

# Love Your Church By Sending

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if we could, for a short while this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Acts. Acts chapter 1.

Acts chapter 1, and if we read again at verse 8. Acts 1 and verse 8.

Where Jesus said to the apostles, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. And so on.

[ 1 : 1 5 ] As you know, over the past number of weeks, we've been considering Tony Merida's helpful yet hard-hitting book, Love Your Church.

And from the outset, you have been exhorted and encouraged to love your church because Jesus loves your church. Love your church because Jesus loves your church.

Jesus loves this church. Jesus loves Barvis Free Church. And as we said, and as we've seen in our study, throughout the chapters that we've gone through, there's eight chapters in the book.

So the first chapter said, Love your church by belonging because our church is our focus. Our church is our fellowship, and our church is our family.

So love your church by belonging, and love your church by gathering because as a church family, we're to make every effort to gather together for public worship.

[ 2 : 1 6 ] So love your church by belonging, by gathering. And then the third chapter was by welcoming, by being a warm and welcoming congregation to those living within our community and beyond.

More than that, we're to love your church, love your church by belonging, by gathering, by welcoming, and by caring. By caring for your congregation, and caring for your community.

Love your church by belonging, by gathering, by welcoming, by caring, and by serving. By being motivated and mission-minded in our service.

Love your church by gathering, by welcoming, by caring, by serving, and by honoring. By honoring, that was a very awkward sermon, by honoring your pastor as he pastors the people in this congregation and community.

Love your church by belonging, by gathering, by welcoming, by caring, by serving, by honoring. And as we saw last Lord's Day, love your church by witnessing, by being an ever-ready battery.

[ 3 : 2 1 ] The ever-ready battery, like Peter sent, always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks for the reason of the hope that is within you. My friend, love your church because Jesus loves your church.

Jesus loves Barba's Free Church. So love your church. And love your church by belonging, by gathering, by welcoming, by caring, by serving, by honoring, by witnessing, and by sending.

Love your church by sending. That's what we're considering this evening as we conclude our study.

Love your church by sending. Love your church by sending.

And I want us to think about this by considering the story of the church of Jesus Christ. And to consider the story of the church of Jesus Christ, we need to consider the content of the story and the characters in the story.

The content of the story and the characters in the story. So first of all, the content of the story of the church of Jesus Christ.

[ 4 : 30 ] The content of the story. Look at verse 8 where Jesus says to the apostles, but you. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

Now, Tony Merida, the author of the book Love Your Church, he's an American pastor in North Carolina. And the church that he's a pastor in isn't a free church, but it's a Baptist church called Imago Dei Church.

Imago Dei Church, which is a very interesting name because boys and girls, Imago Dei means image of God. Imago Dei means image of God.

It's a Latin phrase that explains and emphasizes that we have been created in the image and the likeness of God. We are created in the Imago Dei, the image of God.

In fact, our worth, and this is what the world loses sight of, our worth and our worship is because we are Imago Dei. We're made in the image of God.

[ 5 : 50 ] But the Imago Dei Church is a relatively new church. It was only planted about 10 years ago. And in his concluding chapter, Tony Merida says that people often come up to him as the pastor of the church and they ask him, how old is your church now?

How old is your church? But his response isn't, our church is 10 years old. Instead, his response is, our church is over 2,000 years old.

Our church is over 2,000 years old. And of course, Tony Merida qualifies his answer by saying, it's always important to keep in mind that the story of our church is part of something much bigger.

The story of our church is part of something much bigger. And the same is true for us here in Barvis. Because, you know, people could ask, well, they could ask us, how old is your church? And yes, we could say that Barvis Free Church, it's nearly 180 years old. We could say that Barvis Free Church was formed when most of the people in Barvis, they left the established Church of Scotland as part of the disruption in 1843.

[ 7 : 02 ] We could say that Barvis Free Church became a sanctioned charge in 1845. And we could even say that Barvis Free Church has known different ministries and ministers that have faithfully preached the gospel down throughout the centuries in this parish.

If you want to know more about the history of our church, you can read it on our website. It was written by our local historian and Sunday school teacher. She'll hate me for mentioning this, but it was Margaret Joan that wrote it.

But, you know, when it comes to the story of Barvis Free Church, you and I both know that Barvis Free Church is not the building. It's not the bricks and the mortar.

Barvis Free Church is not the building. It is the body. It is the body of people here. It's not the place. It's the people. Therefore, the history of Barvis Free Church, the history of this church, is his story. It's all God's story. Because as it is for Imago Dei Church in North Carolina, the same is true of Barvis Free Church here in the Western Isles on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis.

[ 8 : 15 ] It's his story. It's God's story. God is the author of the story of this church. He's the director in the drama of this church. He has set the stage.

He's written the storyline. He turns the pages of our providence in this church. And ultimately, he will bring down the curtain when the final scene has been played out.

And my friend, this is what we need to remember. The story of our church, the story of Barvis Free Church, is part of a much bigger narrative. We are only a small part in the great narrative of the story of the church of Jesus Christ.

And you know, the narrative, the narrative is actually much bigger and bolder than the revivals that took place here in the 20th century. Or even the disruption in the 19th century. Or even the spiritual movements that took place in Britain in the 18th century.

Or even the covenanters in the 17th century. Or even the reformers and the reformation in the 16th century. My friend, the story of our church, it dates all the way back to the very beginning.

[ 9 : 23 ] It's a wonderful story. Where Jesus Christ, the king and head of his church, he promised his church. He promised us, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And tonight, we're part of the content of this wonderful story. We're part of the content of the story. And it's a story with a lot of history. But what I love is that it's his story.

It's not our story. It's his story. He's the director. He's the writer. He's the author of the story. And the content of his story is that it all began by sending 12 men into the world with the good news of the gospel.

What a story. And this gospel that they were sent into the world with, it would be the means to convict and to convert lost sinners. It would be the means to transform lives and turn the world upside down.

It would be the means to bring souls from the depths of darkness and death into the light and life of the Lord. the gospel would be the means to impact and influence communities and countries throughout the world.

[ 10 : 40 ] Do you know, my friend, the story of the church of Jesus Christ, it's a remarkable story. It's a wonderful story. And you know, it's a great story to be part of.

You know, that's what the concluding chapter is all about. We need to be part of the story by being part of the church of Jesus Christ. But you know, as we read in this opening chapter in the book of Acts, it's a story which began in Jerusalem.

It began in Jerusalem. Now, as you know, boys and girls, the book of Acts, it was written by Luke. It was written by Luke, the same Luke who wrote the gospel of Luke.

In fact, the book of Acts is the sequel. It's the second part of the gospel of Luke because in his first volume, in part one, Luke wrote all about what Jesus began to do and teach.

But in part two, in the second volume, in the book of Acts here, Luke wrote all about what Jesus continued to do and teach through the story of the church.

[ 11 : 45 ] And it was all, as we see in the book of Acts, it was all by the power and the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Because as Jesus said to his church there in verse eight, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And so on the day of Pentecost, which is chapter two of the book of Acts, on the day of Pentecost, the church would receive power from the Holy Spirit and they would go. They would go out into all the world with the good news of the gospel.

And the story of the church in the book of Acts, it's a wonderful story to read. If you haven't read in a while, read it again. Because the story of the church in the book of Acts, it's all about the unstoppable progress of the gospel.

The unstoppable progress of the gospel where there would be this ripple effect of the gospel spreading out by sending the church from Jerusalem, its starting point, to Judea, to Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And that's the story of the church in the book of Acts. Because you read in chapter one, the church is in Jerusalem. Then when you come to chapter eight, the church has spread to the outlying region of Judea.

[ 13 : 15 ] Then by chapter 15, the church has expanded and extended into the Gentile regions of Samaria. And by the closing chapter, in Acts chapter 28, the church of Jesus Christ has entered Europe.

And Paul is in Rome. My friend, the story of the church in the book of Acts, it's all about the unstoppable progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And it's a remarkable story. It's a remarkable story. story. Which is why I love what Tony Merida writes in his concluding chapter. He writes, the book of Acts marks a pivotal turning point in redemptive history.

Acts describes the day of Pentecost in chapter two, the explosive beginnings of the early church, and the start of the missional history of the church. Then he writes, Christian, Christian, consider what a grand story you are part of.

Consider what a grand story you are part of. This unfolding story of God gathering a people for himself should encourage you as you look at your local church.

[ 14 : 40 ] Marvel at the faithfulness of God and how the gospel got from Jerusalem to your church here in Barvis and how the gospel got from here and this pulpit to you.

Marvel at what the Lord has done. Marvel, he says, at the fact that you are part of this wonderful story of the church. You are part of the story of the church of Jesus Christ because you are one of the characters in the story which is what we see secondly.

The characters in the story. So the content of the story and the characters in the story. The characters in the story.

Look at verse eight again. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. And when he had said these things as they were looking on he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went behold two men stood by them in white robes and said men of Galilee why do you stand looking into heaven?

[16:01] This Jesus who was taken from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. I'm sure you remember being told as a child or maybe the boys and girls have been told this in school.

I won't ask you if you have been told this in school. Stop staring into space and get on with your work. Have you ever heard that? Stop staring into space and get on with your work.

I was often told that in school as I stared out the classroom window longing to be plain outside. And you know in many ways that's what the disciples were being told by these two angels who suddenly appeared when Jesus ascended into heaven.

They were told stop staring into space and get on with your work. Stop staring into space and get on with your work. Because as Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of his father the disciples were told they were not only left speechless but they were left just standing there.

They were standing there looking into the sky wondering what's going to happen next. But you know I love what the two angels say to the disciples. I think it's a great question.

[17:19] Why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

In other words stop staring into space. stop staring into heaven and get on with your work. Stop staring into heaven.

Stop standing around staring into heaven and get on with your work. In many ways it's a great opening line to set the scene for the book of Acts. Stop standing around staring into heaven and get on with your work.

It's a great opening line because as you know the full title of the book of Acts is the book of the Acts, of the Apostles. It's not the book of the apathy of the Apostles. It's the book of the acts of the Apostles. It's the book of the actions and the activities and the advancement of the Apostles. It's the book of the motion and the movement and the mission of the Apostles. It's the book of the work and the witness and the worship of the Apostles. It's the book of the Acts of the Apostles as they seek to spread the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. And you know, in many ways, the book of Acts is the fulfillment of Jesus' words in John chapter 9.

Remember there in John chapter 9, it's just before Jesus heals the boy or the man who's born blind. But Jesus, he asserts and affirms to all his disciples there. He says to them, we must work the works of him while it is day, because the night is coming when no one can work. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day, because the night is coming when no one can work. Jesus says, we must work. We must work.

Not work for our salvation, but we must work in the church of Jesus Christ and the spread of the gospel. And that must is an imperative. That must is inclusive. It includes everyone in the church of Jesus Christ, because if we're going to be part of the story, if we're going to be a character in the story of the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century, then we must work. Like the apostles, we must stop standing around, staring into heaven. We must stop standing around waiting for a revival or waiting for a reformation. We must stop standing around looking at one another, wondering, well, what are we going to do next? No, Jesus says, get on with the work. My friend, Jesus says to us, we must work the works of him who sent me while it is day, because the night is coming when no one can work. And you know what amazes me about the characters in this story, should amaze us about the characters in the 21st century story, but what always amazes me about the apostles is that they were the most unlikely candidates to be chosen to carry the gospel to all the nations of the world. And yet these 12 apostles, they were the first characters in the story of the church.

[20:47] They were those who were first on the scene. And we call the 12 disciples, we call them apostles, boys and girls, we call them apostles, because the word apostle, it comes from the Greek word apostelo, which means to send. The word apostle means send. And that's what Jesus did with the apostles. He sent them. He called, commissioned, and commanded these 12 apostles, these 12 disciples, he sent them, he commanded them to go into all the world and preach the gospel. And you know, when you consider the first characters in the story of the church, they really were a mixed bag, weren't they? Because as we read there in verse 13, in the story, as it began, there

were all these characters. We read there in verse 13 that in the upper room, there was Peter, John, James, and Andrew, who were all fishermen. There was Philip. There was also Thomas, who's better known to most of us as doubting Thomas. There was Bartholomew. There was Matthew, the tax collector. There was James, the son of Alphaeus, who was a brother of Matthew. There was also Simon the Zealot, who was a Canaanite terrorist. And then Judas, the son of James, not to be mistaken for Judas Iscariot, who loved money more than Jesus. And as we read even later in the chapter, after Jesus was betrayed by Judas, Judas was replaced by Matthias. They were the first characters in the story of the church of Jesus Christ. And yet, you know, you wonder, looking at these men, how are they going to turn the world upside down?

How are they going to turn the world upside down? Because surely you'd need evangelistic and energetic and educated and eloquent men, not fishermen and tax collectors and zealots, certainly not deniers and doubters and deserters. And yet, what Paul says is that God chose the weak things of this world to confound the strong. And for the apostles, their story, their story was a story of mission and martyrdom. For the apostles, their story was a story of mission and martyrdom. Because boys and girls, apart from the apostle John, all of the other apostles encountered and experienced a martyr's death. John died of old age on the Isle of Patmos. But you know, you go through the list there in verse 13.

Peter, crucified upside down. James was beheaded. Andrew, crucified on a cross in the shape of the Scotland flag. That's why we call it the St. Andrew's Cross. Philip, crucified. Thomas, thrust through with a spear. Matthew and Bartholomew, killed with an axe. James, the son of Alphaeus, stoned, then beaten to death. Simon the zealot and Judas, the son of James, both crucified. And then Matthias, the new addition to the apostles, stoned to death and then beheaded. My friend, the story of the apostles was a story of mission, but also a story of martyrdom. But the thing is, although the apostles were the first characters in the story, the story of this church, they never saw themselves as something special. And this is the point. They never saw themselves as something special. Yes, they were chosen by Jesus. They were sent out by Jesus. They were called and named apostles.

But they never saw themselves as something special. Rather, it was the Savior they served. That's who they thought was special. Because, you know, the apostles, they saw themselves as a nobody, trying to tell everybody about somebody who can save anybody. Is that not what the Williams brothers sang? I don't know if you know the Williams brothers, but they sang, and their lyrics, the lyrics of their song was, I'm just a nobody, trying to tell everybody about somebody who is able to save anybody. And is that not our song? Is that not our story too?

Because our story in Barvis Free Church, our story as individuals living with us within this community, our story as characters in the story of the church of Jesus Christ, our story is, I'm just a nobody.

[ 25 : 51 ] I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody about somebody who is able to save anybody. That's your story too. That's your story when you go to work. That's your story in your home as a Christian. That's your story as a neighbor. That's your story as you go about your business.

I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody about somebody who is able to save anybody. You know, you remember in our study of the book of Exodus, remember what D.L. Moody said about Moses. Moses spent the first 40 years of his life thinking he was a somebody. The next 40 years learning that he was a nobody. And his final 40 years discovering what God can do with anybody. And my friend, your story and my story, that's all it is. As characters in the story of the church of Jesus Christ, your story and my story, I'm just a nobody. Trying to tell everybody all about somebody who is able to save anybody.

And you know, he is able to save anybody. He's able to save you, my unconverted friend, whether watching online or here this evening. He's able to save you. He's mighty to save. He's able to save to the uttermost.

[ 27 : 23 ] This is the beauty of who this somebody is. He is Jesus, the Savior of sinners. And you know, like the apostles, we're characters in the story. We're characters in this great story.

We're part of the story of the church of Jesus Christ. And that's what we need to remember. This is a remarkable story. And we're all part of it. We're all part of the church of Jesus Christ.

And our story, I'll say it again, your story and my story. I'm just a nobody. Trying to tell everybody about somebody, somebody special who is able to save anybody.

He's able to save anybody. But you know, as I said, we're part of this great story. And that's what Tony Merida says. He says, we're not only part of the story.

We get to continue it. And we get to contribute to it. He says, we read about the birth of the church recorded throughout these 28 chapters in the book of Acts. But the story goes on. And your church is part of that story. Perhaps he says, this is why the book of Acts has such an abrupt ending. It's in order to leave the impression that the story is still in progress. There is at the end of the book of Acts in many ways to be continued. To be continued. And it's being continued, says Tony Merida, because the church today is living out Acts chapter 29. Acts chapter 29. My friend, the story of the church is a fascinating story. A fascinating story of God's faithfulness down throughout the centuries of church history. It's his story. And through each century, the gospel baton has been passed down from generation to generation to generation to our generation. And we have the responsibility of passing it on to the next generation, to our children and to our children's children. And you know, this is something we touched on on Wednesday evening in our study of 2 Timothy, where Paul, who had the gospel baton passed down to him from Jesus and the apostles. And now at the end of his life, at 2 Timothy chapter 4, Paul passes on the gospel baton to Timothy. And he exhorts and he encourages Timothy to ensure that the gospel baton is passed on to the next generation and to the next generation after that. And I mentioned to you on Wednesday evening what Steve Lawson said. I love quoting Steve Lawson. Because when he comments on the gospel baton being handed down from generation to generation, he says about the gospel, he says, this gospel baton, this gospel baton has been passed down from Paul to Timothy, to Athanasius, to Augustine, to Wycliffe, to Hus, to Luther, to Calvin, to Ridley, to

[ 30 : 32 ] Latimer, to Bunyan, to Owen, to Edwards, to Whitefield, to Spurgeon, to Ryle, to Lloyd-Jones, and to Sproul, and then passed down to you and me. It has been passed down to us. This gospel baton, says Lawson, this gospel baton, throughout the centuries, it has blood, sweat, and tears on it, as a great price has been paid to advance this message throughout the centuries. Therefore, we must not drop this baton. We must not drop this baton. We must preach the word. We must preach the word. We must remember we are part of this story, the story where I'm just a nobody, trying to tell everybody about somebody who's able to save anybody. We must pass on this gospel baton.

So, my friend, love your church, because Jesus loves your church, and it's because of him that our church is part of this great story of redemption.

But in conclusion to our study of this helpful and yet hard-hitting book, Love Your Church, I will give the last word to the author, Tony Merida. He writes, it is an awesome thing to be a member of a local church, and it is a wonderful thing to know that our prayers and our efforts can make a difference, not only today, but for all eternity. So, he says, pursue faithfulness to Christ and pursue faithfulness to his church today. Love your church by belonging, by gathering, by welcoming, by caring, by serving, by honoring, by witnessing, and by sending.

The Lord of the church loves you, he says, with an undying love. So, love your church. Love your church. Love your church. Because Jesus loves your church. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for reminding us over these past few weeks that Jesus loves the church and that He gave Himself for her, that He might present our faultless before His glory with exceeding joy.

[ 33 : 24 ] And Lord, help us then as part of the church, as characters in this wonderful story. Help us, Lord, we pray, not to be idle characters, but characters that are part of the story and involved in the story. Characters that seek to lift up the name of Jesus.

And be the nobody that tells everybody all about that someone special who is able to save anybody. And Lord, we pray that we would be willing and that we would be ready to give an answer for the reason of the hope that is within us. O Lord, help us to love one another. Help us to love Jesus, because that is the great commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Lord, bless us then, we pray. Teach us, we ask, in order that we might serve Thee better and bring glory to Thy name. Do us good then, we pray. Go before us, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing in the words of Psalm 72.

Psalm 72. Psalm 72, it's in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 72. We're singing the last three verses. It's on page 314 of the Blue Psalm book. Psalm 72. But before we sing, I'll see if you have answers for

me.

All ready and waiting with your answers. Okay. Question one. What does Omega Dei mean?

[ 35 : 17 ] Image of God. Image of God. Well done. Great. Image of God. So we're all made in the image and the likeness of God. Yeah? You agree? Yep. Who wrote the book of Acts? Luke. Well done. Who wrote the book of Luke?

Luke. Just checking it awake. Question three. What does the word apostle mean? So we'll do that first.

What does the word apostle mean? To send. To send. Yep. And which apostle was not martyred? John. John. Well done. Oh man, you're great. You're on the ball tonight. Good job. So well done for answering the question. So well done for listening. You're very good at listening. Maybe we should ask the adults the question one week and see how good they are at listening. Okay. So we're going to conclude by singing in Psalm 72. As we mentioned earlier, all of our Psalms this evening, they focus upon the nations. The nations of the world. That we are part of this gospel story of the gospel going to all the nations of the world. And the reason the gospel goes to the nations of the world is because as Solomon says in Psalm 72 about the greater than Solomon, Jesus, he says in verse 17, his name, his name forever shall endure and last like the sun it shall. That's why the gospel will spread. Because his name will endure. His name will spread. And as the promise remains, men shall be blessed in him and blessed and all nations shall him call. And as it says at the end of the Psalm, and blessed be his glorious name to all eternity. The whole earth let his glory fill. Amen. So let it be. So verses 17 to 19 of Psalm 72. We'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise.

His name forever shall endure.

The whole nations shall have been called. Now blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel.

[ 38 : 09 ] For he adorneth wondrous worlds in glory that excel. And blessed be his glory.

God of Israel. God of Israel. Amen. So let it be.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.