

*Why The Church?
Hebrews 10:23-25
April 30th, 2017*

In 1776 there was a battleship built to fight in the American Revolutionary War. The name of the ship was the USS Philadelphia. This was a battleship that weight 1,240 tons. It was a gun-ship. It was constructed and designed to fight. History tells us that this ship was, unfortunately, captured. In 1935 the ship was rediscovered, and now it sits in the National Museum of American History, in Washington D.C. The battleship that was once on the frontline of the battle, took a turn for the worst and was captured, and now sits as an artifact at a museum and is visited and admired by tourist from near and far.

Friends, Jesus gave the disciples their final marching orders in Matthew 28:18-20. The question we should ask today is: Is the church still on the battlefield living out the final marching orders that Jesus gave us? Let me ask this another way. Are we a battleship that fights for the Kingdom of God; or, are we an artifact that is visited and admired by tourist on a weekly basis?

The world that we live in is so full of opinions and views that are not supported by the Bible, especially when it comes to the church. There are people who consider themselves as spiritual, but don't go to church. There are others who say that they pray and connect with God on their own terms, but they don't go to church either. And then there are others that claim that they love God, but don't like the church. And I get it, the church – that is, people who love God, have been and sometimes are right now, guilty of being unloving, judgmental, and hurtful. Let me be the first to stand up and state the obvious, that is wrong. But let me also say this: nothing in this world gets accomplished without determination, faithfulness, and a vision for something bigger than any one individual. Friends, please remember that we are on a spiritual battlefield. You know what that means? It means that from time to time you will get hurt, bruised, people will say the wrong thing, people will disappointment you. But, don't allow that to cause you to go AWOL! So today, I encourage you to avoid being negative in your conversation about the church. Instead, let's look to God's Word to see what it truly means to be the church, and not just go to church. Let's do everything that we can to be the church that Jesus died for us to be.

Read the passage: Hebrews 10:23-25

Look at v.23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise.

This is written to a community of the faithful; people that knew and understood the significance of what Christ accomplished during His earthly tenure. Here's the ultimate significance and truth of the Gospel: God sent His only begotten Son to forgive of us of our sins. Consequently, we are placed in right standing with God, and therefore able to have an ongoing relationship with God, both personally and communally. We place our hope in Jesus based on what he's done.

As Christians, it is vitally important that we always remember and reaffirm this great work that Christ accomplished for us. Because of Jesus we have access to heaven and eternity with God, And God has called us to live that hope out in the world we live in.

If we are going to live for Christ, and be His body:

We affirm our hope consistently We must consistently proclaim and affirm our hope in Christ; otherwise, we tend to drift into placing our hope in our own abilities, our own work ethic, our own business and social networks, our finances or worse yet, ourselves. The world needs to see some hope! It's one of the things we can do together as a church on a much greater scale than what we can accomplish on our own, individually.

God never intended for us to have some form of religion and spirituality that is separate from the faithful gathering of the faithful.

We affirm our hope together

How can you love Jesus, and not love His Church – the church, we are the people of God. Biblically speaking, when you love Jesus – you love the other people that love Jesus also.

One of the core values of CrossPoint Church is that we do life better together. And to take it a step further, we should all recognize that it is out of the abundance of our love for God, and His people, that we choose to live our lives in the light of love.

Look at v.24 ***Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.***

There's something to be said about how our devotion to God causes us to have open hearts and willing hands towards God's causes and goals. Love – agape - Love, this passage challenges us to behave in a way that communicates godly love. This is a love that is undeserving, persistent, sacrificial, consistent, unrelenting – this is not the type of love that is here today and gone tomorrow. Let's be honest, the world that we live in is full of superficial relationships. Relationships that are only relevant when one is needed – relationships that serve a benefiting purpose – relationships that are real and intimate when the skies are blue, but non-existent when the skies turn grey. The church is supposed to be different from the world, the church is supposed to be full of relationships that are based on the premise of godly love. We are supposed to be – love that is patient and kind, love that is void of jealousy, love that is not boastful or proud or rude. Love that doesn't demand its own way. Love that is not irritable, love that keeps no record of wrong doing. Love that doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing, but celebrates the truth – Love that never gives up, or loses faith – love that is always hopeful and that endures through every circumstance! Where do you find this kind of love – amongst those whose hope is in Christ! The church! Anyone can do good works: anyone can volunteer, write a check, sacrifice time – but to do it from the position of godly love is another story, and that is what God is calling us to do. Love each other, and practice acts of love and good works with the right motives, that's what makes us a church, that's why church...

When we Love God, Love Others and Give.

I've made 6 trips to Sierra Leone, Africa now and one of the things that guides our work there is this question: *what can we do that any NGO or secular organization not do?* Most of the things we could do in Sierra Leone, or anywhere for that matter, can be done by an NGO: well drilling, is just one example. But, our work must come with the hope of Jesus that cannot just bring a service but, bring life.

Verse 24 says – We must be people who do good works. There are many of you sitting in church right now, and you might believe that you've fulfilled your obligation, responsibility, religious duty, by just showing up to church this Sunday morning; but according to this passage, people that have the hope of Christ burning in their hearts are people who are motivated to do good works because of the love of Jesus that we've experienced ourselves and are committed to telling everyone else about it!

It's out of the abundance of this love and appreciation for Christ that we do good works. Good works like:

- Supporting families
- Helping others
- Food pantry and clothing connection
- Mission Trips

I love how this passage calls us to a place of godly creativity – God is literally calling us to think of ways to encourage one another to do good works. So, how much of our conversations, before and after church involves encouraging one another to do good works? When we post something on social media, does it contain uplifting encouragement and motivation to do good works? When we meet for coffee, do we take time to think through what good works we could do for others? If we are not careful, the world will only know us by the size of our buildings, the amount of people that show up on the weekends, what we buy, what we wear, and sadly what we don't believe and what we don't affirm – if we are not careful, they will never know us for the impact that we make in the world around us, if we are not intentional and consistent about doing good works!

Think about it, there's no shortage of coverage, critique, and cynicism when it comes to global and domestic news and current events. Social media is full of ongoing commentaries on the affairs of the world. Barbershops and hair salons are bombarded with people's opinions about what's going on in the world around us. But my question is this: who is responsible to make a difference? Who does God expect to transform the world? Let me answer this question: The Church. Where else do you go, where everyone has the same rank? And where everyone is guilty of falling short of the standard of perfection? And where else do you go, where everyone is saved by the same means – the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Where else do you go, where no other imperfect human is the center of our attention and our affection? - Unequivocally, the answer is the church. **The church is the bearer of hope to the world.** Just think, if we focused our time, our efforts, and our creativity on being the change, and making change – what the world would look like? What would the world look like if we stopped talking about it, posting about it, and complaining about it – but instead, we took what this text challenges us to do seriously, and we began to live our lives encouraging and motivating one another to do good works! Now, that's a why church!

Please note the context in which the writer of the book of Hebrews situates these challenges: the call to acts of love and good works are the products of a community's focus and emphasis, not just an individual. Too often, we neglect community. When we work together, we find out that people are in desperate need of Jesus, daily. We find out that people lie, show up late, don't follow through, fail to communicate, etc. and we determine that it's just easier to just do acts of love and good works on our own. But friends, that's not God's plan. God's plan is that we are better together because:

When I am not here at church, I am missed.

When you are not here, someone misses you. We miss your smile, your personality, your gifts and talents. And when you're not here we all feel it because it makes us incomplete.

Look at v.25 – ***And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near.***

I love this last verse; it really encompasses the gravity of this conversation concerning our involvement in the church – the gathering of people that affirm their hope in Christ. These Christians that the writer is addressing must have been considering the decision to withdraw from gathering with other Christians. But, the writer reminds them to remember their hope in Christ, motivate and encourage one another to acts of love and good works, but then he also reminds them of the gravity of their lived-out salvation, which is eternal life! Let me make this abundantly clear – One day, Jesus is coming back – and let me lower the boooom.... We don't know the time or the hour of His return. The writer is encouraging these Christians to remain faithful to their gathering in light of Christ's return. Friends, **who we are, and what we do, has eternal value.**

What will happen if we neglect or abandon God's commission for us to be the church that He called us to be? People will suffer an undefinable loss. One they don't even know about because they've never been told. One day – God is going to call the books! And when He does I want Him to say to us "Well done, good and faithful servant". When the Lord comes back I want Him to find us (1) affirming our hope in Christ (2) motivating each other to acts of love and good works (3) and together, as a family longing for His return and winning as many as we can for His glorious cause.

Why Church? – Because we are privileged and blessed by God to belong to a community that has a hope beyond the grave. We are blessed to be around people that encourage us to act in love, and to do good works. We are blessed to be a part of a family that inherits spiritual blessings that impact this life, and the life to come in eternity.