

The following is a transcript of a sermon preached at Living Hope Church, Sunnyside on January 17, 2016.

It is good to be with you.

I can't tell you how good it is to be here, with you.

I didn't realize I would be away so much over the Christmas holidays, which wasn't my favorite, being away, but one of the good things about being forced to be away, is that it reminds you how thankful you are for where God has placed you.

I just love being part of Living Hope.

I am so thankful for the life God's given me.

Because, while I've enjoyed visiting some other churches and even preaching in some other churches, and I am definitely excited about what God is doing in those churches, He's at work, it's clear, I just really love this particular church, and the fact that God's allowed me to serve Him here, with you.

And actually I want to take some time over the next several weeks and even months to help you understand a little bit about why.

Why I am so excited about the church in general.

And why I am so happy to be part of this local church, in particular.

Over the next couple of months, we are going to be talking a lot about the church.

We are going to be doing something a little bit different than we normally do.

In that, normally, we work our way through a particular book of the Bible. If you come, you'll see that. So, before the holidays, we were working our way through the gospel of Luke, verse by verse, and we haven't even come close to finishing that yet, but over the next couple of months, as a church, we are going to take some time away from the gospel of Luke, where we were looking specifically at Christ, to look at a number of different passages in the Bible that teach us about Christ's church.

So, we are going to be asking questions like:

What is the church?

Why is the church?

What are our goals as a church?

What's the plan for this church?

What part does God want you and me to play at the church?

As you can see, obviously, we are going to be talking a lot over the next couple of months about the church.

And there are a number of reasons why.

We think this is important.

It was hard for me to leave our study of Luke honestly, and we are going to be coming back, so don't worry, but, there are a number of reasons why I think it's important, **we spend some serious time, right now, talking together about what the Bible teaches about the church.**

One very practical reason honestly is because there are a number of new people who are coming to the church and even a number of people who have been coming to the church for a long time now who are not yet members of Living Hope.

And I am going to talk about what it means to be a member of this church, and why that's important, so if you are asking that, that's coming.

But basically if you are a Christian and you think Living Hope is your church, if this is the place you have committed yourself to, we want you, to officially, so everyone knows it, we know it, you know it, become a member of this church.

We think that will help us and that will help you.

And usually the way we do that, we have a process, usually, we start by having a membership class.

But there are just so many of you who would need to come to that class, right now, that we thought, it makes sense for us, to bring the class to you, and so as I preach on Sundays, over the next couple of months, it's going to be sort of an extended membership class, for those of you who would like to become actual, members of this church.

And you'll hear more about the whole process along the way, but one step in that process is just coming on Sundays over the next several months and learning more about God's design for the local church.

So, that's one reason, it's a very practical reason we are going to be talking about the church, it's for those of you who want to become members of the church, but it's not the only reason, we are talking about the church.

Obviously.

Because, really, even if you are not a member of this church, and even if you are not really thinking right now about becoming a member, this series is still, for you as well.

There's hardly anything that will have more of an impact on the way your life goes, than the kind of church you end up committing yourself to.

The local church is that important.

The local church is an absolutely vital part of God's great design for how the Christian life is supposed to work right now.

And so, if you are not a part of a local church, it's going to have an impact on you; and if you are part of an unbiblical, unhealthy local church, it is going to have an impact on you, and if you are part of a biblical local church, it is going to have an impact on you.

And a lot of people have never thought about that.

I find a lot of people have never thought about that.

I remember I was talking to someone a while back, he came for counseling, and I had just met him randomly, he had never come to our church, I just somehow met him and told him I was a pastor, and he asked if he could get together and talk.

And when we got together, man, he had a story to tell, there were drugs, there was adultery, there was all kinds of bad stuff, and yet as we got to talking about his relationship with God, he said he had been a Christian for many years.

And even going to church.

And you know, if he was a Christian, and he might have been, he was like a baby Christian at best, and so I am asked him to describe what happened at his church for me, what was happening at the church he went to, because I was thinking how does a man stay a spiritual baby this long, when he's a part of a church, and as he described his church and what it was doing, what he was describing, was really, really far from what the Bible teaches about the priorities of a church, and as he was talking, I was just thinking, you know, one of the reasons, you are having so many problems, and you are having to come to me and ask for help, is because you are not part of a good church, that's teaching you the truth, and helping you follow Jesus.

This stuff is basic.

It's not like being part of a biblical church means you are never going to struggle with problems, that's not what I am saying, but man, if you are not part of a biblical local church, I don't know how you can expect anything else.

That's like, expecting grass to grow in a desert, without water.

It just doesn't happen. Christians don't really grow without the church and yet what is crazy to me, is that a lot of people have never thought about that.

There are a lot of people who say they are Christians, and yet they think of the local church, almost as something they can put on the side, and who sort of feel like, it doesn't matter what local church I am part of.

But it does.

It matters.

It will have an effect on you. Because, God planned it that way. And because God planned it that way, it's important you think about what to look for in a local church.

Because not everything that calls itself a church is a church.

There are certain things a church is supposed to be doing. There are certain characteristics of a biblical local church.

I mean, I said to that man I was counseling, because, he was like, can you help me change my life, that's how desperate he was, and so I said, if you are serious, you need to start by becoming part of a good local church.

I can't even really help you long term if you are not willing to do that, and you know what he said to me, he said, that sounds great, but what is a good local church?

Because, he had no idea, what to look for.

He didn't even know where to begin when it came to what to look for in a local church.

And so that's another reason, really, for this whole series, it's for those of you who aren't even thinking about membership yet, because, I want to help you see the importance of the local church, and to even, know what makes for a good biblical local church.

Because a lot of people are confused.

And this is maybe, the main reason, I think, it is so important we talk about the church, it's because there are so many wrong and unbiblical and unhelpful ideas people have about the church.

Like, I dare you to ask some people you know who say they are Christians, what they think about church, and what is the church, and what is the church for, and what's important for a church to do, and I think you'll see there are a whole lot of people who are pretty confused when it comes to what the church is supposed to be all about.

I know some people their idea of a church is a whole lot more like a business.

Living Hope Business.

It exists to make the customer happy or the pastor rich.

I have heard of people who wanted to be pastors, for the offering, you know. I want to start a church so I can be in charge of the offering.

Others think of the church more like entertainment center, almost.

Church is a place where I go to be entertained.

And so if you look at what is important to them, when it comes to church, it's, was it interesting, did it get me excited, did I like it?

I was watching a pretty famous African preacher the other day, and it was a whole bunch of nonsense, and yet there was this huge crowd there, and I was thinking, why are they there, why would they show up, when there is no Christ, there is no Scripture being taught, there is no real worship, and I realized, it's just

another show, they are there to laugh or be amazed, they are there to be entertained.

Others, honestly, see church more like a hospital.

And I don't mean a hospital for spiritually sick people, I mean literally, physically sick people.

I know I have met people where if you ask them what they love about Jesus, they'll say he's my healer, and if you look at why they are part of a church, it's because they think that being part of a church somehow keeps them physically healthy, and if they are not, if they are sick, they think, going to church, will somehow help them get healed.

And so I want us to go back and talk even about some of the basics of what the Bible teaches about church because the fact is **there is just a lot of confusion out there, when it comes to what the church is supposed to be all about.**

Even for those of you who are members.

I don't want you to be confused about why we are so excited about working at planting this particular local church.

Because, if you are a member of this church already, this is something, the local church, Living Hope Church Sunnyside, we as leaders, expect you are going to have to do some sacrificing for.

The only way we are going to have a biblical local church here is if all the members feel their responsibility to partner together, using their gifts, to advance the cause of Christ, here in Sunnyside, and Pretoria, and Africa, and honestly, I expect that anyone who is a member of this local church, they have signed on,

they have signed up, they are committed, and I expect, they are going to make a priority out of sacrificing themselves to help us be a biblical local church.

I am talking time.

I am talking energy.

I am talking giftedness.

I am talking commitment.

And that's obviously a big expectation for me to have, for those of you who are members, and if you are going to understand why that makes sense, why we want you to make those kinds of sacrifices, we are going to have to go back and make sure we all understand what we are talking about when we talk about church.

And there's hardly any place I can think of that's better for us to begin.

To clear away some of the confusion.

And to lay down the basic principles than a passage we've already studied, but years back, and that's Ephesians chapter one, verses three through fourteen.

And I don't know if I knew it when we studied this book at first, and this is the first book we studied in depth as a church, but this book is basically a theology course centered in on what's God's doing through the church, and as we look at the way Paul opens this book, with one big long run on sentence in verses 3-14, **I think we see at least three principles that are basic, that are foundational to**

understanding what is going on and what we want to be going on here at Living Hope Church.

This is kind of like, you know, before we talk about our plans and what we want to do as a church, there are just certain principles or convictions that are so fundamental, in terms of how we think about the church, that they shape the way we are going to go about absolutely everything.

And the first one is very simple, and it's just that the church begins with God.

Paul says,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

So, this is worship.

Which is what we do, as a church, we worship, and Paul's worshipping.

As he's in prison by the way, for preaching the gospel, so he's worshipping God as he sits in prison.

And I think part of what motivates him to worship is because he's thinking about what God's done in the church.

Specifically, the church he's writing to, there in Ephesus.

That's how the letter begins.

Up in verses 1 and 2.

He writes,

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”

That’s who he is.

“To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.”

That’s who the people’s he’s writing to are.

Which actually, if you look at it, a great summary definition of what it means to be a church.

A local church is made up of people who have been set apart by God.

That’s the word saints, literally holy ones, or set apart ones.

Now obviously there are lots of set apart ones all over the world, but a local church meets in a certain place, and we see Paul’s talking to a group of people who had been set apart by God, who were meeting together in a certain city called Ephesus.

You see, when God sets you apart for Himself, He doesn’t set you apart by yourself, He makes you part of the church.

You become part of this family of Christians that exists all over the world and even across the ages, and that reality is supposed express itself very practically in your life, where you find a place in your area where you can gather together and worship God with some other members of your family.

With other believers.

Which, of course is maybe a third key, in Paul's definition of a church.

The church is made up of saints.

The church is you know all over the world, we are one church, but at the same time, we are to meet together as a church in a particular place.

And the people who are members of those local churches are people describes as faithful in Christ Jesus.

Literally, people who are exercising their faith and trust, in Christ Jesus.

You might say people who are full of faith.

A local church is not just a group of people who meet to worship God.

It's a group of people who are Christians.

Who believe certain things about Jesus. You can't be a part of a real church, without believing certain things about Jesus, and without continuing to believe certain things about Jesus.

A Christian is someone who has certain convictions about Jesus, who has very specific beliefs about Christ, about Him being God and man, about, Him dying on the cross for their sins.

Which is why as Paul looks at this local church, he can be so confident that they now are recipients of God's grace and God's peace.

He says in verse 2,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...”

And while that was a standard blessing in those days, it was anything but standard for Paul, because for Paul, grace means God’s undeserved kindness and peace, means friendship with God, and so he’s saying, as he looks at this church, he’s writing to, I am confident, you experience all of that now, because you now know God as Father and you have submitted to Jesus as Lord.

And so, here in verse 3.

Having, you know, been meditating on all of this about who the church is, and what the church enjoys, it’s like Paul is beginning to think a little more about exactly how they came to experience all this and he just starts overflowing in worship.

Throughout the next 11 verses.

With the first verse, verse 3 really, being a kind of summarizing statement for all the rest.

It’s like a theme statement.

It as if Paul’s announcing in verse 3 exactly what he is talking about, and understanding the way he begins is absolutely vital for understanding the rest.

He says,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So Paul’s worshipping, as he thinks about the church, and you notice, of course, this is obviously, very specifically Christian worship.

It's not just worshiping God in general.

He's praising the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And later we'll see he brings in the Spirit.

This is Trinitarian worship, and all true Christian worship is Trinitarian worship, but why is Paul worshiping God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, that's the question, and really, why do Christians gather together to worship God like this?

You see.

Verse 3 again.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

Which I highlighting because whether you see it, at first or not, that is a radical statement.

The church is a gathering of people who have been saved through faith in Christ to worship God, like Paul is here, and if we look carefully at the way Paul approaches worship, we'll see he approaches it in a way that is very different, from most of what we see happening all around us.

Now, you have to think about this, because obviously, the worship or blessing of God is not that radical.

Because, almost every religion supposedly is a group of people coming together and claiming to worship or bless God.

But what's radical about the way Christians gather together to worship, is first of all who, we worship, we worship a very specific God and then, why we worship, and this is the part I want you to see, if you are going to understand the way we go about church.

We as Christians bless God because we have been blessed by God.

Blessed is past tense.

Who has blessed us.

Not because we have done.

But because of our relationship with Christ.

Who has blessed us in Christ.

With every spiritual blessing.

In other words, we are not coming together to start a church and worship God in order to somehow gain God's favor through our religious activity.

A true church doesn't begin with our efforts and what we do to somehow get God on our side, the church begins with what God has already done, through Christ, to rescue us.

We see this all the way throughout the rest of Paul's praise.

It's about what God the Father has done in verses 4-6.

He chose us.

He predestined us for adoption as sons.

And what God the Son has done in verses 7-9.

He's the one who purchased our redemption through His blood, He's the way God the Father revealed His great plan to us.

And what God the Spirit is doing in verses 11-14.

He's the seal, the guarantee of our inheritance.

But God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, it's all God, our salvation, from beginning to end, and if we are going to be a Christian church, it's fundamental this grabs hold of us, because while it kind of seems simple, it's the exact opposite of what motivates most religious activity.

Most religious activity begins with me.

This is what I do in order to get God to bless me.

Where what happens in the church begins with, this is what God has done, to rescue us, that is why we worship.

Most religious activity is basically people looking around and saying, this world is terrifying, and I have got to figure out some ways to get God to do what I want.

Where the church begins with man, God loves me, God is for me, He's proven that, that's why we are here.

A lot of religious activity is like a bargain. I'll do this, if God, you'll do this.

Where the church begins with God, you are so beautiful, you've given us a glimpse in the gospel, of how beautiful you really are, and we want to be like you, we want to put your character on display.

If you even listen to the way a lot of religious people pray, it's me, I got to pray loud, you know scream at the wall, and seem like I really mean it, or I've got to use certain magic words, to force God into a corner where He has to bless me. So, the reason I pray, is just to get my world, the way I like it.

But again with the church, it begins with God, we know we have a relationship with God through Christ, so we don't need to yell or use tricks, and we've seen who God is in the gospel, and so a lot of our prayer life is not just about me and what I want, as much as about enjoying a relationship with this beautiful, majestic God.

Which I guess I could go on and on, because I think this principle, the church begins with God, is just so fundamental for understanding everything we are about as a church.

You know even way back, when Living Hope started, we made up a list of basic principles, and one of the basic principles, which we still are excited about is, was that God uses this message about what He's done through Christ, to save us and change us and grow us.

Blessed be God because He's blessed us in Christ is not just the beginning of the Christian life, it's the key to the whole of the Christian life, and a big part of our job as a church, is just to gather together, and remind each other of that.

I was somewhere recently and the preacher wasn't that amazing a preacher honestly, he was kind of boring, and he was looking down at his notes most of the time, and a little bit hard to follow at first, but then in the middle of his message, he just started pointing to the good news of what God had done for bad people through Jesus and it was like dynamite, and I was thinking, this is just such a big part of why we gather together as a church, week after week, because we want to worship God for what He's done, and because we need to be reminded of what God's done for us in Christ.

Second, and this flows out of the first, the church is incredibly blessed by God.

I am just trying to give you some starting points for understanding why we do what we do as a church, how we think about church.

Because if we look around, I think we see a lot of people who are going to places and doing religious things, because they think that's the way they can get a blessing.

They don't see themselves as already blessed.

Instead, they see themselves as not being blessed, and the reason they go to church, is in order to somehow obtain a blessing.

Which is different than how Paul sees it.

Here in verse 3.

Because he says,

“we have blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

And the whole rest of the passage is basically Paul drawing out and describing some of those blessings.

Like **election**.

Verse 4.

“God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”

And **adoption**.

“In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the beloved.”

And **redemption**.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us.”

And **revelation**.

We know God’s great plan for the universe.

“In all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

And **future glorification**.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him, you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

And what's so sad, is for a lot of people, who are going to churches, all these blessings, are not really what they are interested in.

Paul here he's in prison, so he's suffering, and yet he's overflowing with worship, because he sees himself as incredibly blessed, and he uses all this really strong language to describe how good he has it, like every spiritual blessing, and the riches of God's grace, which He has lavished upon us, and yet there are a lot of people going to do religious things today who actually are living a lot more comfortable lives than Paul ever lived, and still they don't see themselves as blessed by God, because honestly they are not interested in these kinds of blessings.

If you asked them to write this verse, it might be blessed be God so that He will bless us on the basis of our rituals and prayers with all kinds of physical blessings in the earthly places.

I was thinking about the way Paul describes how God has blessed us, as a contrast, and you see at almost every point, it's different, than how people normally think about it.

First, he says, we have been blessed in Christ.

It's solely because of our relationship with Him.

Outside of Christ, no blessing.

In Christ, every blessing.

And second, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, which could mean they come to us as a result of the Spirit's work in our lives, or it could be a contrast with physical, they are spiritual kinds of blessings, and I think that's maybe the emphasis, because of what Paul says next, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, in the heavenly places.

And it's that phrase that I think highlights something that you'll notice about real churches, which is that while they are interested in physical, now sort of blessings, those are not the kinds of blessings primarily that drive them to worship.

What excites them most, instead, are the kind of blessings that have to do with their actual relationship with God and with what God has done for them through Christ and what God is going to do for them in the future.

This is such a sharp contrast for me.

Most people in this world are not interested in blessings like election and adoption and redemption and revelation.

Those are spiritual blessings, and they are dead spiritually.

What they are interested in are things they can see and touch and feel, so if you talk to them about blessings like cars and houses and money, they get excited, because that's all they know, that's what makes their heart beat.

And that's why if you want to gather a crowd, promise people those things. You can say the craziest things, obvious lies, and yet, people will still come, because they are of this world, and what interests them, are the things of this world.

But that's not true of the church.

Unbelievers are dead to spiritual things, and so of course, they only get excited about physical things, but the church isn't dead spiritually.

The Spirit of God has set them apart, and given them life.

He's given them a new, vital spiritual principle.

He's placed it right there in the center of their soul.

A spiritual mind, you might say, a spiritual understanding, and so he's enabled to put the right value on things.

The church knows what is important and the church knows what is not.

And the church sees just how valuable the spiritual blessings that God has given them in Christ really are, and so, they look at the world differently than the unbelievers do around him.

They are thankful for it.

Of course, we enjoy this world as a church.

But we know we are just passing through it. This world is not our home. There is an inheritance we are waiting for in heaven.

And so the blessings that matter to us as a church most, are the not the physical ones we might experience here on earth for a little while, but the eternal, spiritual ones that are kept for us in heaven, where are our real home is.

It's kind of like.

We were in vacation in Durban last week.

And we were staying in someone's house, and there were lots of nice things about that house, and we enjoyed it.

And you can imagine, if while were staying at that house, someone comes and says, oh man, I see this house doesn't have a pool, and so while you are here, I will build you a pool here at this house, that you can use, and I see there's no internet, and so I am going to give this house wifi, so you can use the internet while you are here, and I see this house doesn't have a car, and so I am going to give the owners of this house a car, that you can use while you are here on holiday, and you are like wow, those are wonderful blessings, and I am thankful for them, but I am only here for a week.

And so I enjoy those gifts but I would obviously enjoy them a whole lot more if someone gave me all that stuff for my home.

Back in Pretoria.

You see, and this is all just so important for understanding how we are going about life as a church.

Because I know you might come in here from some other places, and you are like, this is different.

Why isn't the pastor talking more about, I don't know, health and prosperity, and my best life now? And why do these people seem so content and so happy, regardless of whatever circumstances they are in?

I want more talk about how to get more money or achieve a better status in life or get a better job, and all that's fine, I guess, but it's all so temporary. And it just doesn't energize us.

It kind of bores us a little honestly.

I mean, if someone takes me around this home I am staying in for a week, and they have some amazing Plasma T.V. and he wants to talk for a long time about the T.V., I'm kind like, ok, it's nice, you have got a great T.V., but can we maybe talk about something else?

Because, I am only here for a week.

And that's the way it is for us as a church in this world.

Obviously, we are concerned about this world, it's made by God and we are living here and we want to enjoy what God's given us in this world, and we want to use what God's given us in this world for His glory. And besides that we love people, and so we want to help people with the problems they are facing in this world.

Like I know I would love it if you all were able to have great jobs and live in nice places and use the gifts God's given you as easily as you can, but at the same time, if you are going to understand the way we think as a church, you have to understand, at the end of the day, our heart is really in the heavenly places, that's where our treasure is, and so that's the kind of stuff we get most excited about.

We think being chosen by God in Christ before the beginning of the world is better than driving a BMW, we think the inheritance we are going to enjoy forever is more important than having a big bank account, and so we're always constantly finding reasons to rejoice no matter what circumstances we are experiencing, because we know we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing, and because we've come to see how truly valuable those blessings are, those are the kinds of blessings we are most desperate people come to know and experience.

Third.

The church begins with God.

The church is blessed by God.

And the church belongs to God.

If we look at every blessing in this passage, they all shout back at us, that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves.

In other words.

These blessings that we have been given don't end with us.

It's not like we are the center and God is over here on the side and we use God to get blessings for ourselves.

Instead as we read this passage, it's clear that God is smack dab at the center, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and He is using the church, to bring glory to Himself.

The church is an instrument that God is using to make Himself look great.

One of the things you do sometimes as you read through a passage is you look for repeated words and phrases.

And there are lots in here.

But one of the phrases that is repeated is found at the end of verse 5, "according to the purpose of His will."

That means, God has a will.

God has something He desires and He has planned and that what we see happening in the church, is according to what He wanted to accomplish through that plan.

"According to the purpose of his will."

Verse 9.

"According to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ, as a plan."

Verse 11.

“According to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”

If you were going to go back, way, way back, before even the foundation of the world, you would see that God had a plan.

Before He even created the world, He could see what was going to happen to people.

He saw the way Adam was going to sin.

And He understood the consequences of that.

He knew what sin was going to do to people and how sin needed to be dealt with.

And so He made a plan.

Sometimes people call this the eternal covenant of God, or the covenant of redemption.

Basically, there was an agreement made between the Father and the Son.

As someone's said,

“God the Father gave a people to the Son, and the Son voluntarily made Himself responsible to God for them. He contracted to do certain things for them, and God the Father on His side contracted to do other things. God the Father said He would grant forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration and new life and a new nature to all who belonged to His Son.

The condition was that the Son would come into the world and take human nature and the sin of mankind upon himself and bear its punishment, stand for them, and suffer for them, and represent them.”

That was the plan.

That Paul’s describing.

And so, here are you and I, here we are as a church, and we are just little pieces of dust, and yet even though we are nothing, we are proud and selfish and angry and wanting all kinds of honor and glory for ourselves.

And the only thing we really deserve is for God to just get rid of us.

But what’s happened instead, is that before He even made the world, this great and happy God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, who had no problems, who were totally happy and satisfied with each other, looked at us, and thought about our problems, and saw what would happen to us as a result of our own sinful choices, and made a way for us to be forgiven and redeemed.

He chose us.

He started by choosing to set us apart so that we might be made perfect.

And not only that, He decided to bring us into His own family.

We were enemies but He made us sons.

At the cost of His own Son.

His plan involved sending His own Son into this world as a human being for the purpose of dying, so that we might be set free from sin.

Forgiven.

And then, there's all God had to do, to enable us to know what He's done through Christ.

If Jesus had just come and died, and then rose again, and that was it, we'd still be in trouble, because we wouldn't understand what was going on, and so God raised up and inspired these different men to preach His Word, and then raised up others to protect it, and then He sent His Spirit to give us life so that we can understand it.

Ultimately, not just so that we could only be forgiven and adopted, but you know, so that we could live forever in His presence.

God has a great big goal for us, which doesn't end with us dying, but with this great future glorious gift He wants to give us of a new heavens and a new earth, and joy and privilege of living forever as His people in His presence.

And of course, you look at all that, you look at that plan, and you say what exactly was God seeking to accomplish through all that?

What was the purpose behind His will?

And the answer that keeps coming up as we read this passage is another phrase that Paul keeps repeating.

Verse 6.

“To the praise of his glorious grace.”

Verse 12.

“To the praise of his glory.”

Verse 14.

“To the praise of His glory.”

Now this is so important, but you have to catch this, because we say this a lot, but everything in this world is either an instrument or an end.

And what I mean, is there are some things that are the purpose, the end, and then there are some things that you use to accomplish that purpose, they are instruments.

So, a computer is not a purpose.

It's not an end.

You don't just save up all sorts of money to have a computer sit there. You buy a computer to accomplish something.

You use a computer to accomplish an end.

Well, ultimately in this world, there is actually only one great purpose, there is only one great end, and everything else is an instrument, and that great end is the praise of God's glory.

God is the great purpose of everything that exists, and everything else is an instrument, even the church. We are an instrument God is using to put His glory on display.

Now think about that, because what does that mean?

It means, God's beautiful.

Everything about Him is beautiful. And one of the words the Bible uses to describe His beauty is the word glory. He's perfect and it's like His perfections just shine forth from Him, almost like rays from the sun, or like a fountain that's just overflowing, and we might call that, shining forth of His perfections or overflow, His glory.

And, what's cool, is that God's always been enjoying His own glory.

That's what He's been doing, basically forever.

If you were to look way back to the beginning of the world, what you would see is God the Father looking at His perfections in the person of God the Son, and this is deep, but as He's looking at those perfections, He's totally enjoying His glory on display through the Holy Spirit.

So, He's glorified as He puts His perfections on display and as He enjoys and delights in those perfections.

Which means, when you say, God wants to glorify Himself, that's His purpose, what does it mean for God to glorify Himself, you can look at the Trinity, it means He's showing how awesome He is through the Son, and it means He's enjoying how awesome He is through the Spirit, which ultimately, is God's great purpose for the church.

It's like God's plan from the beginning of the universe all the way to the end is to do through us and for us what He's been doing forever, putting His beautiful character on display through the person and work of Jesus Christ and enabling us to enjoy and delight in the excellence of the Son and the Father by giving us the Holy Spirit.

Or maybe just to make it all more simple, so that you can understand, what all this has to do with us as a church, it means, our church exists because of God, we are not here because we are good, but because God's good, and He's rescued us, and we are really passionate about knowing Him and enjoying Him and putting Him on display, because we've begun to see and taste and enjoy just how good He's been to us through Jesus Christ, and so our purpose as a church, is to praise the glory of His grace.

And I am emphasizing this, because if you look at the way a lot of people think about church, they've flipped it all on its head.

It's like the church exists for them ultimately, to entertain them, to satisfy their needs, their desires, their preferences, to get them what they want, and that's not why we are here, we are here for God, that's what we mean when we talk about being the church.

We're a group of people who have been set apart by God and who have been saved through faith in Christ and who are experiencing the grace and peace of God right now even as we speak and who are absolutely astounded by just how good God's been to us, we've seen it, we tasted it, and we gather together as a result in obedience to His commands in order to praise and worship and glorify and proclaim Him. In other words, God the Father has communicated how beautiful He is to us through the work of the Son and enabled us to enjoy it

through the work of the Spirit and is causing us to respond by sending praise and worship and delight and joy back to Him.

I am going on, I guess, but we're going to be talking a lot in the days ahead about the church, and especially about this local church, and our goals, and what it means to be a member, and all of that, but I think it's going to be very hard to understand much about Living Hope Church, if you don't understand these basic principles first.

This church is about God.

It begins with God.

It exists because of what God's done through Christ.

And it exists for God.

It begins and ends and revolves around God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

And we are not saying we know all the ins and outs and the implications of all of that, in terms of how we live out our life as a church.

But those are our fundamental convictions that drive us, and so we are going back to God's Word constantly, and asking God, how do we church, in a way that makes it clear, we begin with you, not with us.

That we are not saved by what we do, but by what you have done?

How do we do church in a way that makes it clear, we've been blessed by God with every spiritual blessing?

That shows the world what we really value? That we are excited about heaven?
That we value spiritual blessings and eternal blessings even more than short
term physical blessings?

That shows the world how good God's been to us, right now?

And maybe most fundamentally, how do live as a church in a way that makes it
clear, we don't exist first and foremost for ourselves? For our comfort? And for
our pleasure?

But instead, for God?