

What this community and the entire Miami Valley area have just experienced and are continuing to do so through the ministry of Youth With A Mission and the Impact World Tour is nothing short of amazing. Several churches serving together under the banner of a common savior with a common purpose is producing uncommon results. This last week over 700 people responded to the Gospel call with 310 first time commitments to Jesus Christ as Lord. That is nothing short of amazing and miraculous! Throughout the Miami Valley there have been 2113 total responses to the Gospel out of over 15,000 in attendance.

Can we celebrate a little bit together? Jesus said in **Luke 15:10** that *'there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'*

Imagine the celebration recently at 310!

As a pastor I am not only excited about those who once walked in darkness and now are walking in light, 310 of them. That is awesome; I am not only excited about the over 400 others who rededicated their lives to Jesus Christ, some of you here today. I am also jazzed at the beauty of the body of Christ lovingly serving together and the energy stirred up within us as we serve.

So much so that I have asked any of you who participated in the Impact World Tour over the last several months in any capacity to be prepared to share a brief comment this morning. Who will be first?

[Testimonies]

What an awesome God. Our God has an awesome plan to make His Name known among the nations and the Impact World Tour is just a miniscule part of that plan. So why we celebrate what God has recently accomplished we must challenge ourselves to not rest on past accomplishments; there is a long way to go. Salvation has come and is coming; discipleship is getting ready to be launched and will continue.

Over the next number of weeks during the Sunday morning's message and ministry time we are going to be focusing our attention on God's plan to share the hope of Jesus Christ to the world through the local church.

I've got news for you: His plan is the church! That's you and that's me and that's every other disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's not a specific building nor a specific program nor a specific person nor a specific denomination. It's simply the church.

Church: the called out ones

It doesn't take a prophet to discern that God's plan is to reveal Himself to a lost and dying world through the church. Nor does it take a prophet to realize that the nations are in dire need of this revealing.

Even as we continue to bask in the glow of such a momentous occasion as we have just heard described, it seems clear church that we are living in what the Apostle Paul referred to in his second letter to the young pastor Timothy as perilous or 'terrible times.'

## **2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV**

*1But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

Does any of this sound familiar or ring true in your ears? Would you agree that this just might be where we are in the world today with our faltering morality, wars and rumors of wars, and struggling economy to name just a few? Look at this list again:

In the midst of such terrible times in which society finds itself these days I want to declare to you boldly that Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and God's design is to share this hope of the world through the local church. That's you and that's me and that's every other person who names the Name of Jesus Christ as their Lord.

Listen as I repeat that bold statement: **Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and God's design is to share this hope of the world through the local church.**

That's quite a tall order and one not to be taken lightly. However Jesus Christ told the disciples in **Matthew 16:18** that He would **'build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it!'**

Sounds to me like we're on the winning team don't you think?

If Jesus said He would build the church, rest assured the church will be built!

If Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against the church, rest assured the gates of hell will not prevail!

In this past Wednesday night's bible study and prayer time we examined the story of the centurion who had a servant that was sick. The roman soldier in charge of 100 other soldiers told his servants to ask Jesus in **Luke 7:7** to *'say the word and my servant will be healed.'* The centurion had the faith to believe that if Jesus said it then it would come to pass because Jesus had the authority to do so.

Let's be real clear on this point: Jesus alone has the authority to declare that He will build the church, and rest assured the church will be built!

And Jesus alone has the authority to declare that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church, and rest assured the gates of hell will not prevail!

And yet in many ways the church today seems so lacking, so lost, so loose and so languishing, so lethargic.

The truth of the matter is we are. In any number of ways we are far from the 'prevailing church' that Jesus described. It's true; just look around. What do you see?

Don't just look at others either; let's look at our self, Christ United Church, for we certainly have not yet arrived, make no mistake about it.

However, I believe there is a stirring, an awakening, a reformation if you will within the body of Christ, the church; a rising up of a slumbering giant that is preparing to take its place against the powers of darkness; to prevail against the gates of hell; to actively engage the lost with the message of hope and salvation through Jesus Christ just as God Himself has ordained. The mission of the local church is

**To Deliver people from the bondage of sin, Develop them into Christian maturity and Deploy them into the world as servant leaders.**

The Apostle referred to the church in **Ephesians 5:27** as a '*glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish ... holy and without fault.*' 'How can that be' you might ask?

Historically the church wasn't always as lethargic and seemingly weak as we are today. In fact when you study church history you will find that during the first few hundred years the church made great inroads into society with the message of truth. So much so that it was even said of Paul and Silas and their missionary team in Thessalonica that they had '*turned the world upside down*' and they were afraid of them doing the same in their city.

When is the last time you have been accused of such an action as a follower of Jesus? I've been accused of some rowdiness in my day as it relates to my life before Christ but I can't recollect anything even like that as a disciple, can you?

Kind of sounds like a prevailing church to me huh? Doesn't sound like the gates of hell were winning anything at all; not even close. In fact they seemed to be in retreat. How does that sound to you?

Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and God's design is to share this hope of the world through the local church.

As I said earlier over the next number of weeks we are going to focus our attention on this plan of God's called the church. As we do we will look at God's Word as it relates to the church in general and also at His Word as it relates to our local church family Christ United Church. God has specific plans and purposes for each local gathering of called out ones.

As we look at these areas it will become apparent that God will desire to deal with us individually in order to handle dealing with us corporately as a church family.

For example, God's design was to deal with the nation of Israel as His chosen vessel to reveal Himself to the nations and eventually bring forth the Promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. So He appeared to Abram and began dealing with him, sharing His plans with Abram, instructing him to leave from where he was and go to a place where God would show him, eventually changing his name to Abraham, and promising to '*bless him so that he would be a blessing.*' Thus the nation of Israel was born and here we are today.

I want to share with you a passage of scriptures that God placed on my heart earlier this week as I was praying for our local church body. I am going to ask that you dwell on this passage prayerfully over this next week as we kind of 'camp out' on this subject of the church.

Ezekiel 37:1-11 NLT

*1 The LORD took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the LORD to a valley filled with bones. 2 He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. 3 Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" "O Sovereign LORD," I replied, "you alone know the answer to that." 4 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! 6 I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" 7 So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. 8 Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them. 9 Then he said to me, "Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.'" 10 So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army. 11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.' 12 Therefore, prophesy to them and say, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the LORD. 14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the LORD has spoken!'"*

The context of this chapter in a nutshell is this: God's people were quite a mess, divided, scattered, dry, broken, lying around, and pretty much wasting away to nothing. The nation was divided between the northern tribes, Israel, and the southern tribes, Judah.

Because of their sinfulness God had pronounced threatenings of destruction previously by the prophet Ezekiel but now was sharing a vision of restoration and deliverance for the glory of God!

Even in spite of their dispersion among their enemies and their division among themselves, with God, all things are possible!

God had made a promise, and God always keeps His promises; He always does what He says He will do. His desire was to see the nation of Israel be fruitful and prosper, not to dwindle away and die a slow death, but to rise up and be powerful. But it is obvious from this vision that God gave to Ezekiel that the people had given up hope.

Look at verse 11 again to see how they felt: *'these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.'*

Much of the church feels that way today. However, I tell you this generation has the potential to see the churches finest hour. All is not lost. God is still on the throne.

Jesus words in **Matthew 16:18** that He would ***'build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it!'*** still ring with power for the church today!

I see the question posed to the church today is much like the question asked of Ezekiel in this vision: *'can these bones become living people again?'* Can the church become alive again?

Most assuredly I say yes! What do you say?

**Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and God's design is to share this hope of the world through the local church.**

Will you allow God to continue to work through you? Will Christ United Church allow the Holy Spirit of God to breath on us and bring new life into our dry places? To raise us up and cleanse us from our sins and empower us with Spirit and send us forth with His truth so that we will be prepared as a church to be instruments in His hands

**To Deliver people from the bondage of sin, Develop them into Christian maturity and Deploy them into the world as servant leaders?**