

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“Hear then His voice today. Perhaps you are made aware of the necessity of a change of heart and life, at some future period, in order that you might die safely. Such a change is equally necessary if you wish to live comfortably now. As long as you are unfit to die, you can have no true enjoyment of life. It is an easy thing to prove that procrastination is highly dangerous. Do you consider how many uncertainties you must presume upon? Are you sure that you will not be suddenly cut off by an unexpected stroke, or visited with fever? Tremble lest such be your end, if you are trifling with God, who is now calling you by His Gospel to seek Him today.” [John Newton]

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What Does Christ’s Church Look Like? – The Church as Remnant

January 5th, 2025

Sermon Text: Zephaniah 3:12-13

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 10

All through the Old Testament prophets we find, interspersed in pronouncements of coming

judgment for idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness, rays of light which speak of the Lord’s preservation of a *remnant*, such as we have just seen here in this 10th chapter of Isaiah –

Isa 10:19-22 The **remnant** of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down. (20) In that day the **remnant of Israel** and the survivors of the house of Jacob will

no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. (21) **A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob**, to the mighty God. (22) For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, **only a remnant of them** will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.

The Apostle Paul told us in his letter to the church at Rome that this promise is concerning the Church, the true Israel of God –

Rom 9:24-27 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (25) As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” (26) “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (27) And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved,

In our day, as it was in the days when the Lord Jesus was here in this world, most professing Christians embrace a false notion of the Church. And there are serious and even spiritually fatal consequences of this error. Just as the Jews in Jesus’ day were certain they were the people of God, His church, if you will, and yet in fact only a small number of them were, so it is today.

What is the Church? What does it look like? Who are its people? Who is a Christian? What does a Christian look like? These are the questions which are largely being wrongly answered in our day. Those who adhere to Rome, and even many who would call themselves Protestants, believe that the Roman church is Christ’s church, or at least one of the true church’s manifestations. Still others would insist that the Church of England is another portion of Christ’s church, and many if not most local churches today have no doubt that the Lord’s blessing is upon them, that they belong to Christ.

But I want to show you this morning from God's Word what the real Church, the true Body of Christ, looks like – and further – that this picture looks nothing like the portrait which so many professing Christians in our day have in their minds. If we are not clear on these matters, we will embrace the false and reject the genuine. If we are not clear on what Christ's church really is, we will not be clear on what the Church is supposed to be doing, nor will we be clear on what the gospel is nor even who a Christian is. There is tremendous confusion on all of these vital matters in our present time.

Zephaniah

The prophet Zephaniah lived in the time of the Godly King Josiah, before the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity in Babylon. Through Zephaniah, the Lord warned of coming judgment which would come after the days of Josiah (he was killed in 609BC at the battle of Megiddo). What is particularly interesting is that Zephaniah urged

repentance and his target audience was specifically **the remnant** of Judah rather than the entire nation. For example:

Zep 2:3 Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.

And then once more:

Zep 3:12-13 But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD, (13) those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”

A century earlier you have another example spoken by Micah:

Mic 4:5-7 For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever. (6) In that day, declares the LORD, I will

assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; (7) and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.

Notice once again Zephaniah's mention of the remnant:

Zep 3:12-13 But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD, (13) those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."

What is the prophet saying here? It is this:

Rom 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a

matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

And it is this:

Rom 9:6-7 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, (7) and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

In other words, *the true Church, the genuine Body of Christ, is this remnant consisting of people who are humble and lowly, who seek the Lord, the people of His pasture whom He loves.* Just as the true Israel in the Old Covenant era was not those who were merely descended physically from Abraham, but the true children of Abraham who were counted righteous by the Lord through faith.

"I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly." Just as it was in the Israel of Old, so it is today in

the visible church. Not everyone who says to Him, “Lord, Lord....” belongs to Him. In fact, this people He leaves in the midst of the visible church, this people who are humble and lowly, are this *remnant*, a word indicating smallness of number.

In a day such as ours when the typical message preached in the churches is that “God loves everyone,” these words of Zephaniah are urgently needed. “*I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly.*” Listen to the Puritan preacher of long ago, Richard Sibbes (1577-1636)-

“There is a difference of the people, both in regard of providence in this world, and in regard of His love. For God has a more special care of some than He has of others; and He loves some to eternal life, and not others. God will leave some. He will purge away others. There is a difference. All are not alike. Even as there is a difference in the created things – there are precious stones and common stones – so among men there is a difference.”

The Church, the true Body of Christ, is a remnant preserved by the Lord. His Church is *preserved by Him even in the worst of times. The gates of hell shall not prevail.* When you, Christian, are called by Him out of this world, when one generation of His true Church is removed to heaven, *we can take comfort in knowing that the Church shall not die with us. Others will be raised up by Christ to take our place in this perishing world.*

Consider this small church here of which we are members. We are growing older together and one day every one of us will no longer be in this world. It may be that this building will one day be no longer a house of the Lord’s church – it is certain that one day it will be burned up with the rest of this perishing world. But what will be here when our generation is gone? We can hope and pray that the Lord will raise up others to continue this ministry for Christ right here in this place – but of this we can be certain – *The Church will not die with us. As long as the Lord permits this fallen world to continue, He will*

raise up others to stand in our place when we are with Christ in the heavens. Christ will always have a Church. Here is Sibbes again:

“I believe that in all times to the end of the world there will be a company of people spread over the world, gathered out of the rest of mankind, whom Christ has knit to Himself by faith, and whom He has also knit together in a holy spirit of love.” [Works of Richard Sibbes, Vol 6, Banner of Truth]

The Remnant is Few and Small

Now, this remnant is the Church. How do we recognize it? What does this Church look like? Zephaniah has described it in part –

- A people humble and lowly
- Who seek refuge in the Lord
- Who do no injustice nor speak lies
- The Lord is their shepherd, they graze and lie down and do not fear

But this true Church, this remnant, is also characterized *in number*. That is to say, they are a *remnant*. *They are few. A handful in comparison to the world and even to the visible Church.*

Jer 3:14 Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

Isa 17:6-7 Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten—two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree, declares the LORD God of Israel. (7) In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel.

Isa 10:20-22 In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. (21) A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty

God. (22) For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.

Christ will always have His Church, but those are but a few who belong to Him. His flock is but ‘a little flock’ (Luke 12:32).

All of this Old Testament theme about His remnant lies behind Jesus answer to a question put to Him:

Luk 13:23-24 And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, (24) “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

Mat 7:13-14 “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. (14) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Why did the person ask Jesus this question at all? “*Will those who are saved be few?*”? It could have been someone who knew that the OT speaks of this *remnant*, or perhaps it seemed to them up to this point that Jesus was saying that *few* would be saved. But Jesus confirmed it – “*those who find it are few.*”

Therefore – what does this tell us about the nature of the true Church? That is, what then, in light of these Scriptures, does the true Church look like? What does the Bible teach us about the people who comprise the true Church?

- It is small in comparison to the rest of humanity
- It is small in comparison to the outward, visible Church
- The people who comprise it are genuine. They love and seek the Lord. They choose the Narrow Way which is a hard way, yet they travel it to life.

Listen to Sibbes once more as he applies these truths:

“If there is but a few, just a remnant in all times, then *am I one of those? What evidence do I have that God has put His stamp upon me to be His? How can I be sure that I am not going on the broad way to destruction? This truth that few are saved should force these questions upon our souls. When we hear of the few that shall be saved, we should make use of Christ’s words in connection with this fact – ‘Oh, strive to enter in at the narrow gate.’*” [Ibid]

More Examples of ‘Few’

2Pe 2:4-9 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; (5) if he did not spare the ancient world, **but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others,** when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; (6) if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen

to the ungodly; (7) **and if he rescued righteous Lot,** greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (8) (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); (9) **then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials,** and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,

Noah – The Church at that time consisted of 8 people. In Lot’s day, there among Sodom and Gomorrah, only Lot and his two daughters were the Church. All through the era of the OT prophets, in Israel during the wilderness wanderings, there was only a handful. Elijah believed he was the only one left, and yet the Lord had preserved His Church – 7000 who refused to bow to Baal.

The Apostle to the Hebrews describes Christ’s Church –

Heb 11:32-40 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me

to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— (33) who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (35) Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. (36) Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— (38) of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us,

that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

And I ask you – *is this what is so typically being called the Church today?* In the beginning of his sermon series on the book of Acts, Lloyd-Jones said this:

“The great tragedy is that there is utter confusion with regard to what the Gospel is, what the church is, and what Christians are supposed to do [and I would add, confusion about just who a Christian is!]....I have an increasing fear that the confusion of people outside the church has been produced mainly by the so-called Christian church herself.” [The Book of Acts, Authentic Christianity, Lloyd-Jones, Crossway Books]

Zep 3:12 But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD,

The Church and the Gospel

Think carefully on this point – *if we have a wrong concept of the*

Church, if our thinking about the nature of the Church is in error, then our concept and thinking about how the Church is to be built is wrong AND that means our concept and thinking about the GOSPEL is wrong! These doctrines are intertwined.

A false idea of the Church, a defective concept of what the Body of Christ is, will construct a structure which is built upon a false foundation, and everything added to it will be defective. In other words, people will think they are saved, they will believe that this entity they attend for a bit on Sunday mornings is a true church when in fact they are not saved and their church is not Christ's Church. It becomes a mere social club with the mission of encouraging morality – more or less. It becomes a place where bread and fish are served up to satisfy the flesh, but it will not be the Church.

John 6:26 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw

signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

The crowds, you see, just wanted another meal. Jesus rebuked them and called them out on it. He did not feed their stomachs this time. The result?

Joh 6:57-66 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. (58) This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

(59) Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. (60) When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (61) But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"

(62) Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where

he was before? (63) It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

(64) But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) (65) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (66) After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

Do you see it? Understand? *Most of the crowds do not want Christ – the Bread of Life, the true manna. They want a kingdom, a “church” that feeds their flesh. That entertains their senses. That impresses the world. And as soon as they perceive that they are not going to get that ‘bread,’ they turn away and want no more to do with Christ and His true Church.*

I was talking with someone about these things recently and he made an excellent point about the church he attends. “I wonder what would

happen if our church did away with the lighting effects and the big video screens and the band and the building expansion projects?” We can know the answer – “not many would be following Christ there anymore.”

I want us all to seriously take notice of just what Jesus did here. Here was a huge crowd come out to hear Him. And then He messed it all up! Why? *Because the Son of God knows who His real people are and what His true Church looks like. And that big crowd was neither.* Jesus did what pastors and churches and seminaries and typical church members believe is unthinkable – *He offended people and they left.*

Why the Remnant Must Remain in this World until Christ Returns

While His Church remains in this fallen world, the Lord’s special care is upon her. If you are a Christian, born again through faith alone in Christ alone, then you are an object of His care while in enemy territory. As long as His

people are in this world, the world will continue – but the Day will come when He will remove every saint from this world.

“Noah must come into the ark before the flood consumed the world. Lot must come forth out of Sodom before it was destroyed. His people, each one, are marked and sealed before the destruction of the world. God has an exact care of His remnant at all times.” [Sibbes]

While His Church remains in this fallen world, her regular experience is one of being afflicted and poor. Sometimes the Church has more comforts, but most often her experience in the world will be one of low estate, an object of hatred and scorn. Why then does He leave us here? There are at least two reasons:

1. It is for our own sanctification. In this world, the Christian still has this remaining corruption of sin. It is Christ’s will for us to share in His glory and in His holiness. As we are lowly and abased here, Christ is refining

us to make us purer and purer until we are raised up one day in glory.

2. And second, Christ leaves us in this perishing world because we are the salt and light of the world.

Mat 5:13-14 “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. (14) “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Think of this carefully now as we close this morning. Christian, YOU are salt in a decaying world. YOU are light in darkness. It is the Lord’s mercy to His enemies that He puts us here and leaves us here for a time. *If salt and light were removed, if the Church were entirely taken out of this world, the world would immediately perish in darkness and rot.* You see then why the Lord tells us – *do not hide the light, do not lose your saltiness.*

He meant that as His people we must follow Him, we must BE who we ARE and never let the world make us conform to it.

In other words, we must be certain to BE His Church and not conform ourselves nor our local church to the pattern which the world considers to be great. We must not become a buffet set up to feed people's flesh, but rather a place where the Bread of Life is always presented. And that will mean that we are not going to be acclaimed as a success by the world or by the counterfeit church.