

## INTRODUCTION

Bob was walking along one day when he saw a man poised on the edge of a bridge ready to jump. Bob ran over and said, "Don't do that!"

"Why shouldn't I?" The man said.

"There's so much to live for. Are you a Christian?"

"Yes."

"Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?" Bob replied.

"Protestant."

"Me too! Are you a Methodist or Baptist?"

"I'm a Baptist."

"Me too! Are you a hard-shell Baptist or a Regular Baptist?" Bob asked.

The man said, "Regular Baptist."

"Me too! Are you Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?"

"Southern Baptist."

"Me too! Are you Conservative Southern Baptist or Moderate Southern Baptist?"

The man replied, "Conservative Southern Baptist."

"Me too! Are you Conservative Southern Baptist 1963 Faith and Message or 2000 Faith and Message?"

"Conservative Southern Baptist 1963 Faith and Message."

Bob sneered at him and said, "Not me! Go ahead and jump, you heretic!"

Sadly, that story is too true to be really funny. There are so many factions among Christians that it's impossible to keep up with the latest divisions. But if you asked me to use only one word to describe the kind of church God desires, I would answer, "a Jesus church." A Jesus church is one that honors Jesus exclusively.

When Paul wrote this letter 2,000 years ago, there weren't any Baptist, Methodist, or Catholic churches—there were only Jesus churches. Most churches start out as Jesus churches, but somewhere along the way they lose their focus.

Once upon a time, there was a church that displayed a large sign on the front of their building that said: Jesus only. It was their way of announcing they exalted Jesus as their primary focus. However, over time, ivy grew on the front of the building and soon, the first three letters in "Jesus" were covered with ivy. Instead of saying "Jesus only" now the sign announced "US ONLY." Someone brought it to the pastor's attention that they should cut the ivy away from the first three letters, but after looking at it, the pastor said, "No, it's fine as it is." Sadly, many churches are *us* only instead of *Jesus* only churches.

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to a Jesus Church in a city located in modern-day Turkey. He highlights several things you can find inside a Jesus church beginning in Colossians 1:28.

Colossians 1:28-29. "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

There really shouldn't be a break between chapter one and chapter two—they are both part of the same paragraph in all the oldest manuscripts.

Colossians 2:1-5. "I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is."

When I speak about a Jesus church, I'm not talking about a building. The church isn't made of bricks and mortar; it's made of brothers and sisters in Christ. When we were kids, most of us learned the little rhyme: Here's the church; And here's the steeple; Open it up and here's all the people. My version doesn't rhyme, but it is more correct: Here's the church building; And here's the steeple; Open it up and there's the church. There are five wonderful blessings you can experience inside a Jesus church. All five of these experiences begin with an "N."

### **1. You can be N-STRUCTED**

Inside a Jesus Church, the Word of God will always be proclaimed. Whenever Paul entered a city the first thing he always did was find a public place and start preaching. In verse 28 he wrote, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone." He didn't say, "We proclaim Christian doctrine, or we proclaim theology." He said, "We proclaim HIM—Jesus."

Two thousand years ago, there were many spiritual messages being proclaimed, and some of them were dangerous. The Gnostics proclaimed their secret knowledge, and the Judaists proclaimed the Old Testament law. But Paul proclaimed Jesus. The purpose of his preaching was to edify and strengthen believers. A Jesus Church instructs people on how to grow into fullness.

Some of my most pleasant childhood memories were eating at my grandmother's table in Florida. Memaw was about 4'-11" tall and weighed about ninety pounds, but she was a wonderful cook. My favorite two dishes were banana pudding and pounded steak. She made REAL banana pudding—none of that instant stuff! She served it hot with vanilla wafers around the dish soaking in the delicious pudding—and on top was about six inches of light, fluffy meringue. But her pounded steak was the best (what Texans call country fried steak). She had a special way of preparing the beef. She placed the round steak on the counter and then pounded the steak repeatedly with a coke bottle (six ounces of course). I once asked her why she did that, and she smiled and said with a twinkle in her eye, "I want to make sure this cow is dead before I cook it." My eyes got as big as saucers...I later figured out it was to make the meat tender. Whenever I heard the sound of that coke bottle pounding the steak, I always came running into the kitchen!

That's great for country fried steak, but sadly, that's what a lot of churches do with the Bible. They use it as a hammer to pound people over their heads. Paul said the purpose of his preaching

was to admonish and teach everyone. The word *admonish* means "to direct, steer in the right direction." There are too many churches today that only preach the negative aspects of the Christian life. They focus on all the things a Christians *shouldn't* do. They tell you a Christian shouldn't smoke, drink, dance, chew, dip, go to movies, or have long hair. There's not much instruction happening—it mainly prohibitions. How tough would it be if road signs only told you where you *weren't* going? Can you imagine driving toward Dallas and seeing a sign that said: Dallas—not this way. You make a turn and see another sign that says: Dallas—not this way. You would soon get frustrated and say, "Don't tell me where I'm NOT going, tell me which direction to go!" That's why highway signs say something like: Dallas 100 miles—it lets us know we're going in the right direction. That's the kind of instruction you find in a Jesus Church—you hear God's Word telling you, "This is the way; go in this direction!"

Later in Chapter two we are going to be exposed to some of the false, legalistic teaching that was present in the early church. I call these legalistic teachings "grace robbers." You've heard of grave-robbers, well grace robbers are even more dangerous. In June I'm going to do a four-part series entitled "Beware of Grace Robbers!" The law always says, "Don't touch or taste." But Grace always says, "Help yourself to God's blessings!"

## **2. You can be N-ERGIZED**

In a Jesus church, you can find strength and energy to live the Christian life. During this time of high gas prices, people are looking for new, cheaper, renewable sources of energy—like solar power. Paul had discovered the unlimited power of the Son. He wrote in verse 29 he was "struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." Paul didn't say, I am struggling in MY own energy," he said, "in his energy." The supernatural energy of Jesus Christ is available to us!

Before Jesus returned to heaven He told the disciples, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit comes on you." (Acts 1:8) The word for power is *dunamis*, from which we get our words dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pastor A. J. Gordon visited the New York World's Fair. From a distance he saw a man pumping water using an old hand pump. The water was gushing forth at a tremendous volume, and Dr. Gordon waited for the man to tire out, but he kept pumping at a furious pace. Dr. Gordon thought, "He must be one of the strongest men on earth!" But when he got closer he realized the man was only a wooden dummy. His wooden hand was attached to a pump powered by electricity. He discovered the man wasn't pumping the water; the water was pumping the man. Are you trying to live the Christian life in your own energy? Are you pumping away as furiously as hard as you can and wondering why you stay frustrated and fatigued? Jesus said in John 7:38, "Streams of living water will flow from within him." And Christ in you is the river!

## **3. You can be N-COURAGED**

In a Jesus Church you will find plenty of encouragement. When Paul thought of the believers in Colosse and nearby Laodicea, he wrote in Colossians 2:2, "My purpose is that they may be

encouraged in heart.”

The Bible teaches one of the main reasons why Christians should gather together is to encourage one another. We should be cheerleaders for each other. When I played sports in high school, I remember how important cheerleaders were for the team. When I was on the football field I couldn't always hear what they were cheering. But when I played basketball, we could hear the cheerleaders urging the team on to victory.

I don't know if cheerleaders still do this, but when one of us would get to the free throw line to take a foul shot, they would cheer, “Sink it, Sink it, come on David, sink it!” Man! They were cheering for ME! When I heard that cheer, it made me want to try a little harder to make that shot! That's what we ought to be in the church—we should be spiritual cheerleaders for each other saying, “Go! Fight! Win! Pray!” One of our jobs is to cheer on our brothers and sisters: “Trust Him, trust Him, come on people trust Him!”

The only verse in the New Testament addressing the importance of church attendance says, “Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging one another, not avoiding worshiping together as some people do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25, *The Message*)

The big Day that is approaching is the return of Jesus. As we get closer and closer to that day, we should be doing a better and better job of encouraging one another. There is tremendous power in encouragement!

One of America's greatest presidents was Abraham Lincoln. I recently read another Lincoln biography entitled *Lincoln's Melancholy*. It is not widely published that President Lincoln was prone to bouts of severe depression, causing him to stay in bed for days at a time. He struggled with self-esteem and confidence all his life. On the evening of April 14, 1865, President Lincoln attended a play at Ford's Theater. John Wilkes Booth was waiting outside his box, and at the precise moment the audience roared with laughter at the funniest line in the play, Booth rushed in and shot the President in the back of the head. President Lincoln was carried across the street to a boarding house where he died a few hours later without ever regaining consciousness. We all know about his assassination. But what many people don't know is what he was carrying in his pockets the night he was shot. The contents of his pockets were not publicly revealed until 1976. They are now on display in the Library of Congress, and I saw them myself last week when Cindy and I were there visiting our U.S. Representative, Louie Gohmert.

On the night he was shot, he had a handkerchief, two pairs of reading glasses, a spectacles case, a watch fob, and a pocketknife. The only money in his pocket was a single \$5 dollar bill, but it was Confederate currency! There were also a few newspaper clippings. One of them had so many creases it was obvious Lincoln had read and reread it many times. It was an article about a speech given by Englishman John Bright who said, “Abraham Lincoln is one of the greatest men of all time.”

Today, many of us agree with that assessment, but at the time the President was shot, he presided over a deeply divided nation. He was the target for frequent vitriolic attacks in the press. The

vast majority of newspaper articles about the President were harsh and critical. This was long before approval ratings, but he was so unpopular there are accounts of people cheering when they heard of his death.

Why do you suppose he kept that article in his pocket and read it over and over again? I suspect it was because he was prone to depression and whenever he read that article it encouraged his heart to continue to press on. There were times when his heart was broken over the divided nation and the thousands of young men who lost their lives on the battlefields. I can just seem him with his head bowed under the weight of leadership taking out that article and reading those words, "Abraham Lincoln is one of the great men of all time." That should serve as a lesson to each of us about the power of encouragement. You may not write a newspaper article, or give a speech, but you can write a card or note encouraging someone!

That's why those who are the strongest Christians wear out their Bibles reading over and over again the words of scripture. It tells us God loves us and will never leave us or forsake us. It tells us we shouldn't let our hearts be troubled, instead we should trust God. It tells us this life is not all there is. To revise a line from a popular country song, I CAN give you book, chapter and verse—life *doesn't* end with a slow ride in a hearse! Jesus said in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." When you are part of a Jesus church your heart will be encouraged, and you will encourage others!

#### **4. You can be N-CLUDED**

One of the greatest blessings of a Jesus church is that the members open their arms wide and include everyone who comes to Jesus. Paul wrote in verse two, "My purpose is that they may be...united in love." The phrase "united in love" literally means, "knit together in love." This past year, our daughter Laura Grace took up knitting. I was fascinated to watch as she took two different colored yarns and wove them together to make a beautiful scarf. That's what happens in a Jesus Church. We are all different, but the Holy Spirit knits our hearts together.

We live in an age of marvelous electronic connection, but it has only created miserable personal isolation. Today a person can sit in front of a computer monitor and feel like they have friends all over the world. One of the fastest growing internet fads is something called social networking. People can use the internet to display their picture and profile, and invite their friends to visit, who in turn invite their friends, etc. There are dozens of websites facilitating social networking. One of the largest is facebook.com, which is for high school and college students—it has over 7 million users. The largest is called myspace.com, which has 77.5 million users! To me, this trend demonstrates how hungry people are for genuine relationships.

A Jesus church is a place where all different kinds of people can be united in love. I've said many times a church is not a showcase for shiny saints, we are a hospital for sick sinners. We are to be a safe harbor for those whose lives have been shipwrecked.

One of my greatest blessings as a pastor is to hear the stories of people who were at the end of their rope and they came to Green Acres and found hope and help in Jesus. Not long ago a lady said to me, "I came here with a broken heart and I heard you say, 'give Jesus all the pieces of

your broken heart and he can heal it.’ That’s what I did. And I found other people who have gone through the same kinds of heartaches I’ve had. I’ve found a place where I’m loved and accepted.”

Are you inclusive or exclusive when new people come to our church? There are plenty of people who are lonely and even angry, but we must open our arms to welcome them to Jesus. “He drew a circle to shut me out; Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout; But love and I had a wit to win; We drew a circle to that took him in.” That’s what happens in a Jesus church—you can be loved and included.

## **5. You can be N-RICHED**

Now I’m not one of those health-and-wealth snake oil preachers who teach that if you’ll just trust God you’ll never be sick and have a million dollars by Tuesday. But I do believe God wants all His children to be rich. Let me give you a definition: You are rich if you have all your needs met and you have the capacity to enjoy life. There are people with millions of dollars who aren’t rich by that definition. And there are people living on a monthly social security check who are rich indeed.

When you’re in a Jesus church, you discover the true source of our riches. It’s like finding hidden treasure! And in this passage, we discover the source of our hidden treasure. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:2-3, “that they may have the full riches...that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

In Jesus, we can access the full riches of heaven! In Jesus we find ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. These riches are experienced when we understand the mystery we spoke about in the previous message. The life-changing mystery of God is summarized in these seven words: Christ in you—the hope of glory.

He is the treasure, we are the containers. If you think that’s too simplistic, notice what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” We are all different kinds of clay jars. Some are big and some are little. Some are fancy and some are plain. But the purpose of a vessel is to contain something. The vessels in your kitchen (plates, bowls, pots, etc.) are designed to contain food. When they aren’t containing something, they are empty vessels, and they aren’t fulfilling their intended purpose. In the same way, God doesn’t want you to be an empty vessel. He created you to contain a treasure. This treasure is someone—Jesus Christ.

It’s like this clay jar I have in my hands. There’s nothing special about this jar—it’s plain, and even cracked. That’s an apt description of many of us—we’re a bunch of crackpots! But the focus is NOT the container; the focus is on the treasure inside—Jesus. And what just happens to be inside this clay jar? Wow! Why, this jar is filled with treasure—gold coins! This jar is valuable—not because of what it is—but because of what it contains! You and I get our value from who we are in Christ and Christ in us.

Why don’t you enjoy some of this priceless treasure? God wants us to be more than mere

containers, however. He wants us to be channels of Jesus' love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, meekness, goodness, faithfulness, and self control. If you let Him, Jesus will live His supernatural life through your surrendered personality.

## CONCLUSION

At this point you may be thinking, "Well, I attend church, but I don't get anything from it. The problem might not be with your church—it might be with you. It reminds me of what comedian Jerry Seinfeld once said about laundry detergent. He said, "I don't like the commercials that boast about a detergent being able to take out bloodstains. I think if you have a t-shirt with blood stains on it, maybe laundry isn't your biggest problem!" I agree.

Through the years people have often commented to me about a church service by saying, "I didn't get much out of that." Well if you only come to church to get something out of it, you'll often leave unsatisfied. What I want to ask those people is, "Well what did you *put* into it?" The final thought is this: It's better to give than to receive. If you want to be encouraged, then become a cheerleader for others—encouragement is like a boomerang—it will always come back to you. Do you know what you call a boomerang that doesn't work? A stick. If you don't encourage others, don't be surprised if you end up as a stick in the mud!

When you show up on Sundays are you asking yourself, "How can I energize someone? How can I encourage someone? Who can I include today?" Or are you asking yourself, "Who will encourage me today?"

I want to remind you that you can't receive these blessings from a church anyway—you only receive them from Jesus. But Jesus is always present in a Jesus Church. He said in Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them." He never said, "Where two or three are gathered in the name of 'baptist' or gathered in the name of 'Green Acres' or even gathered in the name of 'Christian.' He said, in MY name! It's not so much about coming to church as it is coming to Jesus.

My oldest daughter, Jenni, is now 28 years old (and expecting our first grandchild in September, by the way). When she was only six or seven years old, she used to do a pretty good imitation of me preaching. When someone asked her to imitate her dad, she would stand up straight, smile, raise both of her hands in a typical preacher-gesture and say in a deep, serious voice, "Come to Jesus!" She got it. That's about all I have to say. Do you need instruction? Come to Jesus. Do you need energy? Come to Jesus! Do you need encouragement? Come to Jesus. Do you need to be included? Come to Jesus. Do you need to be enriched? Then come to Jesus and you will find that the greatest treasure in the universe is Christ in you—the hope of glory! And when He is living His life in you, your life will become like a refreshing fountain that overflows with life to those around you!

## **OUTLINE**

### **1. You can be N-STRUCTED**

“We PROCLAIM HIM, admonishing and teaching everyone.” v. 1:28

### **2. You can be N-ERGIZED**

“struggling with all HIS ENERGY, which so powerfully works in me.” v. 1:29

### **3. You can be N-COURAGED**

“My purpose is that they may be ENCOURAGED IN HEART.” v. 2:2

### **4. You can be N-CLUDED**

“My purpose is that they may be...UNITED IN LOVE.” v. 2:2

### **5. You can be N-RICHED**

“that they may have the FULL RICHES...that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the TREASURES of wisdom and knowledge.” v. 2:2-3





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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes