

## The Church Matters

### PRAY.

Maverick *Crossfire* host Tucker Carlson writes that Larry King once gave him some good advice about the TV news business: “*The trick is to care, but not too much; give a ‘darn’ but not really.*” Half-hearted commitments. People like to *look* like they care without actually having to *do* so. The noisiest advocates for the poor are often the richest who oddly enough rarely get their hands dirty unless it’s a photo op.

True caring may cost life, limb, wealth, prestige, convenience, comfort. Most of us reserve that kind of commitment for friends, family, or deeply held convictions. The things that matter most.

What about the *church*? Does it matter? To you, me? Or is it something we just “care about, but not too much; we give a darn, but not really?” Church leaders all across America are frustrated by half-hearted commitments. For example, according to national statistics, every fifth person here ministers in the local church but the other 4 don’t. Here, it might be closer to 2 or 3 out of 5 not ministering in some fashion, but the point is, some Christians coast. I used to make a variety of allowances for that but I think the *heart* of the matter is, “Does the church matter to me?” While most believers would say “yes,” measuring its value to them by what it *costs* them, the right answer may actually be “no.”

The early church *did* place great value on the Church. READ Acts 14:19-28.

On the one hand, these are the professionals: the missionaries. But to accomplish what Jesus *said* must be accomplished before he comes back (Matt.24:14) requires the efforts of all, not just the paid “professionals.”

### 1. The church matters: enough to take risks for. 19-20

On one day Lystra’s pagans were ready to worship Paul and Barnabas, the next, ready to execute them. Paul remembered this infamous day in his autobiography in 2 Cor.11:25, “*...once I was stoned.*” To Jewish troublemakers in Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, stopping the gospel mattered so much that they were willing to take off work, leave their families for a week or so, and travel 100 miles to kill Paul and Barnabas.

Arriving in Lystra they somehow won the pagans to their side. Having two different religions, it’s a wonder a Jewish gripe influenced the pagans, but perhaps they did as they had to with Jesus: change the accusation to one that matters to the killers. In Jesus’ case, they changed blasphemy to sedition. “Jesus wants to be a king and that’s a threat to Caesar; if you don’t deal with him Pilate, you’re no friend of Caesar’s!” (Jn.19:12)

So the mob surrounded Paul and threw rocks until he finally collapsed. They dragged his battered, bloody body outside the city for the carrion. Around him gathered the new believers, no doubt praying. V.19 suggests he was not actually dead, but certainly badly injured. As they prayed, Paul’s eyes suddenly opened, he stood up, and began walking back into the city! If not a resurrection, at least a miracle from the *brink* of death.

In Gal.6:17, Paul talks about scars earned for preaching Christ “*...let no one cause me trouble, for I wear on my body the marks of Jesus.*” Likely some came from this day.

After a night's rest, Paul and Barnabas walked 60 miles to the last town on the tour: Derbe. Unlike other places they'd been, here their witness was quite effective, many came to Christ, and there was no opposition.

Last town; now their work was over; or was it? The quickest and easiest route for Paul and Barnabas back to their home church was east through Paul's hometown of Tarsus, then on to Syrian Antioch. Instead, they retraced their steps back through 3 provinces and all the towns they'd been to, walking and sailing hundreds of unnecessary miles with all the risks that included. Why? Because the church mattered and the apostles were dedicated to insuring its health and endurance.

## **2. The church matters: enough to be cared for. 21b-24**

### **a. Strengthening the believers & encouraging their faithfulness (22)**

In each town, the two men preached to the baby church, and I'm sure, spoke one-on-one to believers to strengthen them. Keep trusting God. Do not fear; do not be discouraged. Remember Christ's words. Do not crumble under persecution. *We* didn't when we brought you this gospel. Furthermore, suffering is the very nature of the gospel: *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."* (22) Paul was not saying suffering was the price to *be* saved, but the price the saved pay between salvation and when we finally get home to heaven.

### **b. Appointed elders (23)**

Secondly, in each place they appointed elders for the fledgling church. Without good church leadership, you don't have a healthy church so if they were not only to prosper, but even to *survive*, they needed good leadership. They didn't vote, the apostles appointed them as was their custom everywhere. Why? Because the believers that made up these churches were so young in their faith, that they probably didn't even realize what to look for in potential leaders. So the apostles selected the first elders.

Some may have known Christ less than a year. 1 Tim.3:6 warns against making a recent convert an elder and certainly none of these men could have been considered mature. But in *any* church, you do you can, work with those you have to work with, and trust the Church to the care of the Holy Spirit.

And, to provide the spiritual power necessary for these men to shepherd Christ's church, the people prayed and fasted for them (preach on fasting later this year).

### **c. Commended them to the care of the Lord (23)**

And finally, the apostles committed them to the Lord. *There's* something about this that has to do a great deal with our theme this morning (the church matters). Would you agree with me that in the average church, we are inclined to do everything possible ourselves *first*, and then—and only then—turn to Christ once we have no other recourse? Perhaps *always* having no other recourse would be best. As they waved goodbye to their spiritual fathers, these churches had no phone number to reach them at, no email exchange through which they could get questions answered. They were left in the Lord's hands. What a terrifying, no terrific, place to be. What sure hands to be in. Their confidence, their guidance, their future, was dependent—not on some preacher—but on Christ and His work.

## **3. The church matters: enough that its people delight in its strength and growth. 27-28**

When the apostles returned, they called together their sending church to give a report of their work. It was more than an obligation. This was a missionary church—officially commissioned the first missionaries to Gentiles. They were no doubt ecstatic to learn of new churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and possibly Paphos. This was the result of *their* labors too; each member. Their vision, their commissioning, their money, their prayers had planted these churches. They must have been thrilled.

Individuals are interested in who's gets credit; church are interested in the impact of ministry. Did people come to Christ; were churches planted; are believers growing in the Lord?

**Concl:**

The church matters. Think *your* church. By the risks you take for it, could anyone tell? Or by the care you help provide for your church? By the delight you take in the successes and accomplishments of your church. I mean the forward, spiritual advance of the church? Are you part of it? Could I tell by your participation with its people?

Could anyone tell that the church matters to you by your ministry? By your prayer for and with the church? By the way you point unbelievers to this community of faith? By the money you give? By the time you commit to this fellowship's outreach?

Let me push us a bit farther. Since the church matters and since multiplying churches is the #1 way evangelism has always taken place since the days of Paul and Barnabas, we're planning to plant a church in Chester County. Having said there must be a minimum core group of 10 family units, couples, or individuals from Keystone before taking serious steps towards making this a reality, things are on hold a bit. We have 8. The group is meeting for prayer, fellowship and conversation, and we have just appointed 3 leaders (name 'em) to guide the group temporarily as they wait on the Lord. We're going to have the leaders in front of you in the next month or so, to talk about their hopes and dreams. And perhaps, fears.

This church may never get off the ground. We may stay stuck at 8 families, or 9. Some currently may get cold feet, or get tired of waiting, or have disagreements with the others in the group. Would it be OK if this work goes down in flames or does the establishment of a new church matter to us? If not, consider playing one of the following roles:

- Pray for them at one of our church prayer times each week
- Give some money
- Volunteer to help with the children when the group meets
- Pick one family to encourage and stay up to date on their progress.

The church matters. READ 2 Tim.3:10-12. If the church matters so much that *persecution* should be acceptable, then any sacrifice for her would be as well. That's what Jesus believed; so He died for her.