

“Called:Be Ready”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1-11

Graphics: phone, world, calling, baptism, cross, spirit, garden, building

Big Truth: The grace of God was poured out into the first century church through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The early church was called by God to receive that grace and live as holy saints because of Jesus. God’s grace and a life of holiness leads the church to be steadfast when struggle comes, to be unified when division seeks to tear it apart, to be wise when the world’s wisdom seeks to confuse, to be Spirit-filled when the supernatural is dismissed, and to be ready for Jesus to move in new ways. We are called to be the Church for today and always by God’s grace given to us through Jesus and the presence of His Holy Spirit.

Focus Phrase: We’re called be ready for Jesus to grow and build His Kingdom in new ways through us.

1. Introduction

- A. I really wish the Buffalo Bills were playing in the Super Bowl today. Although, if they were, my stomach would be all knotted-up right now in anticipation for tonight’s game, so...
- B. I know it’s only a game, but it’s the showdown between the two teams in the NFL that kept winning. And, I know that football teams, or soccer or basketball or any sport, sometimes just have a great game and win, even though they may not be the better team. I also know that being **ready to play** is more important than luck or refs or weather.
- C. One of the problems MY team had at the end of the season was that they didn’t seem to be ready to play. I’m not sure why, but there seemed to be other things they were doing besides growing and building the team.
- D. Football teams are called by their coaches (and fans, I think) to always be growing stronger and better. They’re called to build systems and plays that will be effective to score more points and prevent the other team from scoring points. And to do that, those coaches and teams need to do things in new ways, with new people, and new paradigms. If they don’t, then they’ll stay where they are and be golfing while other teams are playing in the big game.
- E. Now, I promise not to over-spiritualize football today! But there’s a metaphor here. One to which Paul would give nod, if he knew about football. It’s all about **being ready**.
- F. Football teams are called to be ready to play. Churches are called to be ready for the future that God has in store for that body of believers. It’s about being ready to grow and build Kingdom things together, for the sake of Jesus and his gospel...and for the sake of the salvation of those whom we call neighbors.
- G. As we go back, one final time, to the first part of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, Paul had some pretty clear and critical things to say to the

Corinthian church. He didn't sugarcoat any of what he needed to say to them. It wasn't so they'd be discouraged. He said what he said so they could see a vision of what God wanted for them...and for us in 2023.

H. Let's pray and then open our bibles together to 1 Corinthians chapter 3...

I. We are Called: To Be READY...and today we'll find out what that means.

J. PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)

K. OK...let me hear those pages flipping to 1 Corinthians 3, starting in verse 1.

2. Scripture

A. READ 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

- i. Well then! After all Paul said in the previous parts of this letter, this must've been a pretty rude wake-up call to the Corinthians. Let's review what Paul said already, for a minute:
 - a. In chapter 1, Paul gave thanks to God for them. He was thankful that they had heard the gospel and were a growing church. He was thankful that they had every spiritual gift they needed, and that God would strengthen them, so they could be steadfast until the end.
 - b. Paul then, though, identified some problems in the church: divisions from lining up behind human leaders. They were quarreling and trying to boast in their status. Paul wanted them to rally around - unify around - the Cross of Christ, not human wisdom or power.
 - c. Paul then said they shouldn't try to count on their human wisdom or strength to save them. In fact, human power and wisdom is weak and foolish compared to the power and wisdom of God...which is the ONLY things that can save them. They were called to be wise as God is wise.
 - d. By the time we get to what we now know as chapter 2, Paul gave them the key to God's strength and wisdom. It wasn't anything human, but 100% the Holy Spirit filling every person that's saved by grace through faith. And, together, as a body of Spirit-filled followers of Jesus, they would be a Spirit-filled church...that had the mind of Christ himself.
- ii. That's what God and Paul wanted for this young church. But then, in our text today, he had to circle back around and say, "You're not ready to be steadfast, unified, wise, or Spirit-filled because you still need to grow up. You're not ready for the vision God has for you."
- iii. He even called them infants...spiritual babies who were drinking spiritual milk instead of spiritual meat. The image here is a nursing baby.
- iv. I can hear the Corinthians asking Paul, "What do you mean by that?" To which he responds, "You are still quarreling and are divided. That's evidence to me that you're not yet ready!"

- v. They were merely human, which was Paul's code phrase for non-spiritual... not yet fully Spirit-filled. In that 'merely human' state, they didn't see the things of the Spirit, only human things. They were continuing to think that they could be saved by following Paul or Apollos or Peter.
- vi. Yet, Paul was calling them to SO SO much more... Paul knew that COULD be so much more if they were Spirit-filled in stead of merely human. He was asking them to open their eyes and their ears and their hearts and their mouths to the infinite and powerful Spirit of God.
- vii. He and Apollos did some great ministry among them while they were with them...planting the church and encouraging them. But because they thought being the church was about following these men, they would never grow up and stop fighting like children.
- viii. And that's what Paul wanted for them more than anything else: to grow up to be Spirit-filled, wise, unified, and steadfast. To be a powerful force for Jesus and His mission to make disciples for Him was worth growing up for!
- ix. Paul called the church to be ready to grow and build. Let's read this next section...

B. READ 1 Corinthians 2:5-11

- i. Paul and Apollos were servants...they weren't the ones to be followed.
- ii. Paul and Apollos did what God had called them to do - to plant the church and to water the seeds that were planted.
- iii. BUT IT WAS GOD WHO GAVE THE GROWTH!
- iv. In that one sentence, Paul was pleading with them to take their eyes OFF the human leaders and put their eyes on JESUS. It wasn't that what Paul and Apollos and Peter were doing was insignificant. But what GOD was doing was the main way the church and Kingdom would grow.
- v. They needed to stop thinking of themselves as the gardeners, or even the servants in the field, but as the field itself. They needed to stop thinking they were the builders or even the apprentices. They needed to understand that they were the building being built. Fields are prepared for the planting and harvest. Buildings are built on a foundation. It was a call to BE READY!
- vi. And in that process, stop lining up behind the servants, like Paul and Apollos. Turn to God, the Master Gardener...the Master Builder. It's only God who can grow fruit in the field of the church. It's only God who can build the kingdom through the church...not Paul, not Apollos or Peter. Not you or me. Only God. We are the hands and feet - God's servants...but the Holy Spirit is the source of all the power and wisdom.

vii. Paul's message to the church in the midst of their struggles and growth was, "Be ready for God's to grow you and do a new Kingdom thing in and through you!"

3. Application

- A. This snapshot of the Corinthian church proves that a church that's called to be ready is not necessarily a church that has everything figured out. A called church that's comfortable and satisfied with what it's doing and where it's ministering and how is a church that's ready for decline.
- B. Paul called the church to take a hard look at where it was, celebrate the things that God was doing in them and to stop doing the things that had no or negative impact. He was calling them to fervently submit to what God wanted them to do next. T one ready...
- C. We can learn a lot from the Corinthians...as we find a new way to BE the church in 2023 and beyond. Will we be ready? Do we WANT to be ready?
- D. Being ready isn't a matter of having it all figured out. To answer the call to be ready, we need a passionate desire to allow the Holy Spirit to keep growing and building us. To be ready is to be the field being planted and watered...to be the building that's taking the shape that God desires, not what we desire.
- E. Most times, when we submit to God's plan for growth, it takes the big C word - **CHANGE!** We must be adaptable. We must be flexible. We must be nimble and agile. In Paul's words, we must grow up!
- F. The Church in 2023 is not the church of 1950, 1980, or even 2019! We can spend time changing every superficial thing about the church, but that won't grow the kingdom on earth or grow us.
- G. In order to grow and build, we must allow the Spirit of Jesus in me and the Spirit of Jesus in you to connect us together in love and community so that we, together, can be ready for the future.
- H. And that future **MUST** (**MUST!**) be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and him crucified. That future can **ONLY** be a future of growth when the Cross of Christ is at the center of it all.
- I. Building can only happen when the church of Jesus Christ confesses, together, that Jesus is Lord and Savior and submits everything, together, to His authority and His word. Are you ready? Are WE ready?
- J. And, remember, by that I'm not asking if we have it all figured out. I'm asking if we are willing to be the field that God is cultivating and the building being built more and more on the foundation of Christ alone.
- K. Before we wrap up this series, let me give us a vision of what this looks like for us, as people who are gathered together in this place.

- L. We are called to Be Ready for the future that God has in store for us. In order for us to live into that, together, we have to:
- i. **Keep Christ as the foundation of all we build together**
 - a. The old hymn goes like this: *How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word? What more can He say than to you He hath said To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*
 - b. That hymn goes on to say that when fire or flood or anything else tries to destroy your faith, or the church, we will stand firm because Jesus is our solid foundation.
 - c. We must, at all times, build what God is calling us to build on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. Anything else is like the parable of the house built on the sand in Luke 6. If WE try to build it on sand, the waves will tear it down. If we allow God to build it on the rock, it will never move.
 - d. All that God is calling us to build together will stand when we build it on the foundation of Jesus and His word. Then, #2:
 - ii. To be ready, we must **Grow in faith and passion for Jesus and His word**
 - a. In order to be assured that we're building on the solid foundation of Jesus and His word, we must never stop growing in our faith and passion for Jesus and His Word.
 - b. Paul and Apollos planted and watered, but it was GOD who gave the growth. Our leaders and pastors can help up, but we must, together, turn to God to grow us.
 - c. Study his word. READ his word. Talk about his word. Teach His word. When God was preparing the people of Israel to make their way into the land that He promised to give them, he commanded them to first know all His commands. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 God said, *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."*
 - d. To be ready for the future, we must keep growing spiritually. Our passion for God must keep growing. That happens best when we see God at work in our midst. When we see lives being changed and people being saved, we all grow! And when we see God at work changing US, then we are compelled to this next one. To be ready, we must:

iii. Boldly share the message about Jesus with our neighbors

- a. We must confess that we haven't done the hard work of evangelism like we're called to do. I confess that I have not shared my faith in Jesus outside the walls of the church like God commands. I have not done the inviting and encouraging and mentoring.
- b. In order for the church to be ready for the future, it must include a robust new passion for simply and winsomely sharing the Good News that Jesus is ready to save people...to change their lives...and to give them a future with hope.
- c. The church of today and every tomorrow **MUST** get out there to give everyone in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus together. We have all the tools we need!
- d. We must recover the spiritual fervor of the early Methodists to do nothing but saves souls as we partner with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- e. A new movement has begun - a new awakening - that calls us to be ready at all times to tell others...to spend ourselves and our time on telling people about this Jesus who has changed our lives.
- f. And then, as people begin to respond to our winsome evangelism, we must be ready to:

iv. Build new Kingdom ministries to disciple new people for Jesus

- a. This is something that we'll keep working on as a church. Be praying about new missions, ministries, and teams of people serving together.
- b. Our intentional discipleship plans, called Shift, is an invitation and expectation that every person who is all-in will be growing in a life of worship, a life of community, a life of openness, a life of obedience, a life of serving, and a life of sharing. That growth starts with Exploring those parts of being the church...and keeps growing and building until we are Centered in each of those six areas.
- c. How we do that is a process of allowing the Spirit to help us build new ways to reach new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ...and to grow together in intentional discipleship. It'll take some resources, so we need to find new ways to inspire giving. It'll take new leaders, so we need to find ways to raise up new leaders. It'll take creative engagement with our communities, so we'll be praying for God to open doors.
- d. But we have everything and everyone we need to do that right now.
- e. Are you ready? Are WE ready?

- v. We're called be ready for Jesus to grow and build His Kingdom in new ways through us.

4. Conclusion

- A. We are called to be steadfast, unified, wise, Spirit-filled, and ready.
- B. As the church makes decisions about the future, we must live into God's call on the church to BE steadfast in the midst of any challenge, BE unified around the Cross of Christ, BE wise in God's wisdom and strong in God's strength, BE filled with the Holy Spirit, and BE ready for today and every tomorrow.
- C. Football's just a game. It has no real eternal impact. Buildings will eventually crumble and fall. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."
- D. Because of the incredible grace and mercy of God shown to us in the love and humility of Jesus Christ, WE church, together, are CALLED to BE the church for today and every tomorrow.
- E. I don't think we can do anything else...be called! Are you ready?
- F. **Let's pray... (Come, Holy Spirit, Come...fill us!)**