"The Church: Our Home"

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] For those who may be new to our church, typically we walk through books of the Bible verse! And we did that for about 11 months walking through Philippians. We've been doing that on! Sunday nights the last three months walking through Nehemiah. But on Sunday mornings we've been dealing with the subject of the church for about the last three months, three and a half months. We've been trying to see what does the Bible say the church is to be and what we are to do.

And we finished the last couple of weeks by looking at these reminders, these pictures of our salvation, these pictures of our identification in Christ as we looked at the Lord's Supper, we looked at last week at baptism. But there was one last message a few weeks ago that I just really felt needed to be a part of closing our study on the church. We have looked at for a number of weeks lots of elements about what it means to be a part of the church. Let me take you back to early August when we began by looking at Christ, the head of the church. As we reminded ourselves that there is no one man that's here in our church that is the head. It's not the lead pastor, it's not the group of pastors, it's not a group of committees or of deacons or of long-term members. None of those people, none of us are the head of the church. Christ alone is the head of the church. Now bring that back to your attention because if a church ever forgets that, then no matter what ministry we do, it will be less than what it should have been because it will be for the glory of man. It is Christ who is the head of the church. We looked at our worship. What is it that we are biblically to do when we gather for worship?
Lots of things we could do, but what are the things we must do? And we're going to vote ourselves when we gather for worship, to singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, praying together, the proclamation of the Word, believer's baptism in the Lord's Supper, the public reading of Scripture. These are the things that we biblically must do. We talked about the role of our shepherds. The New Testament describes men who are to be pastor shepherds, elders, overseers. What is their biblical role? How are they to serve? And according to 1 Peter 5, it's to be as God would have them. That it's through the revelation of God in Scripture that those who lead the church know how they are to lead. We looked at the tension that we have as believers, that it is true that we are called to be faithful and to work, and yet only God can give the increase. We are to pray and do evangelism and call people to repent, but only the Holy Spirit can convert. And we live with this tension that we are to continually prepare the horse for battle, but victory belongs to God. We talked about ministry in the church and the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has given to believers and how we can utilize those spiritual gifts in a way that would strengthen the body, bless the individual believer, and ultimately bring glory to Christ. We talked about the message of the church, that we are to preach Christ and Him crucified, that we never want to stray away from the reality of this simple fact, the fact that God is holy, we are sinful, Christ died for us, and we call people to respond and to believe in the Lord and to call upon His name. We talked about our stewardship, that the Lord has entrusted to each of us a measure of resources, of time, of talents, that we want to use all the Lord has given to us and be faithful stewards, that we are not owners. We don't own this church. We don't even own ourselves. The Bible says we were bought with a price. We are stewards of all the Lord has given to us, and we want to faithfully steward what has been entrusted to our care. We talked about church membership, why we have church membership, and the biblical role that plays, and how we as members are to live and to function, to care for each other, to love each other, to serve each other. We talked about our obedience, that as those who have been saved by grace, we are to respond to His saving work with a life of obedience, that we are to be people who would read the Bible and simply do what the Bible says. We want to keep our lives simple. Read the Word, do what the Word says. Don't be hearers of the Word only, but do what it says, James 1 reminds us.

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We talked about friendships. Relationships within the body of Christ is a very important part of the family of God, that we're not individuals that are just simply on our own. We're not Lone Ranger Christians. We are a part of a church family, and within that family there are relationships, friendships that are imperative. If we're going to be able to serve each other and love each other, if we're going to be able to bear each other's burdens. That happens within the confines of friendships, and so we want to encourage all of you to continually strive to work to make meaningful relationships here within your church family. We talked about prayer, our fuel, that we want to regularly come before the Lord in prayer, seeking His will by the reading of His Word, and lifting up our hearts to the Lord as we extol Him and praise Him, as we give Him thanks for all He has done, as we lift up our requests and supplications to Him. We want to be people who study, people who obey, and we must be people who pray, and we want to be devoted to be a true house of prayer. We talked about the Lord's Supper, how the Lord's Supper for us unifies us as we remind ourselves we are all sinners saved by grace. It purifies us as we confess our sin and ask the Holy Spirit to search our heart and reveal any sinful ways to us that we would repent. It signifies to us that Christ has come and was buried and raised from the dead and that He will come again. And we talked about believer's baptism, where a believer stands in front of his church and with his words and with his actions in the baptistry declares, I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of salvation to all who believe.
[7:32] But there is one last thing I just need to share with you before we bring this chapter and season of our church to a close. Where is all of this leading? The praying, the ministry, the singing, the study, the serving, the relationships. We do this as long as the Lord gives us life and gives us breath. But when that last breath is taken from the believer's lungs, what then? And I just want to remind you that everything we're doing as the church on this earth is just preparing us for our true home.

This matters. What we do today matters for eternity. But the Bible does say that for the church, we're aliens just passing through. I want to remind you that all the prayer and all the ministry and all the giving and all the missions and all the evangelism and all the discipleship, everything we do as a church is to strive by the glory of God through the power of the Holy Spirit to prepare us to be with the Lord. The church is not merely a group of individuals who show up at the same address with regularity. We are a family walking together, pursuing Christ together, and we pray one day because of the grace of the grace of Jesus Christ, we all will be with the Lord. The singing and the preaching is not simply about today. It's about preparing our hearts to be with the Lord at home. Turn with me to Philippians chapter 3. As has been the case a number of weeks in this study on the church, I want to share from a few different places, but Philippians 3 will get us started. These are familiar words to us after spending about 11 months walking slowly through the book of Philippians recently, but let me recall your heart's attention to chapter 3, verse 20.
But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Our citizenship, the place of our permanent residence, the one place where we will finally say we are truly home. Our citizenship is in heaven. And until we're there, we await a Savior. Heaven is a place, a real place with real people. But do understand that the glorious thing of all in heaven, the most glorious, most wonderful thing, is that we are awaiting to be with the Lord. The most glorious part of heaven that is our home as God's people is not streets of gold.
[11:35] It's not loved ones who are already there, wonderful as that is. It's not the people in Scripture that we have read about all our life, as thrilling as it will be to know them. We are awaiting, above all else, to be with Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Until then, the church dwells here below, doing all the things that we have studied the last 12 or 13 weeks.
Striving to be a biblical church that honors Christ, seeking not to follow merely tradition or trends, but to say, how do we as a church live in such a way, conduct ourselves in such a way, that as we gather, does not matter what the world says, frankly, doesn't really matter that much what even we would say that our heart's desire would be, was Christ pleased with our worship?
And some weeks that's easier than others because this life can be really hard.
In the song that you've just heard sung, it begins by saying, though you are homeless, though you're alone, here's the promise, I will be your home.

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[13:26] Whatever's the matter, whatever's been done, I will be your home.

And then, in the words you've just heard sung, that at some point this life comes to an end. And the Lord says in that song, in those lyrics, He says, When time reaches fullness, and when I move my hand, I will bring you home.
In the sovereign will of God, when your time is up, Christ will bring you home. So on this earth, He is our home.
And when this life comes to an end, He will bring us home. And all the ministry we do as a church, and all the programs, and all the serving, and all the mission trips, and everything the Lord allows us to do, let's never forget, we do everything on this earth in light of eternity, the truth that we will be with the Lord.
So I just want to take those two verses that we've heard sung today, and take those two thoughts to be our two final points in this study on the church.
[14:59] Number one, Christ will be our home. Christ will be our home. Listen to John 14, 23.

Jesus answered him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.
He will be our home. I know that sometimes things in this life are great, and there's moments that we enjoy.
But even amidst the most joyful moments, it's never quite perfect. We talked about this two weeks ago at Ladies, Not a Theology in here, that even at Christmastime, most of the time when you've done all the work, and the preparation, and family is over, and you've enjoyed a great meal, and you've wrapped all the gifts, and the house is beautiful, and you anticipate this just amazing moment in time, how often does it happen that it's messed up because one of the kids are sick? Have you had that? We had that for like 50 straight years growing up. Always somebody was sick.
Or you spend your time preparing for this perfect Christmas moment with your family, and it even starts to snow, and everybody dreams of a white Christmas until they get it, and then people can't get out and travel, and so you do Christmas like March 12th.
[16:44] But every once in a while, every once in a while, everything you planned, and everything you've prepared, it comes together and it works.

And you're there in your home, and the outside world doesn't matter so much. You're not thinking about jobs and deadlines and bills and homework.
You're just looking at your spouse and your kids, your grandkids. And as one Christmas song recently written says, you just want to freeze the frame, and stop the hands of time.
And you look around your living room and you say, everything I love is here. But those moments don't last.
You've got to go back to work. You've got to go back to school. You've got to clean the kitchen. You've got to do the chores.
[18:06] And you know that at some point, there's an empty chair around the table because our loved ones don't stay here forever.

We find ourselves sometimes, even in the most sweet and most tender of moments, being reminded that one day, all things will be made right.
But until then, remember that He will be your home. He is the friend that is closer than a brother. In an imperfect world, with much pain and tribulation, He will be your home. We've been in Philippians 3. Look just over to the left at Philippians 1.
Very familiar words with us again. Verse 21. For to me, to live is Christ. And the second half is what's going to be true forever.
[19:21] To die is gain. Heaven is gain. To be with the Lord is better by far. But, until that moment, we live.

And to live is Christ. To have the gift of life and breath is a day to make much of Christ. To live is Christ.
By no means does this mean that we should be uninvolved in our world. We should. Let's do everything we can to make our communities better. Let's do everything we can to make our state and our nation better.
Let's do everything we can to lead in a way that would honor the Lord in all things. By no means should Christians withdraw from the world as if it doesn't matter.

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This is our life. This is the inheritance we pass down to our children and grandchildren. Let's make the most of every day that we can. And let's remind ourselves that every day we have is a gift. [20:25] But it's not a gift to just do whatever our flesh wants. To live is Christ. So every day let's seek to make much of Christ.

Every worship gathering let's make much of Christ. Every evening meal you have with your family make much of Christ. Every family devotion in your living room make much of Christ.
Everything we have on this earth as a child of God is an invitation for us to declare He has given me life and to live is Christ.
And so we're not just going to waste our time on this earth until we all get to heaven. To live is Christ.
Christ. And we want to approach every day joyfully gratefully in reminding ourselves that He is with us.
[21:27] When you go to a new school and you feel all alone He is with you. When you move to a new city and everything feels strange and different He is your home.

Many of you have joined our church in the last year and I hope and pray it's been a joyful time of transition for you but for some of you you've been at a church or another city for years and years and years and everything's new and everything's different and it can be hard to be in a new place. It can be hard for a new city to feel like home but can I remind you in the truest sense He is your home. And if your life today feels completely imperfect and completely different than anything you ever imagined it would be He will be your home.
Now while we love the fact that He is our home and He's always with us we also long to be with the Lord.
He's with us now but while He's with us now we long to be with Him. Go back to Philippians 1 again. Verse 21 For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain If I am to live in the flesh that means fruitful labor for me yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.
[22:59] I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.
Paul says as I think about my life I feel as though I'm being pressed between two realities. One is I want to go be with the Lord. Two I want to be here to serve you and enjoy life or to say on the one hand I want to know and live out that to die is gain and yet at the same time I also desire to live and to live is Christ.
And I get that. I get that because for me as I think about my life and eternity to be with the Lord is the greatest gain and to be with the Lord will be the first time in my life as a child of God that I will ever feel like this is perfectly home.
And so in one sense if this is the last day I live on this earth and tomorrow I am with the Lord it for me will be nothing but gain.
[24:41] But on this side I also look at my life like this next week I'll have the privilege to have finished my 26 years serving here and while in some ways that's a long time I'm looking at how much time by God's grace I may have left and how much more Bible I want to be able to preach to serve you and it's not that you can't live without me it's not the church can't function without me nothing could be further from the truth in that regard but in my heart I want to feed you as much Bible as I can and I want every Sunday I can to be able to love you and to serve you and to direct your attention to Christ now I know that if my life ends tomorrow that's gain but I also know in my heart that for your sake not because this church can't function without me but because God has given me such a love for you I want as many Sundays as I can to be with you and Paul says

I feel this way I feel pressed this way in fact that word translated there in Philippians 1 about feeling hard pressed in the gospels that word is used to describe when a crowd is pressing in and you just feel squeezed it's also used to describe a disease as it takes grip of your body he says I feel in the grasp of this I feel squeezed by this these two truths at the same time that the greatest thing for the believer is to be at home with the Lord and yet to live on this earth is Christ in other words he's reminding us that yes to be with the Lord is better by far but these days matter and church one of my fears I would have for us at any point would be that we would ever let our doctrine of God's sovereignty or our doctrine of eternity cloud the reality of what we are called and compelled to do

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with every day he gives us let me remind you of Nehemiah 4 where we were a couple of months ago we prayed to our God and we set a guard on the wall yes
God is sovereign over our life yes we plant we water and only God gives the increase yes we prepare the horse for battle but victory belongs to the Lord but we have been called to walk in obedience and to pray fervently in Acts 17 to call all men to repent and yes heaven is our home and that is better by far and yet every day the Lord gives us let's live it for his glory 2 Corinthians 5 verse 6 so we are always of good courage we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord for we walk by faith not by sight yes we are of good courage and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord so whether we are at home or away we make it our aim to please Him in other words yes we affirm the greatest thing imaginable for us is to be at home with the Lord but while we're still on this earth here's the good news
His home is with us to live is Christ now the second half of verse 21 to die is gain this is the second promise that Christ will bring us home first Christ will be our home that's the promise every day we live on this earth and second Christ will bring us home joy read from us from the scripture for us a few moments ago from revelation behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them this is what makes heaven heaven that he brings us home and we will be with him
I've told you before through the years that one of the conversations that is forever in my mind that I'll never forget as long as I'm alive and have a sound mind it was just a couple of days before Marsh and I got married driving around college doing a few last minute things before our wedding I'll never forget this the stop sign is not there today on the street if it were I could take you to the exact place in the street where this conversation took place it was very short very brief we weren't even really talking about heavy things just final conversations just a few days before the wedding and at a stop sign in Edmond my wife fiance at the time she just said Michael I don't know what the future will hold I don't care if we live in a house I don't care if we live in an apartment she said I don't care if we live in a cardboard box as long as we're together that will be home for me never forgotten that conversation took maybe all of six seven seconds what Marcy was saying to me is what's going to make home home is that we're together that's as that's as close as my human finite mind can come to grasping an even far richer far more glorious reality that in heaven
[31:09] I will be with the Lord we've been married 30 years we've lived in three houses but home for me is wherever Marcy is home for Marcy is where I am it's not about walls and roofs and rooms it's not about yards and land and structures it's first about the relationship who you love most humanly speaking there's no one that has a closer place in my heart than my wife does and that will be true until death do us part and that is just a drop just a drop of the reality of how much more that will be true for true believers when we are at home with the

Lord yes heaven's a real place yes the scripture gives us real description about it that will really be there and it will be beautiful and glorious and thrilling and everything and more you can imagine but what makes heaven our home is who is there and church I just want you to remember through every week of studying your Bible and teaching your lesson and practicing your song and making phone calls and making visits and going to the hospital and preparing food for those who are sick and coming to conferences through every bit of all the labor we strive to do we do that on this earth because to live is Christ but in light of the glorious truth that to die is gain because when we die we are at home with the Lord so your life's not perfect on this earth it's not going to be by God's grace he sprinkles in a few days that are exceptionally joyful but it's never perfect doesn't have to be because this life is a vapor and eternity is forever
Christ will be your home and one day when he calls you home he will bring you home there's so many things about this life that I'm thankful for Lord I love Sunday mornings I love seeing so many people at our church and hearing you talk and hearing the Bible talk and discuss and talk about all over the campus I love Sunday afternoons when the Men's Institute is going and today we've got 70 men taking a final on hermeneutics encourage the brothers if you know who's taking that final exam today I love sunny nights when we gather back to end our Lord's day in worship I love Sundays but no Sunday is perfect because no matter who's here there's someone who's drifting we labor hard to shepherd the flock of
God among us members of our church labor hard to care for those under their watch but no matter how great a Sunday is no matter how many people were here no matter how much ministry took place Monday morning there's always an awareness of someone who wasn't here someone who's

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been missing someone who's drifting someone whose family's fallen apart Sundays are great but they're never perfect I love being home with my family but it's never perfect because everybody in that room has a sin nature and all of our lives deal with real pain plenty of blessings praise God but always some struggle always something on the horizon always something that needs to be addressed
Marston over 50 always something that hurts it's sweet but it's not perfect I love my job you've never met a person in your life who loves their job more than I do it would be impossible I go to work every day with a smile that is not an exaggeration I would do this for free but Marcy won't let me so can't do it I love what I do if somebody gave me a check for a million dollars today tomorrow morning I would do two things I'd cash it quick and I'd be at church at staff meeting at 835 I love what I do I can't believe what I get to do but it's not perfect every day is a joy but every day there's pain too for every family who joins our church there's someone who
[37:16] I miss for every family who joins our church there's someone who in recent weeks has gone to be with the Lord and I miss seeing them it's amazing and sweet but it's not perfect that'll be true in a couple of weeks for all of us at Thanksgiving I hope that you have family nearby and I hope it's a sweet sweet day but there will be someone in every family who's already gone to be with the Lord and you'll wish they were there I pray it's a sweet day but it won't be perfect because we're not yet home the Lord has made his home with us and so we can say to live as Christ but one day we will be where he is and what will make heaven home will be the one we are with the psalmist understood this psalm 23 verse 6 surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the

Lord forever David says I just want to be in your house forever and we understand today that the ultimate home for believers is in heaven with the risen Christ our Savior to be with him is when the church will finally be home by God's grace we were able to build this sanctuary we've been able to build the children's building we've been in recent years able to remodel much of our church to make it repurposed to make it as useful as possible because our people faithfully give and wise people help to steward what God entrusts to us we've been able to make this a home for us but this home this earthly home this church building isn't forever and this church home in one spring evening could be gone it happened to our church before about a hundred years ago a physical location wiped away by a tornado
I love this building this physical structure matters to me this isn't just brick and mortar there's more to it than that for me because this is the place where I've seen people married this is the place where I have conducted hundreds of funerals for people I love and this is the place where I've seen hundreds of people baptized and declare they're not ashamed of the gospel this is the place where I have seen lives put together and hearts made new this place matters but this place isn't forever we'll enjoy it while we have it we'll strive to take good care about God's entrusted to us but this isn't home our citizenship is in heaven and so everything we do as a church in this building must be done in light of the reality that we will be with the
Lord back to Philippians 1 verse 24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account this reminds us that the life we live it's not our own we were bought with the price and our time is not even our own we want to spend our time helping and serving others and my prayer is these last three or four months as we've studied on the church we've remembered and seen again the reality that church is not about us it is about Christ it is about loving each other it is about!
taking the gospel to the neighborhoods and the nations it's not about just being comfortable it's not just about having our own preference it's not just about doing everything an individual wants to do we live our life to say Christ if you call me home that's better by far but if I remain in the flesh!
[42:03] let it be lived daily to serve each other church this is what makes this such a special family we have a beautiful sanctuary there's churches in the world much bigger and much more ornate than this the Lord's given us a lovely facility there's facilities that are much larger than ours the Lord's given us a big congregation you don't have to drive far to find churches bigger than ours the Lord has entrusted to us a lot of money that we can give away to missions and we do but there are always churches that have more money than we have none of those things are what make this such a special place what makes this church family a special place is when the whole body says every day of our life is lived in light of this truth that if Christ calls us home that will be gain and until he does let our lives be about the glory of

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Christ give me that church family to be a part of and like my wife told me I don't care where we meet we meet this building we can meet a different building we can move down the street we can meet outside you give me a church family to be a member of that just says we're here to serve Christ and to show our love for Christ by serving each other it's not about rooms and sanctuaries and lights it's about who's there and that will never be more true than when we are home with the Lord I suppose the best verse I can think to finish today is just kind of the end the conclusion of these last 13 weeks or so Hebrews 10 verse 23 familiar words let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near church stay committed to our local church with Christ as the head and remember he is our home until the day he brings us home and then we will forever be home with the Lord imagine with me a 19 year old boy young man tired of his parents rules this 19 year old young man decides he's had enough he can't take the authority of his father's house anymore and so one evening he takes a few belongings throws it in a bag scrounges up what little cash he has in his bedroom puts in his pocket then in the darkness of night with his parents fast asleep he decides I'm done and he leaves home never to come back again ready to go live it up ready to go enjoy his freedom and most of all ready to be away from the restrictions of his father and suppose with me the next day the father mid-morning realizes he's not seen his son so he goes to the bedroom to check on him and makes sure everything's okay only to find that the room is empty and the belongings of his son have been taken the next day throughout that day and the day to come the father goes all around town trying to check and to see has anybody seen my son and driving around town to see if he can find the car to no avail and after a couple of days produce no idea of where his son might be the father goes to one of the old fashioned drug stores in town where he can take his picture and right there on the spot have multiple copies made he takes those pictures put them in his pocket and continues going around town son very quickly burns through what little money he had refusing to enjoy his father's house continues to make an absolute mess of his life the father takes the pictures the pictures of himself he had taken and puts them up all over town in bathrooms of restaurants in the front door of grocery stores day after day just puts his own picture up all over town wherever he can it's not that many days later until this 19 year old comes to the end of himself finds himself at his absolute end out of hope about out of time and completely out of money leaving a restaurant one evening he goes and pushes on the door to leave not sure how many more days he can even survive like this sees a strange thing on the glass door a picture of his father of all things he's barely eaten the last several days he hasn't bathed he's at his end of his hope and end of his time but he takes that picture of his father wondering what in the world is this doing and as he picks it off the glass he sees some writing bleed through the picture turns it over and finds on the back of the picture the handwriting of his father it just says son whatever you've done and whatever you've become just come home and
that day that son learned what grace really is out of money out of hope but saved by grace something that is unearned undeserved!
But completely sufficient! And with nothing in his hands to bring and with nothing he possesses to buy he throws himself at the mercy of his father who by grace welcomes his son home.
[49:32] ! One of these days we will each take a final breath and for the church our eyes will awaken in heaven at home with the Lord and on And on that day better than any sermon better than any devotion better than any Bible study we will understand what grace really is the unmerited favor of the father who has welcomed us home not because of what we have done but because of the work of the son of

God who lived for us a perfect life we could not live died for us a gruesome death we did deserve laid in the tomb raised to life ruling and reigning at the right hand of the father today being the home for every believer and one day bringing us home where we for all eternity will rejoice that we are with the Lord and in that we as a church have everything we need for joy Lord we thank you today for your word we thank you for these weeks and months we've been able to think about who we are as a church the lenses of scripture may we do so even this day aware that you are our home and one day you will bring us home where we will forever enjoy our sinless presence with you in Christ's name we pray amen

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