

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

IT'S NOT ABOUT ME! | CHURCH IN THE WILD

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Several years ago we brought in an outside church consultant to help us to kind of navigate a season of growth and organizational change. This was, I don't know 12 or 13 years ago. And he didn't know much about our church. When he got here he was just asking a few pre-assessment questions to kind of help him understand who we were.

And he asked, "When did we have our launch Sunday? When did this church get started?" I think he was expecting us to say that we had started the church. So, he was a little bit shocked when we told him that none of us were around, we got started in 1834. And I don't know. Some of you may know that already. Others of you who are brand new, maybe you didn't know that.

To just give you a little bit of context, 1834 was the year that Andrew Jackson was president, the first battery powered electric motor was invented that year. Lewis Braille perfected the method of reading for the blind. And our church got started that same year. This is a picture of one of the original crew. The name wasn't Traders Point then; it was Ebenezer Christian Church. They kind of look like a bunch of Ebenezers if you ask me.

And he said to us, "Hey, guys. You need to understand just how rare this is that you are still here." (I think we look pretty good pushing 190 years old.) And he said, "The average," his term, "life cycle," you could say life span, "of most churches is about 40 to 50 years.

Here's what he means by that as it relates to this graph right here. Down in the lower left corner you have a group of people who get together in a community and they launch a church. It was all about momentum and growth. And all about their mission. And they were leading people to Jesus. There was all of this explosive, strategic growth.

And then you get to the top of that curve and there is what we do for sustained health. Then on the other side of this life cycle, if you're not careful, the church can slip into maintenance mode, then preservation, life support—you can go on life support for a long time—and then eventual death. We see thousands of churches close their doors every year in America. They've kind of run this course.

Now, keep in mind the big "C" church as Jesus referenced in Matthew 16—that will prevail. Jesus said, "The gates of hell will not prevail against His church." But the small "c" local expressions of the church, as it turns out, all have a life cycle. Even the church that we're studying about right now in this series right now in Corinth is no longer



around. Most of the churches that we read about in the New Testament, their life cycle has closed.

The first church that I ever preached at when I was in college—20 people every single week—it's gone. That's my legacy.

So, we just kind of see that these churches... In order for a church to stick around as long as we have, to see continued fruit, at the top of the curve before getting into maintenance, the life cycle has to kick over again, which means that a group of people say, "This can't stay with us. We've got to pass the baton to the next generation. We're going to give up our preferences. We're going to recognize that the mission is different from the methodology. And never confuse the two."

Jesus was asked about this one time in Mark, chapter 2. A group of religious leaders come to Jesus and they ask Him this question, "Jesus, why don't you and your disciples fast the way that John's and the Pharisees' do?" In other words, "We really like the methodology for the way that they fast, why don't You do it that way?" And here was Jesus' response in verse 22:

"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the wine would burst the wineskins, and the wine and the skins would both be lost. New wine calls for new wineskins." Mark 2:22 (NLT)

And right there Jesus is saying, "Listen. You cannot put new wine into old wineskins." In other words, in old methodologies.

I remember when I was in college I heard this axiom and I wrote it down.

Methods are many

Principles are few

Methods always change

Principles never do

So, a 40 to 50 year life cycle represents a generation of Christians that refused to pass along to others what was given to them. And one of the things that I'm so grateful for in our church is that what seems to be baked into the DNA of our church is a group of selfless men and women who said, "You know what? We are not going to confuse the two. We are not going to confuse mission over methodology." And decade after decade and soon to be century after century, we've set aside our own wants, preferences, and opinions in order to reach more and more of God's lost kids.

So, what this means in the history of our church is that at some point and time in some congregational meeting in our past somebody kind of gingerly raised up his hand and said, "I think we have to change our name. I'm not quite sure that Ebenezer captures the

essence of what we are trying to do.” And I’m sure that somebody got upset about that and it divided the church and a bunch of people left after that.

At some point the location needed to change because they were like, “Hey, this facility is hindering us from actually reaching our community.” I remember when I got here this building that I’m standing in right now, this Northwest location, was about six months old. So, I heard some of the stories as I came in here how a lot of people didn’t want to make the move up to this facility. They just said, “That’s too much change.” They got upset and they left the church.

Once upon a time the church had to go, “You know what? One service is taxed to the gills, we’ve got to go to two.” And I’m sure that the original people who made that decision said, “Hey, that means we’re not going to see all of our friends anymore.”

It’s not about us.

The music needed to be changed; the style needed to change.

When I got here 17 years ago, there was kind of an upspoken dress code. I remember the first Sunday that I wore jeans to preach from this platform. You would have thought I was the anti-christ. People were upset. They sent emails. They left over that.

About eight or nine years ago we were packed here at this campus and we asked about 300 of you to give up your warm, comfortable seat at this building and to go set up and tear down portable church in a school so we could start our first multi-site location, which is now the Carmel campus. That 300 has now blown up to over 1,800 people who are meeting in the Carmel location. That was all because some people said, “Whatever it takes, man. This is not about us.”

At some point, if you’ve been around here for a number of years, you had to say goodbye to staff and teaching pastors who you know and love. Maybe one of them baptized you, married you, maybe did the funeral of your loved one. You didn’t want to see them go but we couldn’t hold on to them because healthy churches send. And now they are leading churches all across the United States.

What this means over, and over, and over again is that a group of people in our church selflessly said, “We cannot keep this to ourselves. We’re willing to get uncomfortable, let go of all of our preferences and make sacrifices in order to reach more people who need the hope and the help of Jesus.

So, please understand, we will hold on to the truth of God’s word unapologetically and we will hold loosely to methodology because methods have to change in order to reach more and more people.

We have seen the differences between preferences and priorities, between sound doctrine, and missional strategy, between knowledge and love. And, statistically, our



church should have closed its doors before the year 1900, but because of the mentality of, “Hey, man. We’ll do whatever it takes,” we are right now experiencing some of our most fruitful years of ministry in a nearly 200-year-old church.

We’ve got three more months left of this year and we have already baptized close to 600 people. We are continuing to see more people getting involved in groups, more people beginning to make a difference by serving.

I have never seen the next generation of students and kids coming up more engaged and more involved and more about leading the way than I’ve ever seen in my entire lifetime. And over the last 17 years of our life cycle—we started to come up over that curve and then we did something to re-kick in our life cycle again.

And just part of my responsibility is, I’ve got to be so attuned to the Holy Spirit that when I begin to sense that our church has begun to grow a little bit too comfortable, I do whatever I can to disrupt it and to try to kick in a new life cycle once again to remind us that the gospel is for you it’s for everybody, but the minute you give your life to Jesus, it is no longer about you. And you begin to pass the baton to the next generation and say, “We’ll do whatever it takes to reach more people.”

I’ve been in church pretty much my whole life. I was born—I’m an April baby. And my mom has a picture of me when I was just this tiny little thing wrapped in a bunch of blue and she took me to church on Easter Sunday, I was like a week old. I’ve been in church my whole life. And I’ve noticed that there are one or two mentalities that most Christians have a tendency to think through when it comes to the church that they are a part of.

One is just a cruise ship. It’s really easy to begin to think the church that you are a part of as a cruise ship. So, “What can I consume?” And, “How comfortable can I be?” And, “Are you here to cater to me?” A cruise ship is all about me. And, by the way, cruises are great, man. I love cruises. I gain about 15 pounds every time I go on one. It’s all about me. We can begin to think about the church that way.

Or, we have another group of Christians who begin to think about the church as a battleship, “I recognize that we’re in a war. Not with bullets and bombs, but a spiritual battle for the hearts, souls, and minds of men, women, and children.” And we have an enemy who is advancing against us. So, we man our stations. We are on mission. Jesus says that He’s come to seek and to save. That’s rescue mission talk. So, we’re going to do whatever it takes because it’s not about us.”

Now, as we come to 1 Corinthians, chapter 8—we have been in a series called Church In The Wild, and we are working through this letter that Paul writes to a church in Corinth—first generation Christians. They’ve been saved from something for something. And what Paul is trying to do is he is trying to keep them on mission.

That is especially true in the middle part of this letter. If you've been here over the last several weeks, it's just been one difficult topic after another. Why? Because they were already starting to slip into maintenance mode. They were starting to divide over the non-essentials. They were suing each other. They were still sexually promiscuous. They were still living with one foot in the world and the other foot out. They were arguing over non-essential things. And Paul keeps bringing them back to mission.

And in this section of the letter—I said this last week—1 Corinthians is not so much a work of composed theology as much as it is a Q & A time. They had sent Paul some questions and now he is spending this part of the letter responding to the questions. We don't have the questions they asked, we just have the answers he provides. So it's kind of like Jeopardy.

And in our passage today they are asking a question of cultural conflicts. And I'm just going to go out on a limb and say that the topic that Paul addresses today is really not one that you're likely wrestling with in your life, like the others were in previous weeks.

I don't know if you've read ahead or not, but the topic that Paul brings up in chapter 8 is whether or not we should eat meat sacrificed to idols. I'm just going to guess that's probably not at the top of your list, "Finally, pastor. You're going to preach a sermon on what we should do with all of this demon meat we keep getting served."

This is not an issue of whether or not you go vegan or not. It's a totally different issue. But, but the principle behind what Paul teaches these Christians as it relates to that issue can apply to other issues that we do deal with today.

So, I'm going to work down through the passage and then I'm going to make some application to us as individuals and then to us as a group missionally. So, chapter 8, verse 1. Follow along in your Bibles or on the screen with me. Paul says:

"Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols."

So, this is clearly a question that they have and he says:

"Yes, we know that," notice this is in quotes here because Paul is quoting back to them what they've already said to him. So he says, yes: "'we all have knowledge' about this issue." 1 Corinthians 8:1a (NLT)

What is that about? Well, what they were conveying to Paul is, "Hey, we already know, we already have an opinion about this, we're just asking you this so that you'll agree with what we already know." That's what they are saying. And Paul is going to call them out on it. He says:

"But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes." 1 Corinthians 8:1b-3 (NLT)

I think it is important to recognize that we've got to balance these two ideas around good, sound doctrine and good theology and a love for messy and broken people. I always find it fascinating when I'll be talking to people that one of the things that keeps a lot of people tripped up from fully giving their life to Jesus is that they think that they need more knowledge.

So often I hear this from people. They understand the tenants of the gospel. And I'm like, "Man, are you ready?" And they are like, "Ah," like they are just filled up. There's this quote but then they say this, "I don't know if I know enough." And I'm like, "Where did you get that?"

Please hear me, man. I'm a theology guy. I'll talk theology all day. Sound doctrine and good theology matter. But the Bible is not a textbook. We're not cramming for a final exam. If you know Jesus and Him crucified and you declare His resurrection that gets to the essential matter.

Now, we can begin to talk about non-essentials, but they are not the major issues. You minor in those. In chapter 13 Paul would even say, "Listen, man. You can speak in multiple languages, you can have all of the head knowledge, you can have faith, you can give all of your stuff away, but if you never translate your knowledge into love for messy, broken, hurting people, your life is a clanging symbol or gong, which is just really annoying."

He goes on in verse 4. He goes:

"So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols?" 1 Corinthians 8:4a (NLT)

Here's the issue in a nutshell. Remember they live in a very pagan place. It's the sex capital of the world and many of them would have gone to pagan temples and participated in pagan worship. We're talking like maybe last month. And now they've given their life to Jesus—brand new baby Christians. So, they would have been accustomed to going to the temples. And part of pagan worship was they would take meat and lay it at these false idols' feet as an act of worship.

Paul is going to mention this in the text. Those gods don't really exist. They are not really eating the meat. It's like having a tea party with your imaginary friend. So, they get done with the worship service and the T-bone is still there. And they would quietly usher that out the back door and take it to the marketplace where they could sell it.

Here was the issue for them, "Hey, we know that that New York strip was previously offered to a false god, should we buy it in the marketplace and eat it knowing that it had been offered to a false god?" That was the issue. So, he says:

"Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords.

“But for us, there is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live.” 1 Corinthians 8:4b-6 (NLT)

In other words he’s like, “These gods aren’t real. They don’t hear you. You don’t really need to worry about it. We only serve one God. Verse 7:

“However, not all believers know this.”

Who is he talking about? He’s talking about the brand-new converts in Corinth who just last week were participating in those services and now they’ve given their lives to Jesus. So, this is a fresh conversion. And then he says:

“Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. It’s true that we can’t win God’s approval by what we eat. We don’t lose anything if we don’t eat it, and we don’t gain anything if we do.” 1 Corinthians 8:7-8 (NLT)

Verse 9:

“But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble. For if others see you—with your ‘superior knowledge,’” hear the sarcasm? I love it. “—eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol?

“So because of your superior knowledge, a weak believer for whom Christ died will be destroyed. And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ. So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again,” oh, that hurts my heart, “as long as I live—for I don’t want to cause another believer to stumble.” 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 (NLT)

So, from this text, here is the implication and application. Let me start first for the individual. Right? You and God. Your personal walk with God. Your holiness. Then we’ll move on to the missional, which is the gathered church. Alright?

So, first for the individual, Paul throws out two terms here: freedom, freedom in Christ and matters of conscience. So, if you’re relatively new to your faith or maybe you grew up a certain way...

Some of you grew up in a very legalistic, fundamentalist church environment. Very, very rigid—lots of rules and regulations. Maybe that is a part of the reason why you walked away from church at one time in your life.

Others of you, maybe you have no church background whatsoever. You were never in church even on Christmas and Easter. You’re going to have a different lens by which you view cultural issues.

These would be matters of conscience. We might ask: What freedoms do we have in Christ?

So, for us it is not about should we or should we not eat food sacrificed to idols, but it is about should we have alcohol as Christians? What about cigars? Can a Christian get a tattoo? What about entertainment choices? Should Christians listen to secular music or should it just all be K Love?

What about practicing yoga? We've heard there are some connections to Eastern Mysticism. What about holidays? Should Christians participate in holidays that have origins in paganism? Those are our issues, so hotly debated.

Even as I roll through those, chances are you probably have an opinion—maybe a really strong one, maybe not so strong—about each one of those issues. So, how do we navigate them? Because holiness matters, our personal holiness.

So we've got to understand, once again, that there is this tension where we were saved from something for something. For those of you who gave your life to Jesus, the minute you came up out of the baptism, if you noticed, He didn't just beam you up to heaven. You're still here. Why are you still here? Not so that you can say, "Well, got that base covered. Got my eternal life insurance policy in my back pocket. I can go on and do my own thing. And one day, when I die, I get to go to heaven."

No. You are on mission where you live—salt and light. You are here to advance and to usher in the Kingdom coming. So, we are in the wild but not of the wild. We are in the world but not of the world. There is a tension. How much in the world should we be? And what does it mean to be distinct? And what does it mean to contextualize the gospel? There is tension there.

Jesus understood that tension in His prayer for unity in John 17. Some of you know that prayer. Jesus prayed this, "Father, My prayer is not that you would take them out of the world, but that you would protect them from the evil one." Implied: While they are in the world. So, what Jesus is praying here is against the twin errors that can happen in every Christian's life and every church, really, between two big words:

Sectarianism

Syncretism

So, sectarianism is legalistic, fundamentalism. Maybe that's the church you grew up in. And the mentality was, "We don't want to be contaminated by the rest of the world so we're going to isolate ourselves into a holy huddle—the frozen chosen. We're going to separate ourselves. We're not going to watch any secular media. We're going to shop the Christian book stores. We're going to churn our own butter. We're going to pass out testaments. Alright?"

I knew this service wasn't going to get that one.

So, we're just going to separate ourselves from the rest of the world. And Jesus prayed, "God, My prayer is not that My people would leave the world." But He also prayed this in the same prayer, "I pray, however, Father that You would protect them from the evil one."

What is He doing? He's praying in the same prayer for unity against the dual errors of sectarianism and also against syncretism—not just against fundamentalism but against progressivism. Not just avoiding the culture, but also not being so compromised by the culture that we lose our saltiness and our light—that there is no longer any distinctiveness in the way that we live.

I think a lot of people look at the church and say, "Why would I ever go there or do that or give my life to Jesus. There is no difference in the way that you are living your life apart from mine. You just say you go to church a little bit more often. You're still just as promiscuous as everybody else. You're still just as greedy as everybody else. You're still just as materialistic as everybody else."

The biggest threat to authentic Christianity is not other religions. It's not even atheism. It's syncretism, "I'm synched up to the culture. I've blended in." What does that look like? Here's what it looks like—and by the way, we're all guilty of this, including me, which is why we've got to always be repentant. Here's what it looks like, "I love Jesus. I also love myself. I go to church, but I also have a really, really, really good time at the nightclubs. I read my Bible, but I also follow the horoscope. I've got one foot in and one foot out. And I've lost my saltiness."

It's the dual errors of separatistic, fundamentalist sectarianism and compromise accommodating progressive syncretism.

I'm a student of the big "C" in the west. The most vibrant churches are the ones who are not legalists, nor are they the ones that are progressive. They are the ones that hold on to the truth of God's word and they reach out to messy, lost, hurting, broken people.

They understand the difference between mission, which they are uncompromising on, and methodology, "I'm okay with calling out your sin and we're going to give you lots of grace, mercy, and love to get you to Jesus.

So, we're not going to leave the world but we're also not going to be just like the world. I love this passage in Jude, "Snatch others from the fire. You've got to be close enough to the flames to smell like smoke, but don't get consumed by the fire."

So, you are like, "Aaron, this is really kind of tricky. There are a lot of nuances in this." There are. Here are four questions to help you to navigate the issues. You might just jot these questions down. Take a picture with your phone so that way you can go back and think through this, talk through this with your small group.

Number one:

What does the Bible say?

What does the Bible say? Is there a reference? Is there a chapter and a verse that speaks to this particular cultural issue? Is there a verse that forbids what it is that I'd like to do? What do the Ten Commandments say? What does the Bible call sin?

By the way, most of the time when we think about sin we think about sinful actions, that's called sins of commission. But the Bible also says if God asks you to do something and you don't do it, that's also a sin. That's called the sins of omission.

So, what does the Bible say? Number two:

What does my conscience say?

We are made in the image of God. We have the Holy Spirit living in us. By the way, it's the same Holy Spirit that is living in me that is living in you, if you've received Jesus, He's speaking, He's guiding, He's directing you. And our conscience is like a rudder on a boat helping us navigate some of these issues where maybe the Bible doesn't clearly say whether it's wrong or it's right. So, you've got to ask yourself, "What does my conscience say?"

Let me just give you an example when it comes to the issue of alcohol. Should Christians drink alcohol. Here's what the Bible says. It prohibits drunkenness, not alcohol. The first miracle that Jesus performed was he turned water into wine at a wedding party, "Jesus, we need a nice Cab. We're out." And Jesus did that miracle.

So, it's not a sin to have alcohol, it's a sin to get drunk. Why? If you've been drunk, you know. Probably some of your worst mistakes were made when you were drunk. You wake up the next day and you feel horrible. You maybe become addicted. The Bible wants you to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not unholy spirits. You just do dumb stuff. It's very practical. You do dumb stuff when you are drunk. You put other people's lives at risk. So, there is nothing wrong with having a glass of wine with your steak, but don't get drunk.

Some of us, though, are in a family that is predisposed to alcoholism, or you were an alcoholic at one point in your past. Or you know, "I have an addictive lifestyle. I've never had a drink because I know I'd probably like it too much and then I'd jump in."

Well that's a matter of conscience and you would say, "I'm going to refrain." Totally a teetotaler and we would respect that for you. But, understand, you never want to bind everyone to your conscience with things the Scriptures don't bind us to.

Here's the third question:

What does my weakness require?

Now, we all have strengths and weaknesses. Maybe there is an area of your life where you are kind of spiritually and emotionally strong and there is an area where you are weak. So, you've just got to know. You've got to know that the bait that Satan tries to lure you with is different from the bait that he'll try to lure your friend with. So, you become an expert in that and you say, "You know what? I know this isn't a sin for you but because of my weakness, it's a sin for me."

So, those first three questions are individual questions. Here's the fourth and this is more corporate or missional:

What does my friend need?

"What does my friend need? I'm not just thinking about myself." This is so un-American. We've got to get outside of ourselves and say, "Hey, man. It's not about me. And you know what? I'll lay down some of my freedoms, I'll restrict myself in an effort to show affection and concern for you."

This is such an important thing and so vital for the mission of the church that Paul comes back to it again at the end of chapter 10. And I want to read what he says there because this really ties a bow on this missional piece. He says in verse 14:

"So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols." (NLT)

That is the issue. Not eating a steak given to an idol, but worshipping the idol itself. Meaning your heart and your affections... And by the way our hearts are idol factories. Idolatry is still the number one issue. It's just not like this little false god in a temple, it's your car, your career, or it could even be another person—it's anything that is vying for the attention and affections of God on the throne of your heart.

So, Paul gets down to brass tacks in verse 19. He goes:

"What am I trying to say? Am I saying that food offered to idols has some significance, or that idols are real gods? No, not at all. I am saying that these sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God. And I don't want you to participate with demons." 1 Corinthians 10:19-20 (NLT)

So, an idol isn't a real thing, a demon is a real thing. Verse 23:

"You say," in quotes, "I am allowed to do anything" and he responds, yes "—but not everything is good for you. You say," in quotes, well Paul, "I am allowed to do anything" Yes, "—but not everything is beneficial. Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others." 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (NLT)

One of the most common questions we as pastors get—my inbox is filled with these—people will say, "Hey, pastor." People, hypothetically speaking, "Am I allowed to do
?" "Am I allowed to do this?" You want a yes or a no.

And I would even say in the gray areas, the matters of conscience, the better question to ask other than, "Am I allowed?" the better question is, "Is it wise?" Think downstream in your life. Where is that leading you? It may not be a sin in and of itself, but is it leading you more toward Jesus or away from Him? Is it for the good of others?

That's really what fasting is all about. Fasting is, "I'm going to refrain from something good to remind myself that it's not all about me." Verse 25:

"So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience. For 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.'" (NLT)

In other words, He can redeem anything. Verse 27:

"If someone who isn't a believer asks you home for dinner, accept the invitation if you want to. Eat whatever is offered to you without raising questions of conscience." 1 (NLT)

In other words, they were afraid if they went over to somebody's house and they bought a New York strip off of the market place that had been offered to an idol, then they would be sinning by unknowingly eating it. And Paul says, "Would you just knock it off? Seriously, man. It doesn't matter. You can go. Eat whatever they serve you because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. And He can redeem that thing that Satan meant for ill."

So that's the over-arching principle. When it comes to us, let's just say... I'll pick a couple of others. One is like certain holidays that may have origins in paganism. Should we celebrate them?

We have Halloween right around the corner and so you're looking at that and as Christians should we participate in that or should we just turn the light off and tell people to go away? What should we do about Halloween?

Here's the grid. Should you receive it full on as it is? Should you reject it? Or, can you redeem it?

Now, due to your past—maybe some of the things you were involved in, maybe you were involved in an occult earlier in your life or something, and you would say, "You know what? This just brushes up against old trauma and wounds too much, my conscience is really sensitive around this, we are just not going to celebrate this holiday due to it's ties with paganism."

And we would say, "By all means you can do that. But don't employ your conscience on other people, especially with this grid where we would say, "If we are missional Christians, we don't want to receive it full on, but can this be redeemed like food sacrificed to idols? Can we take what Satan meant for bad and let God redeem it?" And that's what the gospel message does for good.

Meaning, 'Hey, we're not going to celebrate the demonic, but we are going to get out into our neighborhood and meet our neighbors who never go to church and be hospitable. We're going to love on people and we're going to try to be as much of a light as we can be in the community. We're not celebrating the demonic, but we are getting engaged with the culture.'" I would probably fall, personally, along the line of what can be redeemed.

My kids are a little bit older now, but when they were younger every single year we would take them Trick or Treating. They would look forward to it so much. And they weren't dressing up as little demons (even though at times it could be) but they were dressing up in their favorite Pixar characters and that sort of thing. And we would take them out. We just used it as an opportunity to get to know people in our neighborhood.

And I would always post on social and follow my kids around. Inevitably, every single year I'd get somebody to DM me and say, "How could you, as a pastor, celebrate the demonic." And I'm like, "I'm not celebrating the demonic. I'm redeeming it because my kids love it. And I want to be out in the community. And I'm teaching them about tithing because they have to give 10 percent of the candy back to dad, that's what they've got to do."

Now, you may disagree with me. And I would be totally okay with that. But we're talking about redeeming things within the culture, recycling the meat, so to speak.

Should a Christian get a tattoo? And oftentimes... I don't even know where this came from [his tattoo] it just started growing. I have people reaching out to me, "Hey, pastor. Doesn't Leviticus prohibit tattoos?"

And yes it speaks to this. Number one: Keep a couple of things in mind. Understand that is under the Old Covenant. Jesus said, "I've come to do away with a lot of it, to fulfill it."

The Old Testament was all about doing external things in order to make us right before God. And Jesus makes us right by what He's done for us on the cross. It's the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

In that section of Leviticus it is referring specifically to priests who were marking their bodies to identify with paganism. That's what it was condemning, not the act of getting a tattoo, especially if there is some sort of spiritual significance to it.

The first tattoo I got was in Jerusalem, it was the oldest tattoo shop in the world. It's a Jerusalem cross that Christians have been tattooing on themselves for centuries. This [a second tattoo] is the Hebrew word for mercy. I'm not worshiping a pagan God.

It also says, in that same book, that you're not to wear two different kinds of fabric at the same time. Most of us don't have a problem with a poly/cotton blend.

I'll just throw one more on there for kicks and giggles. When Jesus returns in Revelation, here's how it describes Him—a warrior on a white horse with a sword coming out of His mouth and a tattoo on His thigh.

So, here's the other one. One more. And I'm just throwing this in because it's the last service. I don't know why but some of you keep pointing out that my left arm is smaller than my right and I'm trying to cover it up. Right? Just listen to the sermon and stop looking at my arms. First my legs, then my arms—stop!

Verse 31:

“So whether you eat or drink,” we'll edit that out later, “or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (NLT)

Hey, that's a great principle right there. Whatever you do, man, eat or drink, do it all for the glory of God. And then he says in verse 33:

“I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do.” Now this one sentence right here, please remember this, “I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others,” Why? “so that many may be saved.” (NLT)

And I would say that's the mentality that restarts this church's life cycle away from maintenance, preservation, and life support. A group of believers who say, “This is too good for us to keep it to ourselves. I don't just come to church and relish in the days of the past, in the hymns and the traditions, as wonderful as all of those are, and just to be reminded of the good old days.” Listen. There are no good old days. There is a good old day that we look forward to. So, “It's not just about me. We've got to do whatever we can so many may be saved.”

So, understand these two things right here. Number one:

Your “freedom in Christ” is more expansive than you think

Some of you need to hear that because maybe you're a little bit too rigid, a bit too legalistic, a bit too fundamental and you need to recognize that the big theme of the New Testament is freedom in Christ. John, chapter 8: The Son of God has set you free. Galatians, chapter 5: Christ has set us free. So, do not stand and put on a yoke of slavery once again. 2 Corinthians, chapter 3: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

You are freer than what you probably realize because Jesus paid it all. Do all to the glory of God. However, (sorry, I didn't mean to cut off your claps—that was good) your freedom in Christ is to be used, not to indulge yourself, but for the good of others. Let me add this, for the glory of God.

Galatians 5:13:

“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.” (NLT)

So, it’s our freedom in Christ that keeps us tethered to the mission and keeps our hearts soft for broken, messy people. Paul would say it this way, “I’ve become all things to all people so that I might save some.”

Jesus would say it this way, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples,” not how much you know, not how often you’re here, “but by how you love.”

Jesus was accused all of the time of being a friend of sinners because He went to parties. Why did He go to parties? It’s because He knew where broken, hurting people were who needed His hope and His grace and His mercy and His love. And you know what? May we never forget it. May we never forget because if He hadn’t there would be no hope for you and there would be no hope for me.

So, when you receive His grace, you’re willing to do whatever it takes to share it with others because He’s for you, it’s just no longer about you. And you exchange the cruise ship mentality of, “Hey, I’m at this church so that you can cater to me, what I can consume, how can you focus on me?” You exchange that mentality to a battleship mentality where you recognize that we’re on a rescue mission, “I’m going to man my station.”

One of the favorite things about my job is that I get to hear stories every single week about people in our church, across all of our locations, who have a battleship mentality.

I’m thinking about my friend Chris, and she works at the self-checkout station at Meijer. I ran into her this last week. You know those little self-checkout stations where they kind of corral you like a bunch of cattle? You get in there and you mess up and their little light beeps and they run over to you with a little key. I don’t know what they do, pump in some secret code?

Chris kind oversees all of that. She was helping me out this last week and she was telling me she goes here. She’s also one of our greeters outside. She said, “Pastor Aaron, I don’t work here for the money. She goes, “I work here to interact with people far from God. And this self-checkout corral, it’s the lion’s den because people are grumpy. And I’m trying to represent Jesus to them—battleship mentality.

I think about a guy named Donald from Haiti who began attending our downtown campus and he jumped on the parking lot serving team. Here’s the irony. He didn’t even have a car. And so he’s taking an uber to church every week. And the rest of the people serving with him saw this. So, they got together. They pooled their resources and they bought Donald and his family a car so they could drive to church—that’s battleship mentality, man.

I'm thinking about our Carmel and Fishers campuses, primarily because they have the biggest parking restraints. And we've got hundreds of people who park as far away from the building as they can, offsite, to get bussed in. Super inconvenient but they do that to free up parking spots for first time visitors—battleship mentality.

I was talking to a couple of college guys a couple of months ago and one of them said, "Hey, Pastor Aaron. Which of the services are the fullest?" They go to the Carmel campus.

I said, "By far the 9:30 is just packed to the gills. We're turning families away."

And he punched his buddy in the arm and he said, "See. I told you. We need to get out of our seats and go to another service to make room for more," battleship mentality.

I think about families who...

One couple gave a couple that they heard about who was struggling with infertility—they anonymously gave them \$10,000 on top of their tithe and what they committed to Awaken to help that couple out.

Another one helped a single mom of two who was struggling to make ends meet.

A young couple lost their jobs and another family stepped in and paid three months of their rent to give them a cushion so they could get back on their feet.

Battleship mentality.

I think about a guy at our downtown campus who is on our team. His name is Demarcus. And Demarcus caught wind of a woman living in the neighborhood who hadn't been to our church. She was feeling lonely and she was struggling. So, he told her, "Hey, you are welcome to our church anytime."

And then he heard that she was going to come. So, he got dozens of people together, and they threw a legit party for her on Sunday morning—balloons, cake, the whole deal. And when she saw that and that it was for her, she broke down in tears at the radical love and acceptance that she felt—battleship mentality.

I think about Sherry Draper, one of my favorite people in our church. Sherry has been here maybe longer than anybody else that I know. Her parents Jerry and Norma Roth were leaders in our church for decades.

Jerry was an elder of mine when I first got here. He was in his 70s, I was in my early 30s and he loved me and accepted me. He kept me out of trouble and he asked me a number of times (we used to stand in this back hallway) he was like, "Hey, what do you think we need to do next to reach more people?" And he has since gone on to be with the Lord.



Sherry, his daughter is here and I asked her last week, I said, "Sherry, you have seen more change in the life of our church than anybody else. How do you feel about that?" Here's what she told me, "Aaron, if God allows me to live a couple of more decades, or just days, eternally speaking I'm about five minutes away from seeing Jesus face to face. And I have that assurance. But many don't.

"So, none of the changes that I've experienced over the past, whether it's pastor changes, building changes, worship style changes it's not about those of us who already know Jesus, it's about those who don't."

And she said this, her words, "Whatever it takes to bring others to Jesus is what we must do." Battleship mindset.

Now, I hope you come Thursday night to Vision Night because I've got some exciting things to share with you. And when you come you're going to hear me talk about some numbers and such. And I just want you to know this. Whenever I talk about numbers or whenever we talk about more campuses being added, I know that's not very emotional to you, because it may not be your son or daughter, it may not be your mom or dad, it may not be your co-worker or neighbor, but it's someone's. And that's why we make a big deal out of it.

Every now and then I get this question, "Well Pastor, how much growth is enough? How many more campuses are you going to start anyway?" And I don't know what to do with that question. That's like you saying to me, "Well Pastor, which one of your kids do you love the most?" Isn't four enough?

I don't know how to answer that question except for this way: As long as Satan continues to actively advance against people to keep them from God, we will actively advance to get more and more of God's lost kids back to Him.

So, in closing let me just say this to you. If you have received and are following Jesus and you consider this your church home, we have some expectations of you. Five expectations. Here they are really quickly:

Come ready - weekend worship

Man your station - make a difference

Find your crew - get in a group

Give your first and best - time, talent, treasure

Invest and invite - build intentional relationships

Number one: Man, would you please come ready every single week? Now, listen. Church attendance isn't connected to your salvation. God is not putting a little gold star on your



attendance chart. But when you come, are you ready? Or are you just kind of showing up in your flip flops and sun glasses because you think you just got on the cruise ship?

Are you ready to man your station? Are you like, “You know what? I’m showing up today ready for God to say something and do something. I’m ready to worship my face off and to hear from God.” You come ready.

Number 2: You man your station. In other words, “Am I making a difference around here or am I just consuming? Am I jumping in on a serving team? Am I on the battleship?”

Number 3: Find your crew. You get into a group. You start in a Rooted group. Whatever it is. Listen. This is just a big church filled with a bunch of smaller churches and you need people in your life who know your name and who can do life with you. They are the ones you reach out to when life gets hard. Man, you find your crew.

Number 4: You give your first and your best. That is your time, your talent, and your treasure. It’s an investment into all of eternity.

Number 5: You invest and you invite. You build intentional relationships with people in your workplace, and neighborhood, and you strategically invite them so they can come to know the love and grace and mercy that Jesus died for them to have.

Those five things. And if I could be so bold, if you are unwilling to do those five things— I’m not saying unable, I’m saying unwilling—then I want you to understand me very clearly. Man, we love you and we will always be here for you. And we will always serve you. But this may not be the church for you because we are not a cruise ship, we are a battleship.

I want to say this with one caveat though, because I know that there are some listening to me right and you are here because you are wounded, you’re here because you’re hurt, and you’re here because you used to be on a battleship and you got used up and you’re bleeding out. And you are like, “Aaron, we came to Traders Point so we could come and sit in the back for a season and heal. Is that okay?”

Yes. It’s okay. You come and you take all of the time you need to rest and to heal and to get restored back in your relationship with Jesus. And then, when you are ready, get back on mission, except this time around let’s do it in a much healthier way.

I want you to know we are not the church that we were. We will not be the church that we now are. And if you are here today and you’re looking for hope because you’re hurting, you will find it in Jesus Christ.

This is not a perfect church. This is a church trying to get you to Jesus. And if you are here and if you are saved and healing and growing, then you are expected to be on that rescue mission to get as many people to Jesus as possible. We refuse to go into maintenance mode. We will stay on mission.

Would you please stand to your feet? I am going to pray for you right now.

Father, we come to You right now. We are so grateful that you are a God who receives us as we are. You are a God who saves us by Your grace and Your mercy. You are a God who left the comforts of heaven to walk among us so that we could be redeemed and restored into a relationship with You.

Father, forgive us, forgive me when I make this too much about me and not enough about the mission that You gave us to reach people far from you. So, would You please give us the wisdom between syncretism and sectarianism? To know how to reach our culture without blending in to the culture.

And, God, would You breathe new life into our church for another 200 years so that we can reach more and more people who are desperately in need of You? We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen.

