



“THE CHURCH IS A FORTRESS”

This week we will study further in depth the “Fairytale of the Church – The Church is a Fortress”. We will look at how the church was created to function in this world. It may be time for all of us to walk out of our bubbles and reach out to this hurting world.

DAY 1

Today's Scripture:
John 1:1-2, 10, 14

The Word

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We are going to study the greatest invasion in history. This, of course, was not your typical battle. I am not talking about warfare over land. This was about reclaiming the human heart.

Verse 1-2: The Word is Jesus. He was with God in heaven. Try to picture heaven. It is more beautiful than any tropical setting. Angels continually worship God in all His glory. There is no pain, no tears, no sin, no regrets. It is perfect in every way. That is where Jesus lived.

Verse 10, 14: God decided to create the world. They made the universe. The earth was formed out of nothing. Only by the Word was everything we see created. Amazing power. The pinnacle of creation came when man was made in the image of God. Yet the relationship formed between man and God was destroyed when Adam and Eve, the first created people, sinned. The perfect relationship was now marred. A perfect God could not allow imperfect people into His presence. But the heart of God could not bear the separation. He had a plan to redeem His people back into His presence. The battle plan? Sending the perfect Son of God into this evil world. Jesus left heaven to come to the world. We complain about leaving air conditioning to walk to the mailbox. The One

who formed the universe at His own command, who held the stars in a hand, was wrapped in confining, limiting, flesh.

Jesus came to earth. But the world did not recognize Him. How painful to give love and receive none in return. God Himself sacrificed all of heaven to reach out to us and we were too busy to notice He was there.

Knowing people would sin, Jesus still made us. Knowing people would reject Him, Jesus still came. Knowing that we would not love Him as He loved us, Jesus still loved us. He made the intentional effort, though it cost Him everything, to reach out and save us. He did not stay in the fortress of heaven. The King left His throne and joined the paupers and in His poverty showed us how we might have eternal riches. That is the battle plan of love.

Application

Jesus is the ultimate example of intentional effort in reaching out to others. Our sacrifice is so small compared to what He did. Ask God to show you how you can follow the example of Christ and reach out to others.

Why did Jesus come to earth?

What pain did Jesus' suffering because He reached out in love to us?

What sacrifice would you have to make in order to intentionally love others?

Pray and ask God to bring specific people to mind that you can reach out to. Write their names here.

Strategize a plan to intentionally reach out to them.

DAY 2

Today's Scripture:

Luke 8:1-3

The Word

We will go in depth on verses that are often skipped over. Behind these verses, however, reveal the intensity of reaching out to others to lead them to God.

¹After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ²and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Verse 1a: Jesus is in the middle of preaching the good news. God Himself had come to earth to proclaim the truth about the kingdom of God. To say the least, God was on a mission. This was important work.

Verse 1b: The most amazing part of what Christ was doing was who He brought with Him as He traveled. First of all, He brought the Twelve. These were twelve men that Jesus chose to be His disciples. They varied in education, background, politics, socio-economics, in everything. Yet, Jesus chose this ragtag group to follow Him.

Verse 2-3: Not only were the Twelve with Jesus, but also a group of women. This is surprising within itself since women were not highly valued. They were considered property of their husbands, viewed inferior to men, and were considered cooks and baby carriers (all of you guys thinking of comments to say, just stop now). Yet, the Lord of all the universe asked these women to join His mission. One of them, Mary, had seven demons driven out of her. I have never seen a demon-possessed person (that I know of) but it is probably not a pretty picture. I would think one demon would be bad, much less seven. She was the perfect picture of tortured evil. I think she could top anyone's stories about "baggage" from her past life. Yet, here she is, following Jesus. Another woman Joanna also was there. Her husband worked for Herod, an evil man who ruled in Israel under the Roman government. Imagine having the wife of an evil politician following the religious leader around. You would think that would give the "Preacher" bad press. Yet, He still allowed her to follow Him. Other women, including Susanna traveled from town to town supporting Jesus and the Twelve with their own money. (It sounds like these guys liked going Dutch). Those viewed as least in society were given the honor of being travel partners with God Himself.

What does all of this have to do with us? Think about who Jesus was around: imperfect people. They had a variety of personalities: bossy, whiny, pessimistic, people-pleaser, obnoxious, self-centered, arrogant, non-confrontational, argumentative, the list could go on and on. Yet, Jesus invested His time in these people. He, being perfect, did not stay removed from others. Instead, He spent time with them. They

traveled together. They shared stories. They laughed and cried. They ate together. They were in fellowship. True fellowship.

We are imperfect people surrounded by other imperfect people. They need to know how to “travel” with Jesus. Will you show them? There are some people right around you that need someone to spend time with them. Will you be that someone? It’s not easy. People can be difficult. People can be draining. People can be just like us. Yet, Jesus poured His life into a few people around Him and shared His life with them. He taught them how to share their lives with others. The chain of love continued. Christ is linked to you. Who will you link yourself to so that they may learn the fellowship of Jesus?

Application

Reaching out to others takes time, energy, and resources. But we cannot do it in our own strength. It is not a matter of doing “something”. Only God can help us to be the friend He has called us to be. Ask for His help and strength.

What surprises you most about the followers of Jesus?

What are ways we can invest in the lives of those around us?

What are the difficulties in building relationships with others?

What are the benefits for building relationship with others?



Today's Scripture:
Luke 5:17-26

The Word

Have you ever prayed for a life to be changed? Maybe it was for family member to be healed, or a friend to find emotional healing, or possibly even a co-worker to find salvation. When we cry out to God on behalf of others, we share in their need. We join them in their time of pain. It is during this time that love is truly shown. It may not be so much in our words but in our actions. For when we meet others in their needs, we ourselves can see a miracle.

¹⁷One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. ¹⁸Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

²⁰When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

²¹The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

²²Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ²³Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ²⁵Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Verse 17: The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were the big named preachers of their day. These were the guys everyone wanted to impress. They were the religious leaders and they were revered by the people. However, the power of the Lord was not upon them but it was on Jesus. We need to realize that when we are dealing with people, we are limited in what we can do. Only God alone can handle every need. And He is ready and willing.

Verse 18: The power of the Lord to heal was present. However, at that time no one was there who was willing to be healed. God had provided a way before the need was perceived. However, if these men had not brought their friend to Jesus, the healing would not have occurred. We must bring our loved ones to Jesus through prayer, through friendship, through advice, through wisdom, through the Word, through invitation to service, through any means that will bring them to God. These men had a

paralyzed friend and the only means they had was a mat and brute strength. They used what they had to get him to Jesus.

It was not an easy trip. It took four men to carry one. That involved teamwork. Everyone had to do his part while everyone headed in the same direction. If one guy had decided to quit, the paralyzed man could have received further injury by falling off the mat. If each man wanted to go his own way, they would have not been able to travel anywhere. Instead, they all knew they had to get to Jesus and that each one had an obligation to take their friend to Him. When we have this one goal in mind: to bring people to Jesus, we can all use our different talents, abilities, and strengths to bring people there and we can help others walking in the same direction. For we all hold the responsibility to do our part.

Verse 19: The obstacles did not end on their journey. Once they arrived, they could not get in because of the crowd. Did they give up? No. It is never easy to bring someone to Jesus but we must persevere. It is too important. There is eternal matters involved.

Verse 20: The four friends were praying for physical healing. Jesus saw past the temporal need and met the eternal one. The forgiveness of sins was truly what this man, every man and woman, needs. And Jesus freely offers it to anyone who will come before Him.

Verse 21: The greatest miracle in the world, the forgiveness of sins, should be celebrated not scrutinized. These “religious men” had missed Jesus themselves so they could not understand how anyone could receive Him. Remember, just because someone claims to be religious does not make them a believer. But Jesus does not leave anyone with an excuse of not understanding Him. If you missed the first miracle, you could not fail to notice His second miracle.

Verses 22-26: The man walked home carrying the mat his friends had brought him on. Can you imagine the celebration he had with his family and friends? That is what happens when we bring people to Jesus. We can witness miracles. But we must first bring them. They cannot walk themselves, they need our help.

Application

Jesus still performs miracles today. Ask God to increase your faith in believing that truth.

What are ways we can bring people to Jesus?

Who has brought you to Jesus at different times in your life?

DAY 4

Today's Scripture:
Acts 9:3-6, 19-21, 26-28

The Word

Son of Sam was a name that drove fear in the heart of the people in New York in the late 1970's. This was the code name for a serial killer who was on the loose. Eventually, David Berkowitz was arrested and charged with the crimes. Yet, amazingly, in prison, David turned from a life of hatred to love. Ten years into his 365 year sentence, a fellow inmate told him about Jesus Christ. He gave David a Bible and eventually David confessed all of his sins and received forgiveness. Since that time, he has had multiple opportunities to testify to all God has done for him. He ministers to other inmates in his prison. And has witnessed others come to the Lord.

Does it seem strange that a murderer became a believer and a witness for Christ? Would you feel safe around him if he now longer was behind bars? Deep down would you still wonder if he was capable of hurting someone again? Would you think it was all just a big ploy for attention? Then you can relate to the fear that the early believers had when a guy named Saul announce his conversion to Christ.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

Verses 20-21: To feel the impact of these verses, you need to have an understanding of the person of Saul. He was a devout Jew who was threatening to murder anyone who followed Jesus. Saul decided to travel from Jerusalem to the city of Damascus so he could capture followers of Christ and bring these prisoners back to Jerusalem. If caught, these believers could have suffered the same fate as Stephen, a follower of Jesus who was stoned to death while Saul watched with approval. However, on the road to Damascus, the life of Saul would radically change.

³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Verses 3-5: Paul became a believer after this experience. He immediately began to showcase his new life in public.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

Some people were amazed, yet others were frightened. After Saul left Damascus to return to Jerusalem, he was not accepted by anyone.

²⁶When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

However, one person risked his life. One person risked his reputation in front of other believers. One person asked Saul the truth about his conversion. One person made all the difference.

²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

Barnabas had a hand in changing the world. For Saul is Paul, the greatest missionary in history. Paul established churches all over the Roman world. Paul wrote a majority of the New Testament of the Bible. Paul led countless numbers of men, women, and children to their Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul did miracles, including healings and raising the dead! I have heard it said that there might have never been a Paul if there had not been a Barnabas.

When someone has a life changing experience, he needs others to share the joy with him. He does not need to be reminded of his past mistakes. Instead, someone should help him find hope for an amazing future. Once we come to the cross, we are washed clean from all we have done wrong. A murderer became a missionary. What could God do in the life of a person that you gave up on a long time ago? Don't give up. You never know when he may walk his own "Damascus" road.

Application

Saul had been an enemy to believers, wanting them dead. Yet, one believer named Barnabas helped a former enemy to find his place in the church. Today, we still reap the benefits from Barnabas reaching out to Saul. Ask God for the courage to be like Barnabas.

Do you feel that someone you know is beyond hope?

Would you be willing to pray for that person to change? Write a prayer for him/her.

When a life does change, how can we be a "Barnabas" to the new believer?

How does God treat us like Barnabas treated Saul?

DAY 5

Today's Scripture:

Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:9-10, Luke 15:11-24

The Word

We are called to reach out to this world. We are commanded by Christ Himself to present the gospel message to those around us. We have studied examples this week of how we can extend a hand to those who do not know Christ.

However, we cannot leave this week without a word of warning. Building intentional relationships is not easy. It involves our time, energy, and resources. Often, it is very rewarding. There are times, though, when it is heartbreaking. Not everyone will accept the message. Moments will come when we will have to watch people revert back to their former way of life. We pray and hope they return to their fellowship with God and with us but it is not always a happy ending.

It seems odd to end a week of study like this but we must realize the risk so we will be prepared. We must choose ahead of time to love those around us despite the choices they may make in their lives. For their decisions could hurt us.

Paul experienced this feeling firsthand through a man names Demas. We first learn about him in the book of Colossians.

¹⁴Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.

Verse 14: Demas was a fellow worker with Paul. We do not know fully how he helped Paul but was obviously known to Colossian believers. Most likely, Demas had traveled with Paul on at least part of his missionary journey. To travel with a missionary means you have a part in the kingdom work. Not only that, they would have spent considerable amounts of time together as they journeyed. Sadly, at some point, Demas changed. Their friendship, the missionary work, the God they loved somehow now meant nothing to him.

⁹Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.

Verse 9: Paul was alone. He had been imprisoned in Rome for being a Christian. He was writing this letter to Timothy, a man that had also accompanied Paul on missionary journeys. Paul wanted company as his life was nearing the end. Unfortunately, someone who could have provided comfort was no longer around.

Verse 10: Demas had left. This once former faithful friend had deserted Paul in his time of need. The world had wooed him back. He chose his past over his future. Paul's heart was broken. The pain was surely magnified due to the situation he was in, chained in a cold and dark dungeon.

There will be times when we will feel the pain from watching people we love walk away from everything of God. When this happens, please realize that our Savior felt the same way. Remember, it was one of His Twelve, Judas, who betrayed Jesus to the people who would kill Him. Jesus can relate to your hurt. Talk to Him about it. He will be your comfort. But do not stop reaching out to others because of the risk. Jesus reached out to you and to me knowing full well all the times we would walk away from Him. Yet, He considered us worth the pain. And He watched for us to return. May we do the same.

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Application

Relationships always cost us something. Thank the Lord that He gave His one and only Son in order to have a relationship with you.

What risks are involved in reaching out to others in the name of Christ?

What rewards are experienced when we reach out?

How can we choose to love people despite their choices?