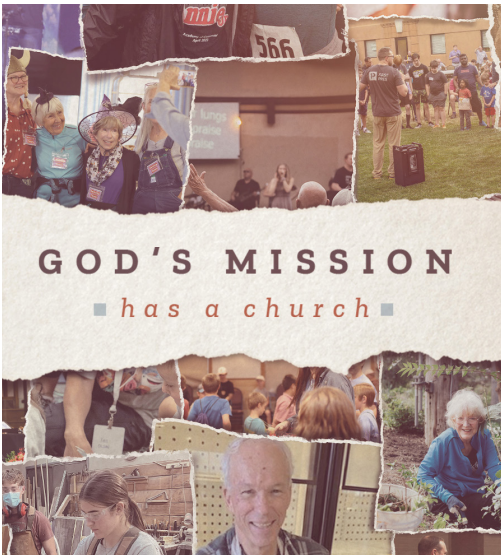




GOD'S MISSION
■ has a church ■

Sermon Growth Guide

February 23, 2025
God Sends a People



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God Sends a People - Hebrews 12:14-24

Key Verse: Hebrews 12:23

To the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.

Big Idea: Having put our hope in Jesus, our transformed lives will be signposts to God's Kingdom.

Foundations

The Letter to the Hebrews is a masterful explanation of how Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises contained in the Old Testament. It is, as well, strong encouragement to keep moving forward in the life of faith.

The recipients, Jewish Christians, were undergoing some form of persecution and hardship and were tempted to go back to the old familiar life of Judaism. The writer of Hebrews encourages them to persevere in their new-found faith.

We have seen how these hard-pressed believers have been inspired to view their hardships as God's way of training them and making them stronger. But they are also strongly encouraged to move forward...to "run the race."

The writer compares their former life and their new faith using the imagery of the mountains of Sinai and Zion. We must be careful to not think of Sinai as bad, because the Lord did good things with His people there. The law came to God's people on Sinai. But on Mount Zion we find the cross.

And in finding the cross at Zion, we realize that we could never fully keep the law given in the past, but it was kept and fulfilled for us by Jesus. At Sinai only Moses could approach God, but in Zion, an innumerable company joins together in joyful worship and celebratory praise.

Understanding God's Word

Together read Hebrews 12: 14-17. Pay particular attention to verse 14: Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. This is a strong command and fulfilling it risks falling back into the fear of legalism. What are specific ways in which keeping this instruction supports God's mission to see His Kingdom grow on earth? What is the connection between holiness and sharing good news?

Applying God's Word

This passage tells us not to let the "root of bitterness" take hold in the life of the church. The Greek word that is used for "root" is riza, from which we get the English word rhizome. A rhizome is a horizontal weed that shoots up stalks all along its length. Pulling up rhizomes, like Johnson grass in Texas, is a frustrating task - you never just pull up one weed. Read Deuteronomy 29:18-29. According to that text, what causes this root to grow? How can we prevent its growth?

Witnessing God's Word

Hebrews 12 is a powerful reminder that it is not just our personal lives that bear witness to the Kingdom. We must nurture carefully our life together so that others can "see the Lord (v. 14)." In what ways can you contribute to the gracious and peaceful life of the church? How can you join God's Mission in pointing others to the Savior?

Last week was a very difficult one for my family. My grandniece of 10-months old died suddenly from influenza A. It was such a shock, and the pain is deep. But we were able to be together Sunday afternoon to lean on one another, pray, and look to the hope we have in Jesus that this life is not all there is. Some of you had a video sermon so I could slip away with my family. Thank you. And thank you for being the church to my family. That's what church is. I looked out over your faces last week and saw friends who I remember when your husband died, or your wife or child, and I remembered seeing you in church shortly after. I could imagine your heart feeling heavy, like a stone was placed on it, and how it was all you could do to say the prayers, or not, sing the songs, or not. And if you couldn't, you just let the person next to you do it for you. Let the church sing the songs when you can't. Let the church say the prayers when you can't. We lean on each other. Christianity is not a solo sport. God brings us together to be a people. I'm grateful to be part of a church, a member of the body of Christ with you.

What is church, then? A club? Maybe the same comfort would be found if I crashed into a skiing club or a fly-fishing club or whatever. What is church? A society for the betterment of Christians? We treat it that way. This is my place to be taken care of. A support system for the like-minded to reinforce one another's worldview? A community center for the distribution of charity? What is church really? Well, here is one picture. Instead of coming to the mountain of fear, you have come to the mountain of faith. "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect." (Hebrews 12:22-23) What is church? A movement. A people on mission. An eternal assembly of God's children on the move. Today as we continue in our series, God's Mission Has a Church, we come to

that question. What is the church? How does God intend to use it? God Sends a People.

I like Ed Stetzer's book, *Subversive Kingdom*, for this series. The Lord's Kingdom has been overthrown by rebels, by a rebellion called sin. That is why this world is so broken and filled with pain. We, who by grace love and follow Jesus, are the rebellion against that rebellion. We are subversively acting to bring about the return of the King, the restoration of justice and the healing of God's world. That's what the church is. The church is God's instrument. The church is a tool in God's hands, a weapon. "Just as he sent Jesus here to establish a beachhead for the kingdom, and just as Jesus dispatched his first disciples to carry out his kingdom plan (John 20:21), the church has now emerged in the wake of this mission, called to advance God's kingdom by taking gospel light into the darkest corners of society as his messengers. Not to prove we're right. Not to win. Not because we're better than everybody else. We go because we are carrying out the mission of our founder. We go because we are sent by him, and he sends us empowered by his Spirit." Stetzer goes on, "God's plan for overthrowing the devil's dominion, freeing its hostages, and advancing Christ's kingdom is for the church to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in both word and deed. That's how he pursues his plan of bringing all creation under his authority and deriving glory for himself in the process. May this be the purpose behind all our subversion." God sends a people. We are part of God's plan. We are on mission together to reset this world; to put it right. What if God sent 3,000 missionaries to Colorado Springs in 2025 to reach this city with the good news of Jesus? God did! It's you and me. How do we live out this mission? What does it look like in real time?

"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14) Here the preacher must remind the English-speaking congre-

gation that most of the teachings in the Bible are not addressed to individuals but to the community of faith. This is all second person plural. "Y'all." We are really missing that word. Together, church, "make every effort to live in peace." "With everyone." Well, that's a lot. Let's just add one more bit to the end of the sentence, "and to be holy." Heavens. "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." You can take that in one of two ways. As an individual, and that's how most of us read it I assume, it says when you are in sin you are also blind. Sin blinds you. You can't see God. You need first to know the forgiveness of yours sins through the blood of Christ and then you can see. "I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." But this is addressed to the church as a group. Be holy, you all. Because without that, no one will see the Lord. "Holy" means "set apart." God wants us to be set apart, living a different life, living a contrasting life, living as an alternative city in the middle of our earthly city, with different priorities, different reactions to pain, different commitments, different values—God's values. Set apart. Why? Because without that, how is this city going to see God? God sends a people. We go together, and together we show God's love to a fallen world. F.F. Bruce called the church "God's pilot scheme for the reconciled universe of the future." God is, in us, saying to the lost world, "Look at my people. This is what the world set right looks like." How are we doing? "They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love; yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love."

So, what do we do? "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." (Hebrews 12:15) They will be watching. Do we let the root of bitterness mature into full fruit? Do we cause trouble? "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son." (Hebrews 12:16) Esau sold his birthright for a pot of porridge. Are we encouraging one another to holiness? Or do we laugh and jest as we watch each other sell all our

tomorrows for a moment of pleasure today? We can do better. Why? Well, in part, because we don't belong to the mountain of fear but to the mountain of faith. We are surrounded by the chorus of witnesses, the Hall of Faith, the communion of saints, and armies of ministering angels. We aren't trying to be holy under the blood of Abel; we are holy under the blood of Christ, "to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." (Hebrews 12:24)

Okay, but how does that play out today? How are we going to be set apart, an alternative city in the middle of our city, an emblem of the returning Kingdom of God? Jesus calls us to show His love to Colorado Springs by being Light and Life for the City. How? Let's name some specifics. How about civic discourse? Let's start there. Are we living as though our greatest hope is politics, or do we see a bigger Kingdom? I have two friends whose jobs are HOA meetings. One said, "Imagine the worst church committee fight you have ever seen, only Jesus is not invited into the room." Whew. Gives me chills. That's politics. Can we live out a community of faith that believes politics is not the biggest thing in town? I have had people leave our church for our politics. I say, "Was it something I said?" No. "Was it one of the Pastors?" No. "What was it?" "It was the Facebook posts of other members of the church. I can't worship with those people anymore." I've had that both directions. On social media, it's fun to let the root of bitterness run rampant. Can we bear witness to a community of faith bigger than current, American political differences? Then they will see something.

How about money? Christians don't see money as an end all be all. It's just a tool. Generosity stands out. How about justice? A good definition of justice is the world "just as" God wants it. This alternative city sees injustice and moves toward it. I was talking to a founder of Rise Southeast, working to help that

quadrant of our city. She said there is a 16-year life expectancy difference. You will live on average 16 years less in Southeast Colorado Springs. We represent an alternative city, Christ's city, and in that city, we don't go for that kind of injustice. Can we run toward that? Last year we sponsored a hydroponic farm for fresh vegetables; we partner with COS I Love You and Solid Rock Community Development and others. Being set apart means we rush toward injustice.

How about sexuality? Christians pursue a different sexual ethic. Esau gets thrown under the bus here. He was just eating stew! But the principle is selling out your future for the sake of a moment's pleasure; sexual self-gratification above all. The Greek word is "porneia." People are sick of it. We have been trying this as a culture for a long time, and it is making people miserable. Jesus offers a different ethic. "'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'" (Matthew 19:4-6) Monogamous intimacy within the covenant of marriage, faithful chastity in singleness. Study after study reveals it still brings the most happiness and fulfillment. Want to stand out in this world? Stand for that. Refuse the exploitation, the trafficking, the dehumanization, the addiction that comes from our sexual revolution culture.

How about forgiveness and reconciliation? In a culture bent on canceling one another, on principled destruction of relationship over differences in perspective, what does it look like to be part of a community committed to reconciliation and forgiveness, and making every effort to live in peace with everyone? That stands out. How about hope? For we do not grieve as those who do not have hope. Have you ever been to a godless funeral? Woah. I was sitting in the saddest funeral I have sat in for a long time last week. A 10-month old baby girl. But we had hope. There was hope. Jesus was there.

Stand out. God sends a people to stand out. We represent an alternative city in the middle of this city, an alternative way of life, a pilot program for the coming Kingdom, not only by what we resist but what we promote. We do not let the root of bitterness bear fruit; we grow the fruit of the Spirit. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Self-Control. Where do we get the power? It isn't from fear. The first mountain is the mountain of fear. Do this or the wrath of God descends. That's not the source of our power. Our power is from the mountain of faith. Faith over fear. "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." (Hebrews 12:22-24) Cain killed his brother Abel. The blood of Abel cries out "Condemn him!" Cain said, "You die so I live." Now Abel's blood cries out for justice. But there is a blood that speaks a better word. The blood of Jesus says "Forgive them! I die so you live. Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Where is the power to be the people set apart, made holy, the alternative city? Only in the blood of Jesus. This is the source of forgiveness, the root of peace, the foundation of hope, the Kingdom that supersedes all political kingdoms, the confidence that my immediate gratification is nothing compared to the future glory, the grace to cover all our sins and reunite us with God, the fathomless, endless love that wells up within us to give us love for one another, and even our enemies, this is the source: the blood of Jesus shed for us.