, is going to carry here?

Gratitude or complaint?

Let me tell you what the Lord has done for me. Or look at what those people are doing. Remember Joshua after Achan's son?

He's on the ground. And he's saying, oh, Lord, you brought us out of Egypt. And why did you bring us out of Egypt? Just to destroy us, not to give us over to our enemies. And he says, the Canaanites, they're going to surround us.

And they're going to destroy us and wipe us out. And we're done for. All is lost. And there's Joshua on the ground. Do you remember what the Lord said to that?

[17:39] Do you remember? Oh, that's good. Good job mourning. Do you remember what the Lord said to Joshua? Get up. Get up.

What are you doing on the ground? He says, quit complaining. We have work to do. There's sin in the camp. You deal with that sin and watch what I'm going to do to your enemies. And you know how that story ended?

It ended with AI and ashes and the victory march rolling on. And so. That's why we like to take you through Thanksgiving and praise times.

That's why we like to. That's why we've tried to start celebrating our evangelistic successes. We don't need to sit around and say, oh, we're bad at this.

There is success. There is victory. There's good news to celebrate. And so if we focus and sit in our complaints, it's sort of like a baby sitting in its dirty diaper.

[18:48] We're just going to be miserable. And. But the Bible is good news. The Bible is good news.

Have you read the end? I think it ends out ends up pretty well for us. So more celebration than lamentation. Number five.

And this is the last one. More strength and weaknesses. More strength and weaknesses. Now. The. I think it's fair to say the vast majority of Christian books, probably Christian preaching, discipleship focuses. I hope it's not here, but generally on the whole, it focuses more on weaknesses and trying to fix them.

Like you need to give more. You need to witness more. You need to pray more. You need to visit the sick. You need to help the poor. You need more humility, more confession and so on. And again, there is definitely a place for all of that.

[19:55] And. When it comes. But but when it comes time to minister in the church, when it comes time to relate in the church, the focus on the Bible is.

Use your gifts. Use your gifts. How is Christ gifted you? Disciple. What is he given you to share? And so we've all been. We've all been gifted. And in the in the church works best when we're not focusing on maybe the aspects of ministry and service that I'm not good at.

But when I'm focusing on the things that I am good at. My strengths. The church works best when we focus on what each of us are gifted at and seek to progress in that.

So Paul said to Timothy, make your progress. Evident to all. Progress in what? What was Timothy to show everyone?

[20:56] I'm progressing at this. I'm getting better at this. Well, it wasn't every single thing in the whole church. It was the ministry that God gave him. Pastoring, preaching, teaching, leading and so on.

Timothy wasn't supposed to become the super Christian that had every single gift. And he was a master at all of them. No, Timothy wasn't good at everything.

But God wanted him to grow in his ministry and the use of his gifts. And now so we have we all have different gifts. And what I'm saying is, is we will be a happier bunch when we when you can use your gift, when you can find your gifts or your gifts and when you're using it.

We're called to be specialists. Specialist. And the more specialized we are in our gifts, generally the happier we're going to be.

And so what I'm saying is, you each have strengths. Every single one of you. You have strengths. You have gifts. Don't bemoan the fact that you're not good at so and so and such and such. [ 22 : 17 ] You're not good at everything. No one's good at everything. I can't do everything. I'm not good at everything. So that's true of me.

That's true of you. And I'm happier. And you're better off and you're happier and I'm better off when we focus on our strengths and seek to develop those gifts.

Seek to develop them. Focus not focusing on where I'm weak so much as focusing on where I'm strong. That's not just true in church.

That's been found to be true just in companies. One study of strength-based education found that concentrating on improving one's strengths produces much greater success than working on improving one's weaknesses.

And so what does that mean? Well, we need to help each other find what we're good at in the body. We need to help each other find what we're good at. And then when we see people growing, we need to encourage them.

[ 23 : 29 ] Praise them. Tell them they're doing a good job. Rather than picking on what they're not so good at. Now, again, the whole point is to focus not on Christians but on Christ.

And so we want to look and say, how is Jesus Christ using that brother or sister? What gift has Jesus given them? And letting that person focus on that and me looking at that rather than just me and my weaknesses and my troubles.

It's his victory. His victory. So I had hoped that we would have some time.

I didn't budget my time very well here. But I'd hope to ask you, what are some things that Grace Fellowship is good at?

What are some of our strengths? Or what do you see in others here that is good? Again, I just want to read Philippians chapter 4 to you.

[ 24 : 31 ] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable. If anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

Again, remember that's primarily what we see in each other. What noble, right, true, admirable, good thing is going on in the church? And Paul says, now think about those things.

And so just as a homework assignment, just as something that says, just as a homework assignment to make you happy, I want you to think about Grace Fellowship.

Think about the brothers and sisters here and say, you know what? This is really good. God is really at work here. Think about that.

And maybe in a couple of weeks we'll have time to share that. But we're dismissed for now.