



Message **Transcript**

Fight for the Church

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

Our Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise, because you and you alone are worthy. And Lord, we gather here today as your saints, your called out ones, to hear your voice. Lord, we're praying that you would speak directly to us, because Lord, we believe that every time that your Word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed, that you speak. So our prayer this morning is speak, Lord, for we are ready to hear. And so now, for all those who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord speak directly to you, who will believe what He says, and who will, by faith, put into practice what He shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

Amen.

There's a difference between picking a fight, and actually being in a fight. There's a difference between talking about a fight, and actually being engaged in the fight. We've been doing a series called Waging War Against Our Enemy, and the way we've started out is how to engage in the battle, engage in the fight. We've talked about how to stay in the fight. Then we talked about how to dress for the fight, by putting on the six pieces of armor that the Lord has shown us. And then we talked about how to pray in the fight.

But just knowing what to do doesn't change anything, we got to know what it is we're fighting for, and we need to know, like the great Mike Tyson once said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face." We could sit in church and talk about what we're going to fight for, and who we're going to fight, and all these different things. But if we don't know where to direct our battle, which we already learned is in the heavenly places, then what is it that we fight for? And I want to spend the next three weeks talking about that.

But specifically today, I want to talk about the primary fight that we need to fight for. We need to fight for the church. We need to fight for the church. Now some of you clap, but I know what some of you did. I watched you kind of peel back like, "Oh, the church. I'll come next week, when it's worth fighting for." Because no matter who you are, whether you grew up in the church, whether you've been a member of a church, whether you've just heard about church, whether you've never been into a church, if we went and polled people that never even heard of a church, it's amazing how many people have opinions about the church. And all our opinions come from somewhat our experience, and then our limited revelation into why we had those experiences. But I want to tell you that the primary fight that we as believers need to have is for the church.

And I want to talk about why we need to have that. And I want to highlight four ways that we need to highlight that today. Because if we understand the church the way Jesus understands the church, and understand our role in the church the way that Jesus understands our role in the church, it can change all of our culture. And all of

these things are things that need to get passed down, because if they don't get passed down, and we don't understand, and we form our own opinions about the church, then the next generation and the next generation and the next generation lose out on what God wants to have happen. So we need to teach these things over and over, because even when we think people get it, they don't get it.

I was in the car with my son last night, and I was listening to John Denver's Rocky Mountain High, Colorado, and he asked, "Dad, where's that school located?" So, you got to pass this stuff down, right? Think about it, he was joking. But when it comes to the church, we have all these opinions, and we have all these ideas of the church, and if we don't pass them down, we're not going to understand what it is. So today what I wanted to do is I wanted to look in some verses of scripture. The first time, and only time, in the gospel Jesus mentions the word "church", found in Matthew 16. In Matthew 16, I want to read verses 13 to 19, and then I want to highlight four reasons we need to fight for the church. Four reasons that church is essential for us as believers and for the world.

Notice what the text says, Matthew 16, starting in verse 13. "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because

flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father, who is in heaven. I also say that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on the earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.""

So let's just talk about this text for a while. During Jesus' ministry, He takes them up to Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea was named after the emperor Caesar, and King Herod Philip. So it was named after the emperor and the king. In this place, every type of pagan worship that could be taking place took place. Think about what this place... If you wanted to come up with your own religion, if you wanted to worship whatever you wanted, this place housed that. Kind of like Boulder, okay? Caesarea Philippi, Las Vegas, Hollywood. This is that kind of a place.

And Jesus takes His disciples there and He asks the question, "Who do people say that I am? Who do people say the Son of Man is?" And they give Him glowing reports. "Well, some people say you're John the Baptist, who's risen from the dead. Some people say you're Elijah, the prophet that's to come. Others say you're Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Jesus, there are glowing reports about you. People are saying very nice things." And He said, "Yeah, but here's another question I have. Who do you say that I am? I'm not concerned about whatever others are saying, I'm not concerned about what your mom or dad are saying, or your grandparents are saying, or your neighbor. I want to know who you say that I am." It's the most important question that you'll ever answer on this side of heaven. How you answer that question will determine

your eternity. Who do you say Jesus is?

And so He was asking His disciples. Now Peter immediately, who was usually the one that spoke first, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are the Messiah. You are God in flesh. When I look at you, I'm looking at God. I know that you're God." And Jesus says, "You're blessed. The fact that you know that, you don't realize how blessed you are." Friends, if you know that Jesus Christ is Lord, you are blessed. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen!

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

And here's why I said you're blessed. You're blessed "because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father, who's in heaven." Jesus Christ came to the earth, He died on the cross, He rose from the dead. If you believe that He's the Christ, if you believe that He's the only Son of God, if you believe He's the only way to the Father, it wasn't your friend that told you about the gospel, it wasn't the pastor that preached about the gospel, it was God Himself that rescued you, and gave you the faith to believe. Blessed are you. God chose you before the foundation of the world. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen!

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

So He tells him he's blessed. "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona," son of Jonah, or son of John. "Blessed are you." And you would think that the text would end there. Isn't that the purpose of the church? Isn't that the purpose of Jesus? To see more people get saved? Man, you're blessed, now go live a blessed life. But He continues, He says, "I also say to you that you are Peter." The word Simon meant little pebble; Peter means stone or small rock. "And upon this rock," which is a different word for rock, which is a huge rock, it's the same word that's used in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount when He tells us, "Don't build your house on the sand, but build it on the rock." That's the huge rock that represents Jesus. He says, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

So as soon as Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus says, "I'm giving you a new name. I'm giving you an upgrade. You were a little pebble, now you're a stone." We, as the church, are living stones that all come together. He says, "You're a little rock, but I am the rock upon which the church will be built upon." He says this word, "church". It's the only time Jesus uses the word church. Church is the word [Ancient Greek 00:07:58]. It's a governmental word. It's really ones that are called out of the people to represent the people for their benefit. It's what called out one does. So the government would have the [Ancient Greek 00:08:11], it'd be similar to our governance today. It'd be like Congress would be the called out ones, or city council would be the called out ones, or the school board would be the called out ones. They represent the people, they're supposed to be doing their job that benefits the people.

When you come to Christ, the Bible says that you've been baptized. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "For we have all been baptized by one spirit into the body of Christ." This baptism is spirit baptism, it's not a baptism with water. At the time that you are born again, when you repent of your sins and trust Christ, you are placed into the family of God. You're His body. This called out group is the public manifested body of Christ. If you live in Czech Republic and you come to Christ, or you live in India and you come to Christ, or you live in Israel and you come to Christ, or you live in Germany, or you live in America, the moment you come to Christ, you're in the body of Christ, universally. But then God has called us to local assemblies called the church so that we can be a physical manifestation of what the living God looks like living in and through us. And so that's why we need the church. We need the church because the church is that manifestation. The church is who Jesus says the church is.

Now, let me give you four reasons you need to fight for the church. Four reasons you need to fight for the church. The first is this. The church displays the creation and the passion of Christ. It displays the creation and the passion of Christ. What do you mean the creation of Christ? I thought God created the whole world, all the way back in Genesis 1? He did. But the Bible says if there is anyone in Christ, He is a new creation. "The old things have passed away, behold all things have been made new." When you repent and you trust Christ, the Bible says you're born again. You've been given a new identity. You are a new creation. You look the same on the outside, but on the inside everything's fundamentally changed.

When Peter declares He's the Christ, everything on the inside of Peter has

fundamentally changed. And Jesus says, "Hey, this is a big deal, because with that testimony, I'm going to form a group that's going to get called out of this world called the church that's going to gather. And here's what's going to happen; everyone who's gathering there is a new creation in me."

Now understand this, not only are you a new creation, you're called to the church and to be part of a local church, but it's Christ's passion. The church is Christ's passion. Christ came for His church. Christ died for His church. Christ is coming back for His church. Let me just give you one scripture, there's several I could point out today, but in the Book of Ephesians 5, when Paul, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is teaching husbands to love their wives, he uses Christ as an example. "Husbands love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Who did Christ die for? The church. The called out ones. That's who He died for.

Now notice this, because I want you to not miss this. We'll just go back to Matthew's Gospel. He says to you, "I say you're Peter and upon this rock," what does He say? "I will build my church." Who's the subject of that sentence? Jesus. "I will build my church." Who's in charge of the church? Jesus. Now, I know we say a lot of things, like, "I go to BRAVE Church", or "I go to Red Rocks", or "I go to Flatirons", or "I go to First Methodist", or "I go to First Baptist", "I go to Second this, Third that," whatever. Who's in charge of the... Whose church is it, really?

Congregation:

Jesus!

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

It's Jesus's church. It's not the pastor's church, it's Christ's church. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

Jesus said, "I'm building my church. So the church I care about is mine, under my authority, under my leadership, under my rule, under my governance, it's my church. It's nobody else's. I shed my blood for this church. I care about this church."

It's interesting, because I've had an interesting history with the church. I don't know about you, I have all sorts of memories of church growing up. I grew up in a little Methodist church, I went to a Lutheran grade school. I just remember as a little kid, four or five, sitting there. And all I thought about in church was "Don't get in trouble, don't talk too loud, or you're going to get spanked when you get home." That's all I remember about church. And then as I got older, I remember my mom sang, and my sister and I would try not to laugh while my mom was singing, and those kind of things. But I loved the days we didn't have to go to church. I didn't like church so much. And the days we didn't have to, I not only could be on time for the Chicago Bears game that started right at noon, but I got to watch The NFL Today with Brent Musburger, Irv Cross, Jimmy the Greek, and Phyllis George. I knew them. That was my thing. That's what I liked. I didn't care so much about church.

Went to VBS because I had to. We played Red Rover because I had to. We had

fellowship. I thought fellowship, the word, meant stale punch and cookies. I didn't understand any of the biblical terminology, I just knew this isn't really where I want to be. And I've always had a little bit of a critical eye for things. That's just the way that God made me. When I go to a restaurant, I can see within about 30 seconds the things that need to change to make things more efficient. I watch a game, I can tell you what needed to change to make the team better. That's just how God made me. So when it comes to the church, I had spent years watching and I could say, "Here's all the things that need to change to make this thing better." And nobody's really paying attention, so I really don't care.

And I had about three times in my history, I'm just telling you this, because I'm being honest, I'm being honest. About three times in my history I was like, "I'm done with church." Once was when I was 18, and after my high school I went to a Young Life camp where I heard the gospel clearly for the first time, and realized that I had never heard that in my church or in my Christian school. And I repented of my sins and trusted Jesus. And I was so filled up with new life that when I got home and my parents asked me how it was and I was sharing, "I've never heard this before, and our church doesn't tell this, and I'm never, ever going to church again." That's where I was. And God, in His mercy, continued to walk me through. But I got involved more in parachurch organizations, like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, or Young Life, or Youth for Christ. And even going to Dallas Seminary, was parachurch.

I tried to stay kind of away from the church, because my view of the church was this, it's the same people in the same seats every week with the same problems doing

the same thing and nothing ever changes, except for the fact that we think it's really important, and nobody in the world cares. And I just couldn't get about that. And as I continued to grow, even as I went to seminary, I'm like, "I want to preach, I want to tell people about Jesus, I want to do all that. I love Jesus, I'm just not so high on the church." And then as I was a youth pastor in a church, our youth group would grow, but the church, it wasn't great, and we didn't preach the Word, and we didn't worship, and there was no fervency and no passion. And God said, "I want you to plant a church where what you're doing with these kids, you can do with adults too."

So I went to a church planting residency. And I was kind of the black sheep of that residency because I would ask questions like, "If Jesus loved the church so much, how come He only mentions it one time in the gospels? And how come it is that I can go out and preach the gospel in a weekend, I can see hundreds, if not thousands of people come to Christ, but most churches don't ever even grow?" And nobody liked my questions. And I ended up leaving that residency, and I remember thinking, "I think I'm done with this. Lord, I'll serve you and I'll do what you want, but I'm not all that keen on the church."

And then it culminated after I got married, because I married a Christian woman, and I was taking her to church, and I was doing all the right things, but I was sitting in a church service once, and in the church service, the worship was all about self, it didn't feel authentic, it didn't feel like they were giving attention to Jesus, it felt like they were more concerned with their guitar riffs and drums. And then when the associate pastor

got up to preach, they had a bulletin, and I filled in all the answers he was going to say. And I even wrote out the stories he was going to say to the side and it was completely regurgitated. And before we were done, I was saying in my heart, "This is it, I'm done with the church."

And so we got in the car, we had been married a period of weeks, and we're driving off the church parking lot, and I looked at my wife and I said, "That's the last time I'm ever going to church. If I'm preaching? I'll go, other than that, I'm never going again." My wife is like, "Who the heck did I just marry?" But I was frustrated, because I wasn't seeing what I was reading about in the New Testament. When I read through Jesus, I was seeing salvations and healings and deliverance, and I read through the Book of Acts and I'm seeing miracles and power and authority, and I'm like, "I don't see any of that. So why would I give my life to that?"

But the Lord is gracious, isn't He? I remember when I was at kind of my wit's end, of just kind of traveling around, speaking, we're seeing a bunch of people come to Christ. I even remember when we would go preach somewhere. By the way, guest preaching is the easiest gig in the world, just so you know. Can I tell you why? Because when the senior pastor is gone that people are used to coming to hear, and you realize, you open up your bulletin, you're like, "Oh my gosh, we got a guest preacher today. I hope they're good." If you can even do half good, you're awesome. And that's all I did, I was a guest preacher. So I would go places and then they would say, "Hey, can you come back? That was awesome. You're a great teacher."

So I was feeling good on the inside. And people would come up and they would

say, "Hey, let me tell you about our pastor. Let me tell you about our church." Or, "Here's the problems in our youth group," or "Here's this..." And we thought we were caring to listen to that and we used to listen to that. And then Kim and I would get in the car and we'd drive away and we'd say, "Oh, thank goodness we don't have to be part of that church. I'll just preach."

And I even remember when I was thinking about... I was talking to somebody, I was at my wit's end, I called up to Chicago to find out about this church planting network and all that they were doing. And I got this guy on the phone who's now on our staff, Kent Shaw. And I was asking him, "Hey, what do I do? I'm seeing people come to Christ, we have plenty of money in our ministry, all these things are going on, but I'm empty on the inside." And he said, "Well, have you ever thought about planting a church?" And I said, "Yeah! Let me tell you why I never will." And ranted for a good 35 or 40 minutes.

He told me, he took a seat, he sat down, because I was going so hard. And he said, "Well that's not what church is." And he started explaining it to me. And by the time we hung up the phone, I said, "If that's what church is, I will give the rest of my life to do that." I told my wife, "We're going to move to Denver and plant a church" that night. And I repented and told the Lord, "I just didn't understand. Lord, I didn't realize I wasn't mad at the church. I was mad because the church isn't doing what you want done in and through the church, and that the church is your vehicle."

I will build my church. Whose idea is the church? It's Jesus's idea. Who's the one

building it? Jesus. So, how you speak about the church, and how you participate in the church is really a direct revelation to what you think about Jesus. I'm telling you from my own experience. If you talk bad about the church, shame on you. If you came up to me and said, "Pastor Jeff, great sermon, we love coming to BRAVE, we love you, you're an awesome guy, but let me tell you about your wife. We don't like her." How well do you think that would go? My wife and I are one. You don't like her? You do not like me. And now I don't like you either. And yet for so many loose-lipped, non-thinking Christians, they think they can waltz around and talk bad about pastors, churches, and all these things that people are doing wrong. Zip your mouth! That is the bride of Christ you are talking about.

When you come from another church, our ears are up like this. When somebody comes from another church and they're like, "Hey, we came from this church, and here's what's wrong with this church." I'm not listening to you. The only thing I'm thinking about is how long will it be until you talk about me that way? You need to repent. These people you're talking about are the bride of Christ, they're the body of Christ. That's how Jesus thinks. We are the physical manifestation of His living body on the Earth, and if we can't be united, and if we can't show love for one another, we can never fight the problems in the world. It starts fighting for the church, because the church is God's creation, it's His passion, it's His glory. And no other place has that. I'm for parachurch ministry; we have some, we have a radio ministry, we have a school that we're starting. There's Focus on the Family, Youth for Christ, Compassion. Serve them, give to them, whatever.

But the church is different. The church is the physical manifestation of the body of Christ, and even if you're involved in those ministries, the church should get the lion's share of all your attention, according to Jesus. Jesus is coming back for His church. So when it comes to the church, speak highly of the church. By the way, let me just say this, the church has never hurt you. People who have sinned in the church have hurt you, perhaps. Because you know who the church is made up of? Sinners. Imperfect people, just like me and just like you. So you've been hurt by people in the church, but you haven't been hurt by the church. Sometimes what you need to do is go back to the people that hurt you and say, "This really hurt me. I just want to let you know." And work it out, and reconcile, and ask forgiveness so the world looking on can see, "Oh, these people can actually get along." This displays the creation, the passion of Christ.

And the beauty of the church is Jesus picks men, He picks women, He picks boys, He picks girls, He picks people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation, every political background, He picks them all and puts us all together so that the one thing that we're about is the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is no other place in the world that's like that. Amen?

So, quick quiz, who's the church for? It's not for you. I'm sorry if I ever led you to believe that it was. It's not about you getting your needs met. It's not about you feeling better about you. It's that Jesus Christ will get all glory, honor, and praise from you, because He's done everything for you. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

That's the church. We just need to speak highly of the church, it's God's idea. He died for the church, He's coming back for the church. That's number one.

Number two, we fight for the church because the church prioritizes your need to worship and honor Christ. The church is what prioritizes your need to worship and honor Christ. "Blessed are you". He doesn't say "Blessed are you, now let me just tell you how blessed you are, now go live your life any way you want. You're blessed." "Blessed are you so much that I'm forming a body that is going to be my physical manifestation on the Earth while I'm in heaven, so that those who don't know me will see what I look like. And I'm going to make you part of that, and I want you to participate in that, because I've called you out. And I'm not asking you to be a consumer and come, I've gifted you so that you'll serve in it."

And when we come to a place where the church is doing what the church is supposed to be doing, which, by the way, many of the New Testament letters, like the Book of 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and even when Paul writes to Timothy and Titus, he's encouraging them for the church. So much is written to the church, the church, the church, the church, and all of you that want to be a New Testament church, "Want to be a New Testament church." They had plenty of problems in the New Testament church, just like they have plenty of problems in the modern day church. But it doesn't

change the fact that it's the church.

Trust me, I've served in the church for 30 some years now. I've seen problems. I've watched horrible things that have happened. I've watched poor decisions. I remember reading a book in the early 2000s by a guy that does a ton of research on the church. And he said this in his book, he says, "If the church doesn't change, it will not exist in about five years." Friends, let me just tell you something. The church is a Holy Spirit empowered institution and organism, and until the Holy Spirit leaves, the church will always be with us. Always. The church is going nowhere.

Sometimes the church is sleeping, sometimes the church isn't doing what it's supposed to be doing, but Jesus Christ is still Lord over His church, and the Holy Spirit wants to awaken His church because in the history of the church, if you study the church, at the different times where the church decided we want to be the church, we want to be everything God wants, we want to be everything He wants us to be, we want to unite like He wants, we want to serve like He wants, we want to advance like He wants, great things have happened in history as a result of the church.

And I say it this way, I know there's a God, because if any other institution was run the way the church has been run over the last 2000 years, it would've ceased to exist a long time ago. We know great companies that have existed in our generation, they don't even exist anymore. Church is still here. It's survived wars, it's survived famines, it's survived earthquakes, it's survived all sorts of natural disasters, it's survived in different cultures, in different countries, it's survived under every different kind of government you can imagine. The church of Jesus Christ is alive and active and

powerful, because Jesus Christ is still in charge of His church. Amen?

So when we gather, one of the reasons we gather, is to give worship and honor to Him. Now, what do you have to worship and honor Him for? That's a good question, right? Because many of us, we come into church, I'm like, "Yeah, I don't know if I like that song." "I used to go to this church, they had an organ." Or "They didn't have music, we sang acapella. I just don't like singing, it's not my style." Before you start thinking about style and what goes on, just think about what Christ has done. God the Father sent His Son Jesus to be the Savior of the world, which means the second person of the Trinity, who had always existed, humbled Himself and became human flesh. Not just for 33 years, but for all eternity. He left heaven's throne, and came down to submit Himself to the Father, to do for us what we could never do. He humbled Himself, He fulfilled the law, He became obedient even to the point of death, death on a cross.

Was His life easy? No. He went to those that He loved and they rejected Him. He got spit upon, beaten, smacked, scourged, stung, hung on a cross naked, shamed, yelled at, cursed upon, and died. Then He rose from the dead, demonstrating He's indeed God's one and only Son. And then in mercy and grace, started offering life to anybody who'd repent and believe in Him. And if you've repented and trusted in Christ, not only is your eternity secure, but the Holy Spirit promises to come in your life, work in and through you, give you wisdom, knowledge, and revelation on a daily basis, give you access to the throne room of Christ, talk to Him every day, let God walk with you, bless you, encourage you. How much is that worth? How much should we worship and

honor Him?

We come into a church where the Bible is heralded, where worship is going on, where prayer is central, where evangelism happens, where the gospel's proclaimed; doesn't it reorient our life towards what's most important? I say a lot of this, I say this a lot of times, we're living in the last days. You just read the news; we're living in the last days. And even if you disagree with me, I'm living in my last days, so I'm telling you right now, "We're living in the last days." I wake up now and I'm like, "Man, not too much longer." Right? We are. Look at the world, look at the currency, look at what's going on in governments, look at what's going on. There's never been a time where everybody's wanting to come together and push God to the curb. And I find that the darker it gets, the more bright the church can shine. And the more hope we have. Amen?

So we come to church to gather and worship Him, but yet what I find is so often, we make excuses for why we can't come. And I've heard them all. These are just some of them. "God knows my heart. I couldn't be there today, but God knows my heart." "I just need a day off of rest." "I want to preference my family today." "I have sporting events." "That group over there, just a bunch of weak people. Don't want to associate with them." Or, "Just a bunch of hypocrites." And when you wake up tomorrow, if you have a job, why don't you try those as some of your excuses when you call in in the morning, see how well it goes? Just call up and say, "You know what? I'm not coming in, but you know my heart. I know we got a big game this weekend, but

I just need a day off. I thought today we could go to the mountains, I just want to preference my family. All of you all in that organization, you're just a bunch of hypocrites anyway. You're lucky to have me. You weak people." Try those.

If they don't work in the secular world, what makes you think they work with the Lord? If He died for you and rose for you and is offering you an eternity, how could you prioritize anything else, according to the Bible? Amen?

Now listen, I realize that hits hard and it hits home, but I'm just telling you there's a great return on investment when you meet the Lord someday, because there's things that God only does in His church that He chooses not to do anywhere else. Do you remember when Jesus rose from the dead, and the night that He rose from the dead, He comes through the wall and He meets His disciples? And He comes through and says, "Peace be with you." And He lets them see His hands and His feet and the spear in His side, and they all believe? But there was one disciple that missed. Remember his name?

Congregation:

Thomas.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

Thomas. Doubting Thomas. Disciples go tell him, "We saw Jesus. He's alive. Look, we saw His hands. We saw His feet." What did Thomas say? "Unless I see His hands, and put my finger in His side, I'm not going to believe it." Now if they would've gone back and told Jesus, why didn't Jesus go beat him on Monday, or Tuesday, or

Wednesday? The Bible says it was the next Sunday. There's some things God only does in the presence of other believers. And the next Sunday, Thomas was there. And when He gets there, He looks at Thomas first. Now, He doesn't shame him and say, "Hey, you know what? I was going for perfect church attendance, you're oh-for-one, we just started the church this week." He didn't say that. He says, "Peace be with you. This is what you're looking for? This is where you're going to see it. In my gathering place in my house. Look at my hands, touch my side. Stop doubting, believe. I'm the Christ."

Worship is priority. When you prioritize worship, it changes your focus and everything else. It changes your family's focus and everything else. It changes your life focus, your week focus. When church is prioritized, then it's a priority. And other people in the world are saying, "Yeah, we know we can't have the game then, and we know we can't have this, and we can't take that vacation there, because they'll never come, because they think Jesus is more important than anything else we do." It's a testimony and a witness to the world. See, you're testifying here today in Denver, Colorado and the greater Denver area, you're testifying that Jesus Christ was worth coming to worship today. You're letting people know that He is. You're telling all the unseen spiritual forces in the heavenly places, all the good angelic beings and all the demonic beings, that I serve the Lord Jesus Christ. You're telling the Lord, "I preference you."

And yeah, it's easier. We hear all the slogans of Christmas and Easter-only, the Chreasters, and we hear all the slogans. You got the Mattress Methodists and the

Bedside Baptists and the Pillow Presbyterians and the Resting Reformed. Nothing good happens there. It happens here. And not when you're coming as a consumer, but you're coming as a contributor, because you've been praying all week, because you need a word from on high, and you want to worship the Lord, and you're here with other believers and you're saying, "Jesus, you are the king. And I can't wait to meet you face to face. Come Lord Jesus." That's what it does for us. Amen?

See, when you miss church, you're not missing Pastor Jeff, you're not missing one of my sermons, you're not missing an hour or two. You're missing a move of God among His people that you don't want to miss. And when you're more consistent in that, you get to hear the whole council of God, not just part of it. I realize you can go on YouTube and be like, "I like this pastor better. He's a better preacher than you, Pastor Jeff." And he very well may be. Or, "I like this worship over here. They're better than the worship team at BRAVE." And they may be. But there's something about when you gather with God's people that are in your city, and you're worshiping and hearing the Word, that changes your heart.

And oh, by the way, if you come to BRAVE, we'll teach the whole council of God here. Because see, when you go to a restaurant, you know how restaurants work. You order what you want, how you want it. You go and you say, "I would like this, I would like this steak, or I'd like these vegetables, or I'd like this side." And then the waiter doesn't say say, "Well, are you sure you want that?" They say, "Sure, I'll do that for you." And then they go back and tell the cook, and the cook says, "Yeah, we'll make it just the way they want." And then they bring it out to you. But if you were to serve God

that way, like, "I'll just take what I want. I like this pastor, and I like what he preaches, and this is the one sermon I like, this is the one worship song I like. These are the bands I like to listen. I'll just take this." You miss out on the full-orbed course, and the full meal of the Lord.

So as parents, you don't just let your kids eat whatever they want, whenever they want to eat it if you're good parents. Why do I have to eat vegetables? Well, because vegetables will do more for you than that pizza will do, so eat your vegetables, right? You come to BRAVE, we'll give you a full diet. We've gone through the first 11 chapters of Genesis. We've gone through the whole Book of Revelation. We've gone through the New Testament Letters, we've gone through the Prophets. We'll continue to give you a full course meal, so that you know how to relate to the Lord, no matter who you are or where you've been. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

That's why we need to be in the church. In the church. We need to preference the priority, the worship, and the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen?

Let me give you a third reason. Let me give you a third reason. A third reason we fight for the church is because the church gathers the gifted for ministry and the mission of Christ. The church gathers the gifted for the ministry and the mission of Christ. I've already told you the church is the [Ancient Greek 00:34:00], it's the called

out ones. Let me tell you something else that the Holy Spirit does at the moment you're converted. He gifts you. He supernaturally charges you with a gift, in a way with your personality, temperament, and experience that you can do only in the way you can do better than anybody else on the planet. It's like your thumbprint, it's original. It's like a snowflake, it's original. God's gifted you in such a supernatural way. You're special to God. He called you out, He chose you. He wants to use you.

And there's really two areas that He wants to use you, and they all combine together. One is to serve the body of Christ, this body, you use those gifts to serve one another in love. And then the second is like it, once we are being built up, we're sent out to advance Christ's kingdom in the world. And both are equally important and God uses your gifts for that. Some people don't even know that they're gifted. They don't even realize how special they are. I'm going to tell you you're special. The other extreme, some Christians are all about the gifts and think they're so special.

But let me tell you why God gave you the gift. He didn't give you the gift so that you'd look in the mirror. He didn't give you the gift of encouragement, so you'd look in the mirror like, "I'm super encouraging." He didn't give you the gift of pastoring so you could say, "I'm a great pastor." He didn't give you the gift of prophecy so you could say, "I'm such a good prophet." He gave you the gifts He gave you so they would serve other people. They'd be a blessing to others. You may not even know what your gifting is, but if you're in a group of Christians, they'll be able to see it. It's amazing how, when you're in a cluster of Christians, a cadre of Christians, a small group of Christians, that inevitably there's somebody there that's super gifted administratively and they don't

think they are, but they are. Or they're super encouraging, and they don't think they are, but they are. They're super merciful, but they don't think they are, but they are. Or they're super directional and they don't think they are, but they are.

And you start realizing that God made everybody unique, and there's spaces in the body of Christ, across all the gamuts of different ministry, to do that. And the church is the only place and the only vehicle in the world where every single person is invited to be a part of. Even parachurch ministries, they niche. Like, "We're reaching youth, we're reaching women, we're reaching men, we're reaching orphans, we're reaching..." That's good, but it's not full-orbed. The church says whether you're lost or found, you're welcome here, and we will put Jesus Christ on display for you to worship. We will show you that if you repent and believe that Jesus is the Christ, that you're gifted and we'll put you on mission.

One of the reasons I'm so passionate about the church is, for years, I was seeing thousands of people come to Christ under our preaching ministry, but they would stream forward, and I know nothing ever good's going to happen from here on out, because where do they go? And God burdened me so much to be a church, where we could bring people together and send everybody on mission, because together we can do way more than one person can ever do. When I was at Dallas Seminary, they used to have a big globe in the library. And I remember one time I put my thumb on Dallas. I couldn't fit my thumb over Dallas, the globe was so big. And at the time, Dallas was about 5 million people. And I remember thinking, "Lord, if you use

me to reach 5 million people," I was looking at the globe and I'm like, "We haven't even made a dent." And the Lord starts speaking to my heart. "I'm not asking you, I'm going to reach the world. You need to empower other people to reach the world."

The reason we gather is not just so we hear the Word so we can become better people in Denver; the reason we gather is so we can use our gifts to build other people, because God's going to use our church to send people all over our city, nation, and world for the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why we gather. We want to see our culture transformed for Him. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

You're gifted. Christ is assembling His army. He's advancing His kingdom. That's why He's called us. And by the way, God's not looking for talented people. You say, "How do you know?" Well, He picked you. He picked me. I read through the New Testament, I look at the 12 He picked. Why would you ever pick those? You got Matthew, who's like this tax collector that's stolen from everybody. You got Simon the zealot who's more political than anybody that you've ever met in your life, that's a patriot. You got all these different people trying to come together that see the world from all these different perspectives, and Jesus brought them together.

But here's what He was looking for. He wasn't looking for talent. You know what He's looking for? Allegiance. He wanted hungry people. I hear people say sometimes

like this, "I'm not going to go to church. All church does is ask for your money." I'm asking for a whole lot more than that, and so is Jesus. He's not asking for your money. Here's what Jesus is saying, "Will you come die with me? I died for you. The world's hanging in the balance. I'm calling people who no longer care for themselves who have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer they who live, but Christ who lives in them. Would you be willing to give your very life, so that my glory can be put on display?" That's what I'm calling the church to be. Amen?

And if you wonder, or have ever wondered, "Why don't I see those miracles I read about in the Bible? And why isn't the church as powerful? Man, I wish..." Ask yourself this question. If everybody at our church participated and went after Jesus like me, what would our church look like? Rhetorical. Convicting, but rhetorical. But what would happen if we all said, "Lord, we can't change anything. And Lord, I know there's still things in me that you're working out. And Lord, I'm not all that, but Lord, in our generation, if you could use me to do something great, that goes far beyond anything I could ever ask or think, according to your glorious power that's at work within us, Lord, I want to be a part of that, and I want to be around people that want to be a part of that. And Lord, we'll continue to humble ourselves and let you be put on display, because we want to see our world changed." That's what the church is at its best. No other organism, no other organization, no other institution can do that. It is the most important institution on the planet. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

That's why we fight for the church. We fight for the church, because Jesus Christ established it, it displays His glory and creation. It shows us His passion. He loves the church. It prioritizes our need to worship and honor Christ. It gathers the gifted for ministry, and it sends people out on mission. We're not here to grow our church in numbers. We're not here to say, "Oh, we need a bigger place. We want more people. Oh, that'd be great." Why do we want more people? Because we want more people that are serving and honoring the Lord, and more people that are being sent out on mission, because there's a world at stake, and we only have so much time to make a difference. And Jesus is looking for hungry people.

Every year, we get people that line up, fill out their resumes, that spend hours and days and weeks and months just to get an interview with somebody that may want them. Every year, we have kids sign up for sports and football teams and scholarships, just to hope that somebody might want them. And the God of the universe is saying, "I want you, and I'll use you to change the entire world, if you'll humble yourself and let me work through you." And we think, "Yeah, I'm kind of busy on Sundays, and I don't know about that." Right? That tends to be our heart towards the church, and when that's our heart towards the church, it's no wonder we talk bad about the church, because really what we're talking bad about is our lack of zeal for the Lord Jesus Christ. He gathers the gifted for ministry. This called out body, this [Ancient Greek 00:41:16], it's a legislative body that rules on behalf of and for the benefit of others.

The church, properly done right, blesses everybody involved. I never get tired.

Last week after our second service, there was a gal that came up right here. She couldn't even look up because she was so depressed and anxious, and her mom was saying she wants to pray to receive Christ. And we talked about that and she was receiving Christ. I could tell there's a lot more going on here, and there's a lot of things happening after service. So I called one of our pastors over and told him, "Here's what's going on, and can you do this?" And about an hour later, as I was still here, he was saying, "Hey, she was demonized. We delivered her from three demons, and she's free and she's glorious." And I saw her on Monday. I saw her on Monday at our prayer meeting at noon, and she came up and she's beaming, and her eyes are open, and I'm calling her by name, and I'm saying, "Tell me what happened to you." And she's like, "Jesus." I don't get tired of that.

This church, and every local church, that does what Jesus wants is the hope of the world. The reason lost people aren't here today is because their view of church is what some of your view of church is. "Yeah, nothing's going to happen, we're just going to go. It's an hour, hour and a half, then we're going to go home." But if people were hearing about salvations, healings, deliverance, life transformation, empowerment, set on fire, people would look on and say, "What's going on here?" Because that's what happened in the early church. And God's still willing to do it again. And I'm just telling you, there are embers in our church where that is happening.

And I get passionate about BRAVE Church, because that's where God's called me. But I want to tell you something else. I am for all other local churches that are

glorifying and honoring Jesus. I'm for them. They're on our team. We'll never run out of people to reach. We're not in competition with anybody. They're our brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

So let me give you this final reason. This may be my favorite. We fight for the church because, number four, the church provides all access and authority to the fullness of Christ. Provides all access to the fullness and authority of Christ. Now, Jesus says in Matthew 16:18, He's going to build His church, "and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Now, don't you love that picture? Most people think that the church plays defense. We just hunker down, and when the world gets really evil, we just kind of sit back and we hang tough and... Mm-mm. The church plays offense. The church is the one saying, "No, we're taking the fight to you."

Because what an embassy is, an embassy is where a nation on foreign soil is represented. When we have an American embassy in another nation, it's not that we're in that nation so that their cultural influence can influence us, it's so that American values can remain on that foreign soil. When the church is called out, we're in embassy. And the reason we're in embassy is because 2 Corinthians 5:20 says that we're all "ambassadors for Christ". And as an ambassador, ambassadors gather at the... Where? Embassy. And we don't gather at the embassy to take our cues from

the culture to see what they're saying about us; we gather here to bring heaven to Earth. To say what our values are, and how we're going to take our values out into that culture. And if we miss that, we miss what church is all about. If church was just about getting people saved, then the passage here would end with "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, my Father revealed this to you. Be well."

No, I'm establishing my church because now we're going to go on the offensive. We're going to take the fight to the devil. We are not going to keep our values inside the church; we are going to strategize to take them outside of church. "Let your kingdom come, let your will be done," where? "On the Earth as it is in heaven." The church is the vehicle through which God advances His heavenly kingdom into this world. If you want to see the world change, the church has to be right. If the church is not right, the world can't change. No matter how many people talk about it, no matter how much effort is done, no matter how much money is spent, the way the world changes is when the church is operating in full participation with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Which is why I love this, because He doesn't even end there. He says, "We're going to go play offense." But notice what He says, "And I will give you keys of the kingdom of heaven." What do keys do? Keys give access and authority. When you have keys to your car, gives you access to get in, gives you the authority to drive it. Keys to your house? Gives you access to get in, it gives you authority to live there and function that way. When you lose your keys, you lose all access and authority. Where did Jesus give the keys? He didn't give them to any parachurch ministry. Where'd He give them? Gave them to the church. He's saying, "You have an all-access pass to my

authority, my wisdom, my power."

And then He goes on and says this. "And whatever you bind on the Earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on the earth shall be loose in heaven." And I've heard every crazy translation, some more mainline, some nutty. Bind means this, it means to tie, or to fasten, or to shackle. Loose means to untie, or to unfetter, or to set free. Here's what He says. He's like, "Here's how much power the church has. You don't realize it, but I'm telling you. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, and I'm giving you access to all my authority, and where I'm giving you access to all my authority is in the church. And here's the deal. When you see something in the world that isn't right, and you bring it to the church, I'll rule on it according to my Word, with all my authority for what you want to see done, and I'll bring my kingdom in and through you to make a change in the world."

Let me give you an example. I can sit up here and talk about different things I see in our culture, and I do, and I'm not afraid to talk about them. Such as abortion, it's wrong. It's wrong because God creates life, and to stop life is called murder. And I know that there are women here who have had them, and praise God, you can be totally forgiven at the cross of Jesus Christ, just like any other sin. And you can be set free. But I've never heard of an abortion that's gone well for anybody. Emotionally, physically, mentally? I've never heard that it's gone well for a family. I've never heard it's gone well for a gal. It certainly doesn't go well for the child, who's now dead. It's wrong. I think it's wrong when God creates two genders, and we turn it into however many we want to have. Think that's wrong. I think God created a marriage between a

man and a woman, to be married till death do they part.

We can talk about all these different things. And we can rant and rave, get all upset, and we're going to protest, and it won't do anything. People have been doing that for ages. But here's what does change things. When you bring it to the church, and you start crying out to Lord on behalf of Him, and you say, "Lord, people are bound in this sin, and they're trapped in it, and they can't change, and they think they're right when they're dead wrong. Lord, we want to see them set free with the gospel. Lord, would you open their hearts? Would you set them free, so the people that are bound in that sin can be set free?" And God says, "You work towards that, you pray towards me, you see that, I'll give all my authority to make that happen." Lord, we think abortion's wrong. We're not going around picketing everything, but Lord, as you prompt us to stand firm and do the things you're calling us to, we're seeking you, we're asking you to rule on that. We're asking you to do something. God can change a whole culture.

Or what about on the opposite side, when things get restricted that we want open? In 2020, we were told by government to close the church because the church wasn't essential. I wish they heard this message, because it's the only essential institution on the entire planet. And after praying about it, and reading through the scriptures where God says, "Continue meeting together and all the more as you see the Day approaching", and reading about the one another's, and loving one another, and caring for each other, and bearing one another's burdens. When we're in a season

where everybody's freaking out and anxious, the church is even more essential than when it's not. And we made the decision, "Nah, God, we're seeking you, and you rule on this for us, because for us, we're going to do what you want us to do. You open it up, you set us free." When we did that, God protected us.

And here's what I'd also say. If every God honoring Christ-centered church would've done that during the pandemic, it would've been over in a month. It would've been over in a month. Because if millions of Christians had stood up and said, "You say whatever you want to say, but we're meeting because Jesus Christ is worthy of our honor and praise, and we're gifted, and we're blessed, and we're seeking His authority, and He trumps your authority." This is why I would say. Listen, listen, listen. I have political convictions, you can have political convictions, but if your political convictions are more passionate than your passion for the church, you have the wrong convictions. Because I'm going to tell you, no matter who gets elected in the next election next year, it won't change things for the kingdom to the fullness that Jesus wants to do.

But if the church will stand up and do everything the church is supposed to do, and seek His face, and stand firm for the things that need to be set free, and binding the things that need to be bound, Jesus Christ can change our nation. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen!

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

And it's the church. It's the church. That's why, for me, that's why I'm passionate about the church. Passionate about our kids. I'm passionate that the church would stand firm in the face of evil. Not just telling you how to live, but showing you how to live, learning how to live. Guys, I hope that by coming to BRAVE Church, you love your church, and it's the church of Jesus Christ. I love our logo. I like the BRAVE moniker, I love BRAVE, I love what it stands for. Bold, Resolute, Authentic, Virtuous, and Engaged, I love that. I hope you do too. But when you get to heaven, don't look for BRAVE Church signs because they're not going to be there. Where is the church of Jesus Christ? He's in charge of our church. He's the ruler, He's the leader. All of us are just under-shepherds, under-leaders. It's all about Him.

And to the extent we'll put Him onto display, and to the extent we'll empower all of our people to go do what He does, to that extent, God can do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to His glorious power that's at work within us. And I'm telling you this; the darker it gets, and it's getting dark, the greater generation I believe that we're living in, because I think we have the greatest opportunity to see Jesus Christ put on display, unlike any other time in my history or your history. And I want to be a part of a church that does that, and I know you do too. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

That's the church. That's the church. So we're going to fight for that church. And

the problem with the church is it's only made up of imperfect people. Imperfect people. Made up of me, made up of you. We're not going to get it right every time. We're going to need to ask forgiveness of one another, we're going to need to forgive one another. We're going to need to be patient with one another. And while we're doing that, what are we going to be learning? We're going to learn how Jesus is with us.

Congregation:

Preach that!

Pastor Jeff Schwarzentraub:

We're going to learn who He is, and then we're going to continue to walk with Him. We're going to continue to ask Him, "Lord, continue to use us to reach more and more people with the gospel. Continue to expand the influence for your great name, so that more people everywhere can worship you." Today, we're going to take communion after the singing of this song, because whatever your convictions, your background, or whatever, what is represented in these elements in the body and blood of Christ, that's what makes it central here. No matter who you are, I want you to know God the Father loved you so much, He sent Jesus Christ to be the Savior of the world, and He would've come if it was just you. He loved you so much that in your sin, when He knew you couldn't get to Him, He came for you, He died for you, He rose for you. Guess what? He's coming back for you. Amen?

So as you hold these elements in your hand, I'm just going to ask you to prepare your heart during the singing of this next song for communion. Just be reminded of all

that Christ has done for you. You can stand, you can sit, you can sing. And then we'll come up. We'll take the elements here together.

Father in heaven, we give you glory, honor, and praise. We thank you for your church. Lord, thank you that no matter where we go in the world, and Lord, I've been in a lot of places in the world, where every time I walk into a place where you're being highly exalted and honored, I look around and see my brothers and sisters in Christ. Imperfect people that are in love with you, and that are passionate about your return and reign. Lord, use us, move in our hearts, guide us in the way you want us to go. Lord, as we hold these elements in our hand, remind us of all you've done to forgive us and make us new. We give you all the praise. In Jesus' name, amen.