



JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH

Part 2 of Jesus Loves His Church

Pastor Mark Driscoll | July 01, 2012

“I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”

It's a crazy story. Two thousand years ago there's a guy around thirty. His mom was a teenager when he was born. His dad was a carpenter. They lived in a rural area, very poor. Probably grew up in a home about the size of a parking stall where you and I would put a vehicle. Part of that home was dedicated to animals. They didn't even use all of that square footage. No indoor plumbing, no wealth, affluence, opulence, nothing like that.

He worked with his dad for a while as a carpenter, and then he started preaching and teaching. And he had a group of about twelve followers, that's it. Comes from a small town, maybe dozens of people. There's only one well to sustain that entire population. He would have gone there every day, perhaps with his mother, Mary, to get some water. Very simple, very humble, very rural. No wife, no kids, no job.

And then in Matthew 16:18 we read this statement that he makes even though he's only got about a dozen followers. Here's what he has to say, it's an astonishing statement, “I will—” this guy's pretty confident in his plan, “I will,” what? “Build my church.” Not just some thing, his thing, “my church.” Ownership. “Who's going to do it?” “I will,” he says. “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Just imagine a thirty-year-old, unemployed, homeless guy, single, who grew up in a rural town, saying this with all authority to twelve guys. How many of you would snicker, laugh, make fun of him, immediately Twitter, “Met the craziest guy on earth”? This is a big statement.

Well, this guy's Jesus Christ. And two thousand years later, we're the church. Jesus builds his church. A few billion people on earth today claim to worship him as Lord, God, Savior, King, and Christ. The most famous person who's lived in the history of the world is this man, Jesus Christ, and the church to thousand years later loves him, serves him, follows him.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

How in the world did this happen? What were the events that transpired? How in the world did Jesus build his church? Well, it starts in Acts 1:8, Jesus told us how he would build his church. After his sinless life, after his death on the cross, after his resurrection from death, Jesus gets together what was at that point the early church, and it was 120 people. Not a lot of people. And he says this, “But you will receive power.”

Now, the difference between those 120 people and a few billion people a few thousand years later is that they were given power and that power has continued from generation to generation. It's supernatural, miraculous, God-appointed power. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”

And so Jesus' promise to the 120 who were comprising the first church after his resurrection is “Your lives are going to be marked by power because the Holy Spirit is coming and he is going to give you power.” Jesus is the second member of the Trinity. There's one God in three persons. And he is God become a man. And when he rose from death, before he ascended into heaven, he said that the Spirit would be coming, the third member of the Trinity, to empower the Christians for what? Well, for ministry and mission.

“And you will be my witnesses.” Jesus is telling 120 people, “The whole world is going to know who I am and what I've done through my death, burial, resurrection, and you're going to tell them.” He tells the church that our mission is to be his witnesses. That means we live openly, and publicly, and honestly about a love for Jesus because we want other people to know him, and to love him, and to meet him, and to become Christians devoted to him and following of him.

And he says it'll happen in “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth.” That it would start where they were at and it would ring out from there. And that's how ministry is ultimately to work. You start with your neighbors, your family, your friends, your co-workers. Your heart grows for your city, for your region, for your nation, for the nations of the earth.

Jesus said this is how it would work. And here we are Mars Hill; we are officially the “end of the earth,” amen? We're a long ways away from Jerusalem, but it's the same Jesus that we love, that we know, and we worship. That's the story of the Christian faith. We love the church. Jesus loves the church. Jesus loves us, and we love him back.

Jesus has built his church for two thousand years, and he was right, the gates of hell have not prevailed against it. Satan, and demons, and their minions, and opinions have in no way been able to thwart the forward progress of the church of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years later, with all her faults, flaws, and failures, the church of Jesus Christ persists and continues for one simple reason, Jesus loves his church. He just does. And he said he would build

it, and he is. And he said he would send the Holy Spirit to her, and he has.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH

What happens then is after Jesus promises, “Here’s the global plan,” to 120 people, the church is birthed through the preaching of a sermon by a leader whom Jesus personally trained, named Peter. We’re going to read his sermon, and then we’re going to look in succession at what happens when Jesus builds his church. What happens when the Holy Spirit shows up?

I’ll just say this plainly and clearly, Jesus loves us, and we want you to love Jesus, and we want you to love one another, and we want you to love our church, and we want you to love the whole church, all the churches that belong to Jesus. And as our church has grown, and we have so many new people, we’re taking some time in this series, “Jesus Loves His Church” so you would know and understand, appreciate, and love the church of Jesus Christ.

And here we’re going back two thousand years and we’re looking at opening Sunday, as it were. Where 120 people that were the core group of that original church plant, they opened the door and Peter, their pastor, stands up to preach the first sermon, and the New Testament, new covenant church is birthed. And we’re going to see how the church started. And we’ll see how the church is sustained. And we want to look at the ways that the Holy Spirit worked because those are the same ways that the Holy Spirit is still working.

So we read this, in Acts 2:38–47, we’ll read it all together. “Peter said to them,” so it’s a sermon, you need to know this, Christianity starts, the church is birthed with a sermon, with a preaching of the Word of God, and the church is sustained through the preaching of the Word of God. That is why at Mars Hill Church every week the Scriptures are opened, Jesus is proclaimed, the Bible is taught, the gospel is shared.

I believe in every way that if at any point we cease teaching the Bible, the Holy Spirit will cease blessing us. Because the power is in the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of Scriptures works through them, powerfully in the lives of people. And if we shut the Bible and set it off to the side, and we don’t seek to understand and obey it by the grace of God, then the Holy Spirit is, in every way, unwelcome in our presence among our people.

We want to be a people who always have the Bible open, who are always studying the Scriptures, seeking ways that we can learn, and change, and grow by the grace of God. The church was birthed by a sermon, and it is grown and sustained through the preaching of God’s Word.

And he says, “‘Repent and be baptized.’” We’ll unpack all of this. “‘Every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ,’” the church is Jesus’ people, “‘for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off,’” that would include us, “‘everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’ And with many other words,” so this is just a short summary of a long sermon, “he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Can you imagine that? The church went from 120 to 3,120 in a day. Do you know how many Community Group leaders they needed? Problem was all the new people had been a Christian for a minute. They needed a lot of elders, deacons, members, I’m sure their budget was way out of whack. The line into kids’ ministry was probably horrible. And it probably took an hour to get your camel out of the parking lot. It was very complicated. They suddenly outgrew everything, praise be to God.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship,” that’s friendship, “to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul.” People were amazed because God showed up and the Holy Spirit was working. Jesus ascended back into heaven and sent the Spirit, and when the Spirit of God dropped on the people of God, lives were changed in large number, and the world has never been the same.

“And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” We still see people healed and miracles done because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If you’re sick, come forward after service, we’d love to pray for you and see if perhaps God has a miracle, a sign, or a wonder for you.

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together,” these are big meetings, like we have on the weekends, “and breaking bread in their homes,” these are like small meetings, Community Groups, “they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” That’s the story.

Here’s what I want to do. I want to look at eight things that happen when Jesus builds his church. I want to look at eight things that happen when the Holy Spirit shows up among the people of God. And I want you to see that the way he worked then is the way he works now. Jesus continues, two thousand years later, to build his church.

We are very excited to be a part of Jesus building his church. In the providence of God, I didn’t intend or plan it this way when I laid out the preaching schedule, but this is the end of our fiscal year, in concludes at the end of June. And so in addition to seeing what the Holy Spirit was doing in their day, I also get to share with you what the Holy Spirit is doing in our day as sort of a year-end summary.

1. REGENERATED CHURCH MEMBERS

And so number one, when Jesus builds his church it has regenerated church members. We see that here in the book of Acts, it says that the gospel was preached, that they asked, “What must we do to be saved?” Peter says, “Repent of your sin. Repent of your sin. Trust in Jesus. Be baptized. Receive the

Holy Spirit.”

It is very important for us that you know, if you're not a Christian, you are totally welcome at Mars Hill Church, we love you, we are earnestly glad to have you. If you have young children that have not yet met Jesus, I'm a father of five, we love kids, Jesus welcomed kids, we welcome kids as well. And certainly children that are in the process of coming to know Jesus are welcome at Mars Hill.

But church membership is reserved for those who are Christians. Regenerated means born again. It means that they have experienced the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

How do you know whether or not you have the Holy Spirit? Well, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ but by the Holy Spirit.” The one way you know you have the Holy Spirit is you love Jesus. You belong to Jesus. You worship Jesus. You serve Jesus. You confess your sin to Jesus. You want to be like Jesus. You're pretty fired up about Jesus. You know you've got the Holy Spirit when Jesus is the center of your life and the object of your affection. That's what it means to be born again. You could be physically alive but spiritually dead. Regeneration is where you're made spiritually alive. You're connected to the resurrection life of Jesus through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

This is so important. Many churches allow anyone and everyone to become a member of the church. They get to vote on things. They get to lead ministries. They get to teach others. We do want to welcome everyone, but we reserve official membership of the church for those who know and love Jesus. Once you become a member, then you can lead, you can teach a Community Group, you can lead others with a worship team, or a service team, or a Redemption Group for those who are addicted or abused. But we need to guard the gate of membership.

So we have something called the Doctrine class. And I've written an entire book called *Doctrine* because we want you to know exactly what we believe and what the Bible teaches because it's our highest authority. And we invite you to become members of the church. The Bible uses the metaphor of the church often, that it's like a body with many members or parts. Our goal is if you know Jesus, to become a part of our body, and to then find your place and to work with your brothers and sisters, the other members of the body, to be the hands and feet, to be the love and service of Jesus to our community. I would encourage you, if you're a Christian and you're not yet a member of the church, become a member of the church, go through the doctrine class, we'll tell you what we believe, answer your questions, and you'll know exactly what you're signing up for.

But there are churches, friends, where the members are not Christians. I've consulted on a few deeply troubling situations where a church is near dead and the members have the right to vote on what the church will do. On one of those occasions I actually was devastated because the majority of the people who were members of the church were not even Christians. And they're voting what to do with all the assets and all the opportunities.

I saw one church that was dying, near death, and it came down to where the members of the church had two options: “We're going to give our building to another church or we're going to give it to a basketball league.” And the people voted to give it to a basketball league because they love basketball more than Jesus. There's nothing wrong with basketball. Yay, basketball. We're pro-basketball. But if it comes down to Jesus and basketball, Christians should vote for Jesus.

That's what happens when you have non-Christians who are members of the church. Then non-Christians become the leaders of the church. And if the leaders in the church and the members of the church don't love Jesus, how in the world can they introduce the world to Jesus Christ?

It says, “Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” They did know who the Christians were. Now, truth be told, sometimes it is hard to tell whether or not somebody is a Christian. Sometimes it takes a while to see if they persevere in the faith that they profess. But they knew, “We had 120, and 3,000 people became Christians today, and they joined our church.”

If you're not a Christian, we want you to give your sin and your life to Jesus. He died and he rose for you. Number two, if you're a Christian, you're part of something that Augustine called the universal Church. You're one of God's people. You're also supposed to be part of something called the local church. Welcome to Mars Hill. We love you. We want you to be connected. We want you to be in community. We want you to care for others and be cared for.

So it starts with regenerated church membership. And let me say, I've even seen churches where the pastor's not a Christian. I'll never forget the day, I was a brand-new Christian, and they brought me to teach at a conference, and I had no right to be there, and I shouldn't have been teaching because I didn't even know what I was talking about. But I remember standing up and they had me do a session on how to reach young people, and by young they meant sixty or under. These were some old people.

And so I got up and I preached out of Romans 1, that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, and the power is in the gospel. I had a pastor raise his hand. There were a couple hundred pastors in the room. This was a major denomination, one of the largest denominations in America. He says, “Well, what if you don't believe that?” I said, “What if you don't believe what?” “What if you don't believe that Jesus rose from death?” I said, “Well, then you're going to hell.” I just said it like that, I would probably say it differently today, but I'd still say the same thing.

So I said, “Then you're going to hell.” I said, “Are you the pastor?” He said, “Yeah.” And I said, “You think Jesus is dead?” He said, “Yes, I do.” I didn't even know what to say. I didn't know you could be a pastor who thought Jesus was dead. But some pastors aren't even Christians. They don't believe in Jesus. We want to make sure that the members of this church really are Christians. Amen?

2. QUALIFIED LEADERSHIP

Number two, what happens when Jesus builds his church? Well, they have qualified leadership. Here, it's Peter, he stands up to preach. He's the leader. With him are the other disciples. Qualified leaders. They're exercising leadership through preaching, and teaching, and leading. The church is to be led. Ultimately Jesus is our senior pastor. First Peter 5 says he's the chief shepherd. So he's the senior pastor and then under Jesus are to be other qualified leaders. Peter goes on to call himself a pastor, a shepherd. He says this in 1 Peter and 2 Peter.

And what happens then is, as the church grows, they have elders, also called pastors, and deacons. We're going to get into all of these issues in the coming weeks. We're going to take this eleven-week series to look at all of these issues biblically. We want you to know what the Bible teaches about the church.

But suffice it to say, those pastors, elders, and those deacons, those two offices of leadership, the qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. We'll get into that in the coming weeks. What we're looking for is people who love Jesus who have exemplary lives. Not perfect, but humble people, growing in the grace of God, who really love the church.

And to be a leader, the Bible says, is to be like a shepherd. And so there's Jesus, the good shepherd, that's who he says he is. And the church is filled with people, they're like sheep. And that leaders are to be like shepherds who love, and protect, and care for, and tend to the church. And Satan's always sending in wolves, the Bible says, to hurt the flock. So a good shepherd also has to fight wolves, false teachers, those who would use and abuse people.

And they're not to be like hirelings. John 10, Jesus says that there are leaders and hirelings. Hirelings are people who are just in it for the power, they're just in it for the money, they're not in it for Jesus, they're not in it for the people. And when crisis comes, a hireling runs away. You can tell the difference between a shepherd and a hireling, when there's a crisis or a problem, the shepherd runs to it, and the hireling runs from it. Because a shepherd will lay down their life for the sheep and a hireling does not want to be inconvenienced.

Is God calling you to be a leader in our church? Is he calling you, some of you men, to be an elder or a pastor, paid or unpaid? Let us know, we have a process we'll take you through. We're going to evaluate you and get to know you. It's not fast because we want to make sure we get shepherds and not wolves or hirelings. Is God calling you to be a deacon, a man or a woman, in paid or unpaid ministry, serving God's people, the church? If so, please let us know, we'd love to meet with you. We'd love to talk with you. We'd love to help you see if you qualify in the grace of God for that noble office.

Is God calling you to be a Community Group leader? To be someone who loves and shepherds a group of people? Is God calling you to get trained to be a Redemption Group leader in Bible counseling and helping those who are addicted, or abused, or struggling with pernicious sin or pain? Let us know. Are you someone that God is calling to work with the children and introduce them to Jesus? Let us know. Are you someone that has musical ability and is feeling called to lead a worship team? Let us know. Are you someone who loves to serve and God's calling you to lead a serving team somewhere in the church? Let us know.

The door is wide open, we love you very much. And as Jesus builds his church you may be one of those bricks that he lays down to build his church. But you need to be qualified, so we're looking at your doctrine, what do you believe. We're looking at your lifestyle, how do you live. We want to know that you're a member of the church, and that you love the people.

And here's the truth, and one of the reasons we're doing this series, our church has really grown in the last year. Actually, it's really grown in the last fifteen years. It just keeps growing, in the grace of God. And so what happens is most of our growth is September, October, November, and then things level off between Thanksgiving and Christmas. And then things really grow historically from January through Easter. And then during the summer it kind of levels off because people have their holidays and vacations, and then we hit another growth season in the fall.

We're in that season right now where we're getting ready for the big fall push. It's the time between the busy times, so this is the time that we need you to become a member, to step up and nominate yourself as a leader because we believe in the next year Jesus is going to bring thousands of new people to Mars Hill, and we need leaders to care for them. So one of the reasons we're doing this sermon series "Jesus Loves His Church" is to help you understand how important you are, how necessary you are, and how vital you are. And help you get ready for whatever Jesus would have you to be and do for the upcoming season in the church.

I hope this makes you really excited. You get to be part of a church that's talking about growing, not dying. Where people are meeting Jesus. Where people are getting married. Where babies are being born. Where lives are getting changed. If the Holy Spirit is in you, you're really excited about that. And what I'm saying is the door is wide open, we'd love to find a place for you.

3. PREACHING AND WORSHIP

Number three—I've preached so much I've almost preached myself out—preaching and worship, that's how Jesus builds his church. Again, the church is birthed here in Acts with Peter stepping up and preaching. We believe in preaching. Paul tells a young man in the New Testament, "Preach the Word." So we are a Bible-preaching church.

And here's my vow to you, as long as I'm here, the Bible will be open, Jesus will be taught, every single Sunday, we believe in the preaching of the Word of God. On any Sunday you can bring family, friend, neighbor, co-worker, enemy and they're going to hear about Jesus. And we're going to open the Bible. Amen? That's my prayer and that's my pledge.

So here's what it says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." We devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching; we open the Word of God. God used them to teach the Old Testament, to write some of the New Testament, and to be eyewitnesses to others who wrote the rest of the New Testament. Everything connects to apostolic teaching. We believe in the Bible. We believe in the whole Bible. We're not trying to invent a new religion.

We're not trying to change anything. Our goal is faithfulness to the timeless truths of the Word of God.

So we believe in preaching, and so if you're new, kind of here's what it looks like for us, most of the time we go through books of the Bible. Sometimes we'll do a series like we're in now. So we spent a few years in Luke, and then we did "Real Marriage" and then we did "The Seven" series (Revelation 1, 2, and 3), and this summer we're doing "Jesus Loves His Church." In the fall we're going to do Esther. Okay, if you like the book of Esther, amazing, crazy story. Nobody touches it because the girl does a whole bunch of things she shouldn't do, okay, and then she does a few things that she should do. So she's a little complicated. So we're going to get into Esther in the fall.

In January we're going to start the book of Ephesians. We're going to take sixteen weeks and go through the book of Ephesians. And I've got a book coming out, and we're going to do a big campaign around it. And after that we are going to do the Ten Commandments. Then I think we're going to do a short series in the Psalms, and then we're looking at James.

So for the next few years we've got sermons series laid out, books of the Bible that we're in the process of preparing for. Right now, to be honest with you, I'm working heavily on Esther, and on Ephesians, and on the Ten Commandments 'cause that's where we're going to be going in the coming years.

And it says that they would meet in the temple courts, these were large meetings, and then they'd meet from house to house. That's how we do it. That's how Jesus builds his church. People get together for a big meeting, the Bible's taught, and then they meet together in small meetings to figure out, "What questions do you have? And how can I pray for you? What is the Lord calling you to do? And what does this look like for us?" So we believe in the preaching of the Word of God.

I just want to say this: thank you. I get to teach the Bible at Mars Hill. I am blessed, and honored, and glad that I get to teach the Bible at Mars Hill. I know of pastors and their people don't want to hear the Scriptures. I know of some guys, at twenty-five minutes, people check their watch, get up, and leave because that's all they're going to give the preacher is twenty-five minutes. We are experiencing the grace of God in a unique way, long sermons, massive conversions. That's amazing.

See, there's a lie that's been told, "Oh, you can't teach the Bible and reach the people." We don't believe that. We believe you can reach the people by teaching the Bible. And so we go through the books of the Bible, and people get saved. A few thousand people gave their lives to Christ and got baptized in a two-year study of Luke. That's fantastic. You can teach the Bible and reach the people.

And I just want to say thank you. I preach with great freedom. I preach with great joy. There are other pastors who preach at Mars Hill as well, but I get to do the lion's share of the preaching. And I'll tell you this, I have more joy, more freedom teaching here than anyone I know, anywhere else. It's a great joy. So thank you.

And now that we live in the age of technology—Acts 17 says that God determines the times and places in which we live—he put us here now. And when we started Mars Hill this thing came online called the Internet, I don't know if you've heard of it, it's sort of taken off since then. And there was a little company not far away called Microsoft. And we started putting our sermons online in the mid to late 1990s. Do you know that in the last year 12 million sermons were downloaded? That means every week not only do I get the great joy of preaching to the people of Mars Hill, preaching beyond. God blesses his Word, and we are seeing that fact.

And so it's about preaching, the Bible opened up, Jesus proclaimed, and worship. And that's the response of the people. So one of the reasons we put our service order together the way we do, we'll sing to prepare our hearts, we hear the Word of God, and then we leave time to respond. You need to know that our whole service order is put together theologically.

It's not enough for you to simply hear the Word of God, you need to respond, you need time to repent, or time to pray. Take Communion, remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. Come forward to be prayed for, come forward to give your life to Christ and be baptized. To sing, which is how we pray together, in the Spirit, honoring Jesus, glorifying God together. And so we believe that worship includes our life and what we do when we scatter. It includes our times together when we gather.

I want you never to leave after the sermon. If you're a Christian, take Communion, pray, reconcile with anybody that you're not reconciled to in the church, come forward for prayer. If there's someone around you and you know they're struggling, pray for them, right there. Sing with the people of God as a form of prayer. We give you time to respond in worship after the preaching of God's Word.

And one thing I would give you is something that's really exciting is our bands—and worship is more than just singing, but it includes singing—our bands are now Mars Hill Music. We've got thirty-four-ish bands at Mars Hill. Tons of volunteers, they write songs, they practice, they serve, some of them show up very early, and they stay very late, and they work very hard. And I want you, when you see them, to thank them. They're people who love you, they love Jesus, and they're very talented.

And so with Mars Hill Music we're recording those bands, we're working on a distribution deal with a major record label, we want to get our bands out on the radio, they're playing main stage at Creation. We recently released a little \$200 EP we recorded in a warehouse and it went to number three on iTunes. And so the future looks really good for Mars Hill Music.

'Cause we want people to worship Jesus and for us we love the fact that a lot of the songs that we sing and hymns that we rewrite, they come from people in our church who are members, in community who do love Jesus, and are serving. It's music from the church, for the church, because of Jesus. Isn't that cool? It is to me. All right.

4. RIGHTLY ADMINISTERED SACRAMENTS

Point number four, what happens when Jesus builds his church and the Holy Spirit shows up? There are rightly administered sacraments. And again, in the coming weeks we're going to unpack all of this. What we're talking about here are two sacraments, baptism and Communion. Some of you are brand-new to church, brand-new Christians, "Why do you do it the way you do?" We want to follow the teaching of the Bible. And what happens is first of all there's baptism.

So it says, "Those who received his word were," what? "Baptized." This means they are showing what Jesus has done for them. Jesus lived without sin. Jesus died and was buried. Jesus rose. When we're baptized we're saying, "Jesus did that for me, and I belong to him." And we love baptisms at Mars Hill. How many of you love seeing people get baptized? Isn't that cool? It's great.

So again, if you become a Christian today or you're a Christian who's never been baptized, meet with a leader, let us know, we'd like to talk to you, and baptize you. We believe that baptism is a way of you publicly witnessing. Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses." One of the ways we witness, we show the world who he is and what he's done, is through baptism. Baptism doesn't save, Jesus saves, but he saves through his death, burial, resurrection, and baptism shows something of his death, burial, and resurrection for us.

And so we can't always count how many people got saved, but we can count how many people got baptized because that's a good indicator of who became a Christian. Now, it is our annual, year-end financial report, would you like to know how many people got baptized at Mars Hill in the last year? Okay, would you like to know? I'll check the number, 1,135 people baptized in the last year. You break it down, that's about one hundred people a month. That's three people a day. The Bible says in the book of Acts, "The Lord added to their number daily." And he still is. Every day at Mars Hill people are becoming Christians.

What we're not talking about is, "Here's what we want to do." Here's what we're talking about, "Here's what God's already doing." Every night that you go to bed, pray and thank Jesus for the three people who met him that day at our church. Every night, "Thank you Jesus for the one, two, three people who met you today. And Jesus I pray for the three more tomorrow." How great is that?

And some of you know, these are your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors. I saw earlier today, I was preaching, and a young man gave his life to Christ, and I don't know what the whole story is, there was a line of twenty or thirty young men that ran up after him, hugging him, praying for him. It was obvious that this was a friend of theirs that they'd been praying for for a long time. And he got born again. And he gave his sin to Jesus. And he became a Christian. And when someone becomes a Christian their whole life changes, their eternity changes. So many of their family and friends get to celebrate in their joy. And who they marry changes, how they parent changes, legacies change, generations change because the Holy Spirit indwells that person, and who they are changes, and the legacy they leave is forever altered. So we praise God for 1,135 people.

And the second sacrament is Communion. Some of you have noticed this: we take Communion at Mars Hill Church every single Sunday. We're going to get into this in a future sermon in this series. But that's what happened, it says, "Breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God." The Bible talks about the Lord's Table, or the Lord's Supper, where when the people of God come together they remember Jesus.

See, Jesus, one of the last things he did before he died, he had a meal with his disciples. He took the bread and he said, "This is my body broken for you." And he took the cup and he said, "This is my blood shed for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So when we partake, we're to remember Jesus, body broken, blood shed for us and our sin. And so when the early Christians started meeting, it says that they broke bread together. So for us at Mars Hill after the preaching of the Word of God, we allow time for Communion every week.

And the Bible says, "Don't partake unless you're repentant of sin, otherwise you're bringing judgment upon yourself." Communion, the Lord's Table, is not for non-Christians. We love you. We don't want you to feel awkward. And one of the reasons we serve Communion the way we do is we want people to come forward, if they're Christians when they're ready. And so if you're a Christian you can come forward, and if you're not, don't. And we're not passing it by you or pressuring you in any way. Because we don't want non-Christians to partake of Communion.

Number two, we want the Christians to partake when they're ready. You may hear the sermon or maybe just the Holy Spirit convicts you, and you say, "Ugh, I got to talk to the Lord about this." Take your time and pray if that's what you need. Work it through with God. Think it through with God. Pray it through with God. Maybe you came with somebody and you're arguing with them or fighting with them, and not getting along with them. Then reconcile with them, work it out with them, and then come forward together for Communion.

That's why we do it the way we do. We do it every week so there's always an opportunity. And the remembrance and the celebration of Jesus is at the center of our service. And we tend to offer wine and juice so that you can operate according to conscience, and you don't have to violate your conscience.

Some would ask, "Well, I'm a Christian but I'm visiting from another church." You're welcome to partake of Communion with us because if you're part of the church of Jesus Christ, you're welcome at this church of Jesus Christ. So, in a moment, we're going to give you, pretty soon, an opportunity to be baptized. If you want to get baptized, let us know, let the leaders know. We're going to give you an opportunity to take Communion because that's one of the ways that Jesus builds his church.

And I want you to just see it, when people get up out of their seat, here's what I think of, one day we're all going to get out of our graves together. And just like we're walking forward for Communion, we're all going to walk into the kingdom of God together. We're a family. And Communion is where

we remember our Savior until we see his coming.

5. HOLY SPIRIT UNITY

Number five, how does Jesus build his church? Well, there's Holy Spirit unity. It says it this way in the Bible, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers." So what do they do? Study the Bible, fellowship, they're friends, breaking of bread, meals together, and praying for each other. That's unity.

As a church we want to be unified. Now, we're not uniform. We disagree on some secondary issues. Some of us have different interests than others. But we're unified even though we're not uniform. Because what really counts, the Bible, Jesus, love, we agree on that. And by the power of the Holy Spirit we want to live in unity.

What this means is that the church really is like a family and God is a father, and Jesus is our big brother. The Bible says that ladies are to be treated like sisters and men are to be treated like brothers. And just like every family, we're going to have our squabbles, and our spats, and our conflicts, but you fight with your family different than you fight with your enemy, right?

Any of you guys have a brother growing up? You would fight with him, but not to kill him. You would work it out, wrestle it out, and there was a limit to the conflict. Say, "Well, I'm not going to cross that line. I do love him, just driving me crazy right now." And they're thinking the same thing. That's how it is in the family. Families disagree. Families have conflict. Families sometimes have odd moments. Families sometimes even have a struggle to work it through. But a family always does. A real, good, true family works it out and sticks together. And so it is for the family of God. Paul calls us the household of God.

What's interesting too, is that for some of you this family's the only family you've got. In a day when families are fractured, they're divided, they're splintered, the church becomes for many, first family. And so the spiritual unity is very important, that not only does Jesus love us, and we love Jesus, but we take Jesus' love, and we love one another.

How's it going? Are you working on obeying the Bible? Having friends in the church? Eating meals together and praying for one another? The easiest two ways, I think, to become friends with another Christian is eat a meal and pray together. It's what they did. Eating a meal is what you do with a friend, or someone you want to become a friend. And they would meet in homes and have meals together. We encourage you to meet in homes and have meals together, and sometimes that's in and around Community Groups.

Pray for one another. I know it's sometimes awkward if you're not used to this. Let me just encourage you, when someone says, "Hey, I need this. I'm struggling with this." Or they just let you know something, don't say, "I'll pray for you." Just pray for them. Just pray for them. You can pray right then. You can pray on the phone. You can pray in person. Feel free to pray with them after, but pray for them.

When's the last time you prayed for someone? Just, "You know what, let me pray for them." When's the first time that someone prayed for you? I can still remember that. I was a non-Christian, I was a boy playing Little League baseball, and I think I got injured, hit by a pitch, I don't remember what. I remember one of the boys on the team, his mom came over, and she said, "How are you doing?" I said, "Not good. Something's wrong." She said, "I'll pray for you." She didn't ask, she just did. She said, "I'll pray for you." She put her hand on me and she prayed for me. I don't remember what she prayed, but I remember at that moment thinking, "That was wonderful. She prayed for me." Pray for each other. I still remember that woman. I still remember her son. He was one of the first Christians I knew. They made a big impression on me.

Part of our evangelism, too, is praying for people. We say, "Man, my friend does not want to hear about Jesus." Are they sick? Pray for them. I've yet to hear a sick person say, "Do not pray for me." It's a start. It's how we invite people into friendship. It's how we grow our friendships.

You know you can pray in church on Sunday? You know during Communion you could pray over people? Do you know after service you could pray for people? Do you know you could come early and pray together? Do you know if you need prayer and you don't know who to have pray for you, you can come forward afterward and we'll pray for you? And that's how we build unity in the Holy Spirit, studying the Bible, building friendship, eating meals, praying together.

6. HOLINESS

Number six, Jesus builds his church through holiness. Now, Peter says it this way, he stands up and he says, "Repent." What he's saying is sin is a real issue, sin is a real problem. So one of the things that a church has to do to be obedient to the Scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit is deal with sin.

If you're in sin, we love you. Jesus loves you. But if you're a Christian, we want to help you walk in holiness. We want to help you walk away from sin. We want to help you walk toward Jesus. Now, we don't want to be controlling. There are far too many people, we could never control. But we do want to influence you to submit to the Scriptures, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to pursue holiness by the grace of God.

Holiness means "like God." Not that we are gods and goddesses, but that God is holy, God is without sin, God is perfect, God is good. His name is Jesus. And when we sin we're not just breaking the laws of God, we're breaking the heart of God. Just like a father who looks at his rebellious kids and they're just destroying their life, and it destroys his heart. So when we sin the Father's heart is broken.

And our brothers and sisters are supposed to come around and say, "We love you. The Father loves you. Please stop. Please repent. Please let us help you. Please let us walk with you. Please let us pray for you. God wants good for you. And what you're doing is very bad." Any church that refuses to

deal with sin, any church that refuses to compel people toward holiness, doesn't love the people.

Some churches will say, "Well, come as you are." Here's how we say it, "Come as you are, meet Jesus, and change forever." Everyone is welcome to come, but once you meet Jesus, you start to change. You start to hate sin and pursue holiness. You stop rebelling, you start obeying. Your nature changes, your desires change, your life changes.

Let me put it this way, any church that doesn't encourage its people toward holiness, in love, in community, doesn't really love the people. I've got five kids, I'm a dad, imagine if what I told my kids was, "Do whatever you want, I don't care. That's deadly, that's dangerous, you're going to hurt yourself, you're going to hurt someone else, but that's okay." I don't love my children if that's what I say. I don't love them at all, in fact, I hate them. And it doesn't bother me that they're going to destroy themselves and others. A loving father says, "I love you but I don't love what you're doing. And I want to help you to stop doing that because it brings death."

So it is with the church of Jesus Christ. And that big word, "repent," it's hugely important. So as a church, yes, we'll talk about sin, our sin and help others work through their sin. When the Holy Spirit shows up, these are the things that happen. Sin comes to light and people get the help they need.

7. THE GREAT COMMANDMENT TO LOVE

Number seven, the Great Commandment to love. It says it this way, "They were selling their possessions," this is pretty major, "And belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need." So what they're doing, they're meeting spiritual needs; they're praying for one another and teaching one another. They're meeting emotional needs; they're spending time together, fellowship, friendship. They're also meeting physical needs: food, shelter, and the like. And those who have a lot are selling what they have to give to those who need.

See, you get the picture of the rich guy, puts all his stuff on eBay, takes the proceeds, hands it to the single mom. Right? The kids who have a really hard-working, good dad, well, a friend of theirs, his dad walked out and isn't loving and caring for his family. So the kids come home and say, "Dad, he's got no dad and the mom's struggling." And then the kids and the mom and the dad, they all adopt that family. They want to love that mom; they want to serve that child.

See, when the government does this it gets very convoluted and complicated. When the Holy Spirit does it, it works a whole lot better. The government here isn't coming in and practicing communism, and socialism, and equitable distribution of resources. The Holy Spirit is compelling people to be generous. That's it. It's more loving, it's more kind, it's more compassionate, it's more like Jesus. We don't have to force Jesus to be good to us, he just is. "For God so loved the world, he gave." One of the ways that we know that we love people is we give, we give to help them.

And here in the early church this is one of the ways that the church grew. You need to know, in that day, this was not done. If you're poor, you're a slave, that's it. If you're a child, you may just be abandoned, especially if you're a daughter. If you're a woman, let's say you're a widow, well, you really don't have any rights in society. You're not supposed to testify in court, you're not supposed to own property, you're going to be abused and mistreated.

And then people become Christians and all of a sudden what they do is they start treating one another like family. "Well, you're my sister, I need to help. And you're my brother and I need to help." And they start caring for one another to the degree that the church starts even possibly up-ending all of Roman civic structure. I think I've said this before, but in that culture you couldn't call anybody brother or sister unless they were a biological relative because inheritance and property rights were tied to the family.

And the Christians said, "We don't care. We're going to call them brother, and them sister, and we're going to treat them as well as we would treat biological family because God's our Father, and Jesus is our big brother, and through salvation we're all adopted into the same family." Now, the government had a problem with this. "You're going to mess up the whole inheritance structure." "That's okay." Because what matters is loving one another. Loving one another in word, and in deed, and in gift. And sometimes the way we love people is by giving.

Now, one of the ways this is practiced at Mars Hill is something called Community Groups. Again, they met in the temple courts, large groups, thousands of people, and they met, it says, from house to house, small groups, a dozen or so people. We call these Community Groups. The Community Groups get together every week to do just this: study the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, have a meal, and pray. We call it Community Groups.

How many Community Groups do you think we have at Mars Hill right now? Over six hundred. How many people are in Community Group on any given week? Over eight thousand. That's amazing. That means on any given week at Mars Hill there might be eight thousand people having dinner together, praying for one another, helping one another to grow in holiness, and loving one another. What that means is there are all of these gifts being given, and prayers being offered, and services being rendered by people who love one another. We can't account for all of it, there's too much to even record. That's how Jesus builds his church.

If you're not in a Community Group, please get connected to one. Some of you walk in and say, "It feels very cold and impersonal." Wait 'til you get in a Community Group, that'll solve it. And some of you will get into a Community Group and say, "These people are driving me crazy." They're thinking the same thing. You're great for each other. You're going to grow in holiness through frustration and that's God plan for you.

You're going to have an opportunity to serve. Is God calling you to lead a Community Group? To host a Community Group? To start as an apprentice? To become a leader? Now's the season where we're inviting you to do that. And I believe, even today, the Holy Spirit is going to call some of you into Community Groups. He's going to call others of you to lead Community Groups because we believe in the fall he's going to bring thousands more

people, and he wants you to help love them. Amen?

And here's what's so cool, you get to see the kingdom of God show up on your couch. People are going to get saved on your couch. Sin is going to get dealt with on your couch. People might even fall in love on your couch.

8. THE GREAT COMMISSION TO EVANGELIZE, MAKE DISCIPLES, AND PLANT CHURCHES

Number eight, the Great Commission to evangelize, make disciples, plant churches. Here's what Jesus said at the end of Matthew's gospel, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," that's the Trinity, "teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you," that's holiness. "And behold, I'm with you always, to the end of the age." We read in Acts that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Mars Hill, I want you to always have a heart for the people that aren't here yet. Before you were here someone had a heart for you. They were praying that you would come. They were giving to provide an opportunity for you. They were preparing their Community Group to welcome you. Before you showed up someone loved you. And they were waiting for you. And I want our heart to always be open for the people that aren't with us yet. It's very grievous to me when a church becomes insular and selfish: "It's only about us. It's not about them." We want to always be a church that has our heart and our hands open, welcoming anyone and everyone that Jesus would bring us.

Last year at Mars Hill Church, as an average, we were up twenty-three thousand people. As an average, Jesus brought us twenty-three thousand more people. These are people he loves. These are people he died for. These are people that he rose for. These are people that he cares for. And you know what? He's entrusted them to our family. He lets us love them. He lets us serve them. He lets us welcome them. We had certain Sundays in this last year where we were up almost five thousand people from the year prior.

Jesus is building his church. I'm so glad that I don't have to get up and cast a vision for what could happen. I get to give a report of what is happening. So we want to plant more churches. We're one church in fourteen places. Right now we have three pastors who are feeling called out to plant, one to Orange County, one to Denver, one to Florida. So pray for them as they're making that transition, they're wanting to plant independent churches. They love us, we're in good relationship, there's no problem at all, they just feel called to go start a church. And we believe in church planting.

In addition, we have residents coming in to be with us for a year, and you'll hear in the next year that we want to start Mars Hill Tacoma, we want to start Mars Hill Renton, and up around Bothell/Kirkland. We believe there are other opportunities, and we're waiting for Jesus to clarify exactly where he wants us to go next.

In addition, I want to tell you some things that are going on with Mars Hill Global. We've been working in a partnership to help plant churches in India since 1996 with a dear friend of mine. Right now we're supporting twenty-three church planters in India. They have planted a collective forty-three churches. One of the church planters is blind, and he's planted four churches. We also have one man who's a Hindu convert that we support; he's planted fourteen churches in India in the last seven years.

In Ethiopia—Pastor Sutton our executive pastor, he's adopted a beautiful little boy from Ethiopia. He's got a big heart for that country. So we've started supporting church planting, missionary work in Ethiopia, and we are now funding over a dozen church planters in—you are funding over a dozen church planters in Ethiopia. In South America we've started supporting church planters in Chile, Ecuador, and Peru. As well as in Morocco and Sierra Leone. We're now looking at Mexico and the Dominican Republic as well.

As we want the news of Jesus to get out to the nations, in addition to the Internet and the technology, which I praise God for, we've started doing translation work, so for a while all of my sermons have been translated with subtitles into Spanish. Fast growing, huge percentage of the American population and the global population.

As well, we've gotten the rights to the Doctrine book that I wrote, it's a theological text, and we've translated it into Spanish, and we're getting ready to give it away for free online because there's a lot of missionaries and a lot of Spanish-speaking ministers who have asked for it, but it's hard to get it at a price point that makes sense for certain countries. So we're just going to forsake all the royalties and just give the whole thing away online in Spanish. That will be coming out very, very shortly. Pray for that.

We've got three thousand Bibles, as well, translated into Spanish that we've sent down to Mars Hill Albuquerque. One of our services there has the sermon in English with the Spanish subtitles. We're seeing a lot of Hispanics, especially Hispanic males, meeting Jesus all the way down into Mexico. We think there's a huge opportunity to do more.

We're also working on getting the Mars Hill resources out in Portuguese, Korean, as well as Amharic, which is Ethiopian language. And our goal is to continue, through Mars Hill Global, to take the resources and to get the news out of Jesus to the nations. Because he said we should be his witnesses to where? The ends of the earth. The ends of the earth.

As well, one thing I'm really excited about is the military ministry. We have a lot of soldiers at Mars Hill Church, and a lot who tune in online. So we've started giving away some years ago resources to military personnel and their families. In the last year you guys funded, helped fund along with podcasters, the giving away of five thousand books to soldiers.

And what we've started doing is taking all the books, and the sermons, and the resources, and loading them onto hard drives, so they can take them out in the field with them. Obviously sometimes physical product is hard to pack. So in the last year you gave away 127 hard drives of sermons, music, and

books. I'm told it's thirty-two terabytes of data, to soldiers in the field. And there are soldiers that are meeting, doing Mars Hill, following our sermon series, in tents all over Afghanistan, and Baghdad, and all over the world.

Mars Hill, I hope you're encouraged. Jesus builds his church. And when the Holy Spirit shows up, as we saw in Acts 2, things happen. Wonderful, amazing, God-glorifying things happen. And things are still happening two thousand years later because Jesus is still alive, the Holy Spirit is still at work, and Jesus still loves his church.

Mars Hill, I am more excited, encouraged, and hopeful than I have ever been for our ministry. I've handed off some other responsibilities so that I could focus on Mars Hill Church. I don't want us to be like a lighthouse where light goes out but it's dark at the base. I want it to be Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth. I don't want to miss anything that God has for us, but I want it to start at home with us having real leaders, real members, on a real mission, really loving one another, really reaching their community for Christ.

We have come through the most fruitful, successful year we've ever had in the fifteen years of our history. And right now we are paring back our budget to live lean, so that we can give generously, and we can continue to move forward faithfully by the grace of God.

YEAR-END UPDATE

And so in closing we're going to give you an opportunity to respond, but first I wanted to share with you just a little year-end financial update, and where we are at. April for us was a big month, in part because of Easter, which is our biggest day of the year. Almost twenty thousand people. Adults who gave in April was 42 percent, the average amount given per adult at Mars Hill was just under \$30 a week, about 5,500 households. In May it was up to 47 percent, so more people were giving, and thank you to all who give. The dollar amount was up to \$35, which is exactly where we need to be. If we get beyond that we'll have a surplus to use. And the number of households was down a bit, probably because of the Easter adjustment, but our average weekly attendance, even in May, was over 11,000 people.

Last slide. How to give. During the offering you can use the envelope, cash, check, credit card. You can go online to marshill.com/give and sign up for recurring ACH. You could send in a check as well.

And here's the big idea: Pray for your church. Give to your church. Serve your church. Love your church. Mars Hill, this is an amazing church. And Jesus loves our church. Amen? Jesus loves our church. So we're inviting you to love her too.

For those of you who have been giving, and you have been praying, and you have been serving, and you have been caring, and you hear all the numbers and you say, "I'm not surprised." Thank you. For those of you who are new, welcome. For those of you who don't know Jesus, give your life to Christ, repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit. For those of you who are Christians and you have gifts to give, and you're vitally needed, today's the day that we want you to take that step of faith.

So as we collect our offering, and I'll call the offering stewards forward, for those of you who are Christians, give generously. For those of you who are disconnected, take that connect card and let us know. "Plug me in, connect me, help me out. Here's who I am. I'm raising my hand. Follow up with me." We'd love to do that for you. And for those of you who are not Christians, we're not asking for your money, we're asking for your sin, and we want you to give your sin to Jesus. We want you to receive his salvation so that you can share in our joy.

So, Father God, as we transition now I just want to say thank you. Lord God, I want to say thank you that Jesus loves the church, and Jesus loves our church. Holy Spirit, I want to thank you for being so generous, so good, so gracious to us. And God, I want to pray that we'd be good stewards of the people, the opportunities, and the resources that you've entrusted to us. I want to pray that you would multiply what we have, like the little boy's lunch that was given to the Lord Jesus. Lord God, we pray for the new churches. We pray for the new church plants. We pray for the international missions. We pray for those who have yet to be saved. We pray for those that you're calling up into leadership. We're praying for those whose lives are being changed. And God, in light of the fact that this is the end of our fiscal year, thank you for the greatest, most fruitful year that we've ever had by any measurable, statistical evidence. And we pray for much, much more. In Jesus' good name, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.