

A GREAT CHURCH (1 Tim. 3:14-16)

Introduction:

1. What makes a great church? We speak often about how we must watch our words because they influence our thinking. Is a great church great because of numbers? Or the number of activities they engage in? Or by their reputation?
2. Let us consider this morning what a great church is, and what exactly makes it great.

Discussion:

I. Not size.

- A. Throughout Bible history, those who received God's favor have been the minority.
 1. In the Garden 2 out of 2 rejected God and were cast out; in the days of Noah, all but 8 in the entire world killed due to sin; in the days of Moses, only 2 of an entire generation were allowed into the promised land; in the days of Elijah, God had 7000 out of all Israel.
 2. In the days of Jesus, all forsook Him and don't forget Pentecost.
- B. How big were the churches mentioned in the NT?
 1. How big was the church in Philippi?
 2. It appears that the church in Philadelphia was small (Rev. 3:8).
 3. Consider some words of Paul (Rom. 9:6, 27-Is. 10:22; 11:1-5).
- C. Some numbers from a lecture at PTP by Neil Pollard (Director at the Bear Valley School of Preaching).
 1. From 1990-today the churches of Christ have lost 100,00 members.
 2. The major denominations have lost tens of millions (only growth in community churches and that is highly unstable).
 3. In America THE churches are mostly small: 47 churches have over 1000 members; 190 churches have from 500-1000 members; 515 churches have from 300-500; 726 churches have 200-299 members; 2359 churches have 100-199 members; and 9515 have under 100 members. 5434 have under 50. The median size of the church in America is 50.
- D. Clearly a great church is not great because of the number of people who attend it. Consider the words of our Lord (Matt. 7:13, 14).

II. Not activities.

- A. Ephesus seemed to have a lot going on, and yet the Lord warned them to repent or lose the right to be His church (Rev. 2:1-7).
- B. The Northern kingdom of Israel had multiple sights of worship and multiple feast days, but was condemned because they were not according to the word of God (1 Kings 12).
- C. Corinth was filled with "exciting" religious things to do, but were shameful and degrading.
- D. We can fill our days with "things to do", even "religious things", but if we do not abide in the doctrine (teaching) of Christ then it is all for naught (John 15:4-11 = abide/dwell [11X] = His.; Deut. 4:2 = Rev. 22:18 = Gal. 3:15; 2 John 7-11).

III. Not reputation.

- A. Sardis had quite a reputation as being the church of our Lord, and yet, our Lord pronounced them as being dead (Rev. 3:1-6)!
- B. In the days of Jesus the Jews had quite an appearance and reputation for being religious, and yet Jesus said they were hypocrites and tombs (Matt. 23:27).
- C. Paul saw that Athens was very religious and Ephesus was “the City of Diana”, but both were called to repent and serve the true and living God.

IV. Faithfulness determines a great church.

- A. By definition this is so. Only those who live according to God’s word, and assemble to worship according to God’s word are God’s people (Ps. 127:1; 2 Tim. 2:19; 2 Pet. 2:9).
- B. A faithful church of 2 people is a great church in the eyes of God because a great church is great because Jesus built that church upon Himself. When we are faithful to His commands (Matt. 28:20) we become the physical expression of that great church.

Conclusion:

1. Numbers can be useful to help us understand trends, but we must not allow them to determine what is right and what is wrong; God’s word alone does that.
2. Consider the words of Heb. 12:1-3 = many have walked the lonely path we are walking today; stay focused on Jesus not the world around us; remember that Jesus too walked this very same lonely path; and WALK IT!
3. Invitation.