

What's the Value of a Church

By Dr. David H. McKinley

Sermon preached by Dr. David H. McKinley on September 13, 1998, from the pulpit of Boca Raton Community Church, Boca Raton, Florida.

I am going to do something you have probably never done before in a church service. I have arranged with the ushers to pass the offering plates for a second time this morning. You may have never done this before, or this may not be new to you! But here is the catch. When the plate comes to you, simply reach in and take something out!

How many of you have ever taken from the plate? This may not be the first time for some, but for most of you, this is probably a new experience. Wouldn't it be great if the offering was a time of rattling and laughing? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had such a good time in giving that people knew something was happening?

When you are out in the community this week, people may ask you about your new pastor. When they ask about the first Sunday, you can tell them I passed the plate and we all took something out. I guarantee folks will be in this church next Sunday morning!

I am asking you to reach in the offering plate and take out a coin like the one I am holding in my hand. It is one of the most common coins in the American currency. In Jesus' day, it was not uncommon for Him to use some of the most common elements of life to illustrate his teaching or message. It was not typically the pattern of Jesus to take His Bible, stand in a pulpit like this one, and say, "Turn with Me in your Bibles" That is a wonderful way to preach and teach, but that was not how the Lord Jesus Christ taught and spoke. Instead, He would often take the common things of life (like coins) and bring alongside them the great truths, promises and teachings of the Word of God.

Jesus knew how to get people's attention. You can find in the New Testament where Jesus used money on several occasions to illustrate great truths. Wouldn't you agree with me that people are interested in money? I realize their interest may not be in pennies, but people are interested in money. Drop a sack of change on a sidewalk and see how much attention you get. So much of our success, significance and sense of well being is wrapped up in economics and money. Money, many times, represents what is happening in our hearts. With the Bible in one hand and the coin in the other, I want us to look at some things about the church of Jesus Christ.

I know you have been praying for me. But I want you to know that I have been praying for you. As I have prayed for you, Ephesians 3 has probably been the text I have read before the Lord more than any other single passage of scripture. As I come today, I come recognizing that there is a new role and relationship as pastor and people that we are entering into together. It is my desire that I would honor this moment as a divine appointment in my life with you and with God.

Earlier today, I spent some time reviewing the personal journal that I keep, reflecting back over my prayers and journey with God. As I looked back over the summer of 1998, everything in my life pointed to a divine appointment with the Boca Raton Community Church. I recognize the significance of this moment. Not only is it a divine appointment, but it is a defining moment. Much of what I am going to share from my heart with you today will shape and point to the future of what I believe is in the Word of God for His church and His people. So I want us to look at this prayer beginning in Ephesians 3:14 and I want to take you through several passages today that will help us to learn about the church. Ephesians 3:14-16a,

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened . . .”

Is there anybody today who is weak . . . vulnerable . . . struggling? Do you feel a need in your life for strength? Just as the Apostle Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus, I want you to know that I am praying for you. I want us to learn to pray for one another that we might be strengthened. Continuing in this passage of scripture, the Bible says,

“ . . . strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, . . .”

We see the power of influence and affluence all around us. But we need the kind of power that will enable us to be able to have courage to stand and to make a difference in this day. Paul says in Ephesians 3:17,

“ . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; . . .”

Your relationship with Christ should be real and active!

Ephesians 3:17-18,

“ . . . that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints . . .”

Did you get that? You are included! If you have received Christ and He is in your heart, you are a saint! This may seem strange to you, but the church does not appoint saints, the church is full of saints. Saints are those who have received Christ. Together we are the saints. Paul’s prayer continues in Ephesians 3:18-21,

“ . . . [that we] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

God desires glory. “Glory” meaning “attraction”, “magnification”. God wants to be lifted up. God wants the church to call attention, not to itself, but to Him. The whole essence of the church is about this issue: the glory of God in the church! We, as individual members of the body of Christ, come together that the glory of God might be seen in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.

It is about glory! Does the glory of God matter to you in Boca Raton Community Church? Is God’s glory evident in this place? Do we draw attention to Him and to the Savior, Jesus Christ, whom we love? When we begin to care about the glory of God, it changes how we feel about the church.

You can hold this coin in your hand today, but the coin can have little or no value to you. This coin could be a fifty-cent piece, a silver dollar. It could be a gold coin worth tremendous amounts of money. It could be a dollar bill, a fifty-dollar bill, or even a five hundred dollar bill. If the coin or bill has no value in your heart, it is literally metal that has been impressed or paper with ink on it. You can hold money in your hand, but it does not have value unless it has value in your heart.

In the same way, we need to have the value of the glory of God in our hearts. Nothing should matter to us as much as the glory of God. Our lives should be joined together for the glory of God.

What is the value of a church? How does that church bring glory to God?

You have the coin in your hand. What is the purpose of a coin? You spend it, right? Some of you will spend this coin today. That is fine. It is yours to purchase something. ***THE PURPOSE OF A COIN IS FOR REDEMPTION.*** The word “redeem” means to buy, to purchase, to pay off. Just as the purpose of a coin is to redeem, to buy something, so it is that the church is about a redeeming mission. The Bible tells us that every one of us begins our lives with a debt.

A common thought in our world today is that everybody is born with a blank slate and that we make the marks that matter in our lives. The Bible does not teach that. The Bible teaches that every one of us are born with marks against us. There is a “sin debt”. It began with Adam, our first father, when he refused to follow God. Everyone who is of his likeness is born in sin.

Today we camouflage that sin. We give it new names. We categorize it in different ways. Some people will say that we have financial problems. We just need more money. Other people will say we have educational problems. If we could just teach people more, then they will be able to know and understand how to solve the problems of their lives. Some people will say that the problems of our world are social problems and others will say that we have governmental problems. Some will say that the problems are emotional problems. While all of these are expressions, none of them get to the root of the problem.

The root of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. The heart problem that everyone of us has is that we are born with a debt of sin that separates us from God. We are born in bondage to sin. Consequently, we need Someone to release us from the bondage. We need Someone to pay the debt and to remove the bankruptcy of our condition separate from God.

The good news is that God has done that. God has solved that problem for us. Galations 4:4,

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

What God has done for us is that two thousand years ago, God stepped out of heaven and stepped in to earth in the form of a human body. When He came and walked among us, He came, walked among us, died on the cross for our sins in order that He might fulfill His redeeming mission. What Jesus did on the cross is that He paid the debt of our sins. He took away the debt of our hearts and He has made it possible for us to now have a relationship with God.

The problem in our world is that people do not have a relationship with God. The problem in our world is that people do not know God and have ignored God and consequently nothing else in life comes together. Galations 3:13,

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on the tree.’”

Jesus went to a cross. And there, Jesus shed His blood. Jesus gave His life because the debt of sin was greater than what any of us could pay. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death . . ."

There is a death sentence on sin. It means that we would be eternally separated from God, but the good news is that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ! The good news is as Peter said over in I Peter 1:18,

“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold from your former manner of life from the tradition of your fathers, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ you have been redeemed.”

The wonderful thing about the church is that the church is involved in a redeeming mission. Nothing is more important than when we get the message of redemption in Christ to our world. Let me be very careful here. I am not saying to you that redemption is in the church. I am not telling you that if you come to church that every time you come it is as though God takes the sin list of your life, takes an eraser, and when you are there on Sunday morning He erases a few lines. And when you are there on Sunday night, He

erases a few more. And if you are there on Wednesday night, He really erases a few more. Some people think you go to church and you kind of erase the debts.

No. The church does not have redemption. The church cannot erase the debt of sin. But the message of the church is the message of Jesus Christ. The church is about one thing. It is about a redeeming mission to see people who are lost, people who are in debt, people who are in bondage to sin brought into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is all about that redeeming mission. Consequently, every time someone comes to the doorway of the church, what needs to be communicated to them and what they need to see and to understand is this: in Christ, one post of the doorway is forgiveness and all of our sins are forgiven in Christ for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all of our sin. And the other side of that door post is freedom because once you have been forgiven, then you have a new life called “freedom” in Jesus Christ. Freedom to live the life that God intended for you to live. In Christ, there is a new beginning, there’s a new doorway, there’s a new way to live and it is the way of redemption, to be free and to be forgiven.

Just as the purpose of a coin is for redemption, so the purpose of the church is to share the message of redemption in Jesus Christ because our world needs to be redeemed. That is, those that are in the world need to receive the message of Jesus Christ.

The great songwriter put it this way:

*Jesus paid it all
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain
But He washed it white as snow.*

The purpose of a coin, the purpose of the church is for redemption.

As you hold that coin in your hand this morning, I want you to notice that the coin bears the emblems and bears the images of things that are important in America and in American government and history. I chose the penny because while it is the smallest of all our denominations, it is possible that the face that is affixed to the penny is the greatest of all of our presidents: President Abraham Lincoln. Certainly, all of us are aware of the impact of Lincoln on history and rights and all of those things on moral character in our nation. I thank God for what Abraham Lincoln represents about the history of America. But just as a coin has images, coin is shaped and designed in order that it might be officialized and authenticated as true United States currency, so it is that what happens in a church is to give identity to the One who owns the church.

I do not own this coin. I have this coin, but I do not own it. This coin belongs to the American government ultimately. That is how it is issued and it is used within the circulation of the currency of the American government system. In that same way, we need to understand that as a church that the pattern of the coin is for identification in the

nation and the pattern of the church is for identification and here is the pattern: every person who becomes a part of the church becomes an image-bearer of Jesus Christ!

Several years ago, I had the opportunity of going with my family up to Philadelphia and making the pilgrimage around Liberty Square. We went into Independence Hall. We spent time out on the beautiful lawn plaza area that was there and we went by the Liberty Bell. We even took in a Phila Cheese Steak Sandwich.

But before we left, I noticed over just off of the plaza was a large building and it said, "Franklin Mint." I decided that I had never seen them made money or what happened in one of those buildings. So, I thought to myself, "I just want to see what the building is, what it is about." I was amazed as I walked in the foyer of the building to find it very different from most government buildings that I have been in. I found that there were beautiful floors in that building and very elegant wooden cases. Inside each of those display cases, there were magnificent coins of gold and silver all sizes and denominations from all eras of American history. I found that we saw that on the floor, and then went up the escalator to the second floor and saw the same thing. And even again to the third floor just coins, gold and silver. It was more money than I had ever seen in lifetime.

Then, when I got to the third floor, there was a corridor, a very long hallway. Actually, that corridor was longer than the entire length of this building, and as we walked down the wall looking at the corridor, we could read something of the history of currency and coinage in America. But then suddenly, almost as if going from day to night, I turned at the end of the hallway from these beautiful pictures, graphics and colors, and I suddenly turned and I was looking out over a manufacturing plant. There in the great, hot, smoking conditions of that plant, I could see men and women at work in uniform helping to melt down the metals and to pour the blanks for the coinage and then washing and they were putting the images into the coins. Interestingly enough, thousands of pennies, unlike any other time in my life, just pouring into a vat that was there waiting for them.

As I stood there that day looking at it, it suddenly dawned on me that I had just seen an illustration, I had just seen a picture of what is most important in the church. It is easy, ladies and gentlemen, if we are not careful, to begin to see the church as a museum, as a place where all the saints come to shine and to be on display on Sunday. But suddenly I realized that God's plan and purpose for the church is not that it would be a museum where everybody is shined and polished. But much more, that the church would be seen as a manufacturing plant and what happens in the manufacturing plant is that people are being shaped and marked into the image of Jesus Christ and their lives begin to be image-bearers of Jesus Christ.

Just as the pattern of a coin is for identification, so the pattern of the church is to be identification of image-bearers for Christ. What does an image-bearer look like? What are the elements of the life of an image-bearer?

I believe there are several things and I'll use the cross to represent it.

First, the image-bearer is a person who has a spirit, a attitude of submission. They have come to the place in their life where they have resigned as the general managers of the universe and they have recognized that they need God and that they are dependent upon Him. So consequently, there is a spirit of submission.

I find it that image-bearers of Jesus Christ not only have come to that place of submission, but they are people who look for opportunities to serve. Life is not about who can serve them, but now their life is about how can I be a servant of Jesus Christ? Then not only the spirit of service, but the spirit of stewardship. Learning that what I have and all that I have, whether it is the money I hold in my hands, or whether it is the wonderful talents like these that we have seen this morning, that everything I am and everything I have is taken and used with the trust of sharing the message of Jesus Christ.

Then there is one other element. Image-bearers of Christ are people who are submitted, people who are servants, people who are stewards. They are also people who are able to handle the suffering of life with a completely different perspective. I want to be sure you understand that I believe that believers, followers of Jesus Christ, suffer. But Jesus Christ makes a difference in our suffering. He is able to take the fires of life and the trials of life and to shape in us the beautiful image of Himself, of Jesus Christ, in us.

Just as the pattern of a coin is for identification, so the pattern of the church is to produce image-bearers of Jesus Christ and here is the value of the church: not just that we come together on Sunday and look good on the pew, but that what is happening here is changing who we are and how we are day in and day out.

One final thing that I want you to see. The purpose of a coin is for redemption. The purpose of the church is to share the redeeming message of Christ. The pattern for the coin is for identification: image-bearers of Jesus Christ. But the power of a coin is in circulation. It is when the coin is put into circulation! You can choose not to put this coin in circulation. You can choose not to put any of your money in circulation. You can choose not to be your life in circulation for the kingdom of God. But I want you to know that power comes when the coins move into circulation. Power comes in the church when churches begin to be full of people who are circulating with the redeeming message of Christ and who are image-bearing what it is to be like Christ out in the world around us.

In the seventeenth century in the commonwealth of England, Oliver Cromwell came to a crisis in his leadership. The crisis was that they were without currency. They no longer had silver that was needed to make the coins and to buoy the vats of wealth in the nation. So Lord Cromwell sent his men out to the countrysides and to the cities to see if they could find some more gold and silver. They came back and reported that the largest source of silver they could find was in the churches, in the cathedrals, and they said that they are in the statues of the saints. They said that they had beautiful statues there that are representations of great heroes of the faith to which Cromwell responded, "Well then go and get the saints and melt them down and put them in circulation."

Ladies and gentlemen I submit to you today that that is the greatest need in the church in America. We have a circulatory problem in the church in America today. We don't have a digestive problem. There has never been a time in history where more spiritual food was available than it is today. From the radio, to the television, to the book market, there is a ton of spiritual food that you can take advantage of and you should. But, while we have indulged our digestive, we have a circulatory problem. The church doesn't have a problem with the nervous system. As best I can tell, most churches are stirred up most of the time. We don't have a problem with our respiratory system because there is a lot of hot air going on in churches too. But, there is a circulatory problem. What is needed in this day and what is needed in this hour and what is needed in this generation unlike any other generation in American history is for the church to understand its message of redemption, to become genuine image-bearers of Christ and to move out in circulation in the world and to take this world for the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

Five times at the end of each of the gospels and the beginning of the book of Acts, Jesus said, "Go. Go. Go. Go. Go." Today, we have translated it, "Sit. Sit. Sit. Sit. Sit." It is time for us to move into circulation. I love what some men have said. Ernest T. Campbell said, "The holiest moment of the church service is the moment when God's people, strengthened by preaching, go out of the church door into the world to be the church." We don't go to church. We are the church!

Listen to Myron Augsburger (sp?), "The Christian church is not a static institution. It is men and women who flesh out in daily life the meaning of faith through reliance on the risen Christ." That is what being a part of the church is all about. And the value of a church is that we come together, we clarify the message, we take the shape of Christ and we go out and we begin to circulate in this world to make a difference and to make a change in the community in which we live because of Jesus Christ.

In our community, there are many fine people, well-educated people, gifted people, successful people, wealthy people. They have the finest things that money can buy, they have experienced the greatest things that life has to offer. But time and time again in our community as in every community across America, what we find are people who are living with fear, despair, emptiness, doubt and whose lives are filled with pain. What they need is someone like you and me, someone who may seem like nothing more than just a penny in the currency of God to begin to be put into circulation and to carry the message of life, hope and peace in Jesus Christ.

Our mission in circulation is to bring the hope of Christ to all people. Can you imagine how far just one of these pennies will go that I have given you this morning? Can you imagine how scattered and varied the course of their lives will be over a lifetime? We cannot begin to imagine it today any more than we can imagine how though we seem small and insignificant in the kingdom of God, when put into circulation our lives can make a difference for Jesus Christ. No matter where you are or what you go through, your life can make a difference for Him.

In the summer of 1994, America was captivated, shocked, saddened, and then ultimately saturated with the events that unfolded in the relationship between a football hero, O.J. Simpson, and his wife, Nicole Brown Simpson. To this day, there has never been a finalization of exactly who the perpetrator of the crime was that night on the doorstep of Bundy out in the Brentwood subdivision of Los Angeles.

During that same summer in Cocoa Beach, Florida, where I have recently resident there in Brevard County, a similar thing happened in our community. I am sure you never heard about it in the news here. It was just one of those many random acts of violence that we hear about today. A gentleman, his wife, and their eighteen year old daughter returned home on a Sunday night after church to the doorstep of their house to be accausted by a masked invader. He had a knife in his hand, and he began to wheel that knife first against the husband, the man, to try to disarm him, and then against the two women as they began to try to stop him. He injured the man, the father, the husband. He injured the wife, the mother. But the young lady, though she had received an injury, thought that maybe she could get away and get help. So she broke free and began to run to the neighbor's house. Within just a matter of moments, it was seen that the intruder left. The father and mother, though critically wounded, would survive. But that young eighteen-year-old girl named Amy never made it to the neighbor's house because she had had a fatal wound. It was a great tragedy: a Christian family, people who loved God.

Something very interesting happened. About three or four days later, I was out in the front yard of my house doing some work there in the yard and I heard something that was very common up in that part of Florida. I heard an airplane, a banner tow, flying overhead. I looked up and expected to see what you usually see: 12 t-shirts for \$2.00 or happy hour or whatever. To my total surprise, I looked up and there behind that airplane was a banner that said, "Amy lives with Jesus!"

As I stood in my yard that day and as I looked up at that banner, I realized in a way like never before in my life, the tremendous honor and privilege that I have to preach the message of hope in Jesus Christ because when life is absolutely at its worst, for those who know Christ, there is still hope! Though it was a tragic moment and though it was a horrible moment in the life of a family, they could still fly a banner over a grave side that said, "Amy lives with Jesus!" because that is the triumphant that we have in Christ.

Today, I am asking you to join me as your pastor and to come together as a church and let the value of this church not just be something that we hold in our hands, but something that gets deep into our hearts and that we understand the redeeming message that we have, that we purpose to become image-bearers of Christ together, and that we move into circulation in this community and as far as God will let us go into the world that we might make a difference for Jesus Christ in this generation and in the generations to come. May God help us to do it by His grace!

Father, I thank you today for Your Word. I thank you for the way a coin can bring such clarity to who we are and what we are about. Father, I pray that You would let this message be something that would be simple and transferable enough that we really could

talk with each other about how we can be image-bearers of Christ, about how we can be faithful to proclaim the redeeming message of Christ and never be ashamed of that message and Lord, how we can let our lives flow in the circulation of Your work today. Father, it is our desire that You would move and work in this moment today and that this would be a moment of commitment. So, Father, right now, we surrender ourselves to You. We look to You. We believe You to work among us in this moment and in the moments to follow as we go out to be the church of Jesus Christ. We pray in Your name. Amen.