

Sermon: A Church Not Lacking

Series: Christ and His Church

Bible Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

I've missed BCEC for the past two Sundays. I've been away on vacation or had the opportunity to speak at another church. Like many of you, this feels like my first time back in awhile. It may be your first time ever. My name is Enoch. I'm one of the pastors here and it's a great privilege to be in the city of Boston, particularly in the fall when the season changes.

We're going to be starting a new sermon series we're calling "Christ in His Church" and this is going to take us up through mid-November when our congregation and our church is going to have a missions emphasis and then turn our attention to advent, the coming of Christ at Christmas. But for now, we're going to start "Christ in His Church", a series that will take us through 1st Corinthians chapters 1-6.

So, if you have your Bible, would you open your app or flip to 1st Corinthians. If you don't have your Bible, you will find it provided below. 1ST Corinthians 1:1-9. This is the Word of God:

¹ Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,
² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Can we pray together please?

Our heavenly Father, we acknowledge that you are the reason why we are here and we acknowledge your presence. And Father, whether or not we believe in you as the true and living God and your Son and your Spirit, or whether we don't or we're not sure, we ask that You would be here and teach us. If You are real, speak to us. As we embark on this new year, this new start of the school year, and this city of Boston does revolve around the academic year because of the presence of so many schools, we pray that You would fill us with the sense of hope and anticipation You have for us, for this church, for everyone in this room. We pray this in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

A few weeks ago, I got to speak at a church in Rhode Island and I shared a story that I'd like to share with you. It was a couple years ago when I was at a church event and I was playing that incredibly

spiritual game called Monopoly. Monopoly is a game with little pieces that you move around the board and you win by dominating the market and destroying your opponent ruthlessly by basically getting them into what much of America and Europe has gotten into, which basically is: bad.

Anyway, I was playing this game with some college students and I was doing pretty well (by the grace of Our Heavenly Father). I had the orange properties, which are mathematically superior because of the preponderance of the number seven being rolled between two die, the “Go to Jail” card, and all these other cards. All these things make the orange properties, like Chinatown, you know, great real estate. Anyway, I had all these hotels on the orange properties and, I don’t remember exactly, but I also had hotels on the purple or the green properties.

All of a sudden, I had to go do something and get up from my game. I turned to someone and said, “Can you just humanly stay here? Just like, roll the dice and collect the money as it comes in. That’s all you need to do and hopefully, this [game set-up] should win.” They say, “Okay” and I go and do something spiritual, like pray or heal someone. I come back and I look at the game and say, “How’s the game going?” only to find that my hard earned hotels, that I spent, like, fifteen minutes on, were gone. The dialogue went like this: “What happened to the hotels?” “I had to sell them.” “What happened to the property?” “I had to mortgage them.” “What did you do? What school do you go to?” “Harvard...”

The point is, I took the game back, and by the grace of God, everything was alright and I won. The point is, I tell that story because, I think, there is a time when we put our hope in someone, or maybe in something, and then we turn our attention to something else. It’s our hope that things will go properly and when we turn our attention back to that enterprise, that activity, that relationship, that endeavor, and something goes wrong, we’re upset. We wonder, “Did that person that took over know what they were doing? Was the situation too much for them to handle?”

I understand that everyone in this room may not be a Christian, but as we enter the Fall season, we’re going to consider a theme about making disciples and what it means to be engaged in disciple-making in terms of helping people, Christian or not, know about Jesus Christ. We’re going to take a look at Corinth.

Corinth was a city much like Boston, a seaport bustling and growing. Like Boston today, it’s full of many people who would say that they don’t believe in Jesus Christ, the true and living Son of God and have a personal relationship with Him. Because of the commonalities and because of the fact that it’s in the Bible, the Lord has led us to consider these few chapters in 1st Corinthians. As we consider this, I’d like us to begin with having the idea and hope that God has the power to do things that we might have given hope on, particularly the church—the church in Boston.

When I say “the church in Boston”, you might be thinking Evangelical or Christian or Protestant churches, but I think the general world thinks of lots of things, like the Catholic church or the Mormon church. The church in Boston hasn’t had a great reputation in the last decade or so. In my time here in Boston, the past twelve or thirteen years, we’ve seen the Catholic church be pumpled by this sexual abuse and clergy scandal. The whole region of New England has a lack of faith in the church.

Maybe you’re here because you have come to Boston for school and you’re excited to find a church family. We’re so glad you’re here and we pray that God would bless you and that you’ll find a great church. Maybe you’re here and you went to church before maybe while you were working or in high school or undergraduate school or whatever, and you’re in here today because you promised someone that you’d go to church. Or maybe you’re here because you come here all the time.

The point is, as we look at Corinth, that Corinth had a lot to be discouraged about. What we’re going to see here is how God gives us hope, not in just in this church, but in any true church of Christ—a church just like us. Now, I just want you to know, having been in this church for several years, I’m still the “new kid on the block”. I’m not nearly as seasoned as Pastor Steve or Pastor Tom. Here I am at young age of twelve years at this church, compared to the twenty or thirty years of our more seasoned ministers and pastors, and I think we’ve seen this church go through many seasons of ups and downs.

We’re going to take a look at Corinth to see how Christ wants to see the church have hope and power. The challenge I want us to consider today is: do you really have hope in this church? Whether you come here regularly or this is your church family or it’s your first time here. The purpose of this passage is to give us hope in this church or any church that claims the name of Christ. What I want to talk about from this passage about why, when you wake up and go to church on a Sunday morning, a church that truly claims the name of Christ, you can have hope and power and optimism because of this.

Three points I believe this passage will tell us:

1. In Christ, we [our church] can have **hope**.
2. In Christ, we can have an **urgency**.
3. In Christ, we can have **thanksgiving**.

As we think about that, let’s take a look here at 1st Corinthians chapter one. Let’s take a look starting in verse one. This is a typical greeting. This is like how we do emails. Email is so wonderful for nothing else, except that it’s so useful for this illustration. For most emails, you see at the top the sender, recipient, subject, and date. This is like an ancient email.

1st Corinthians 1:1-3:

“¹ Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,”
Verse one: that’s the sender.

“² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:”

Verse two: that’s the recipient.

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
And verse three: “hi”. A profound, but simple way of Paul saying, “hi”. What are we taking here? From this, actually, he has a lot of hope. Let’s continue onto verses 4-8:

“⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Why would I say that this normal greeting is laced with an incredible hope about the church? And how would that encourage us, especially as Christians or even if we’re not? Well, it has to do with Corinth.

1. In Christ, we [our church] can have hope.

Corinth, as we’ll see, had a lot of problems. Now, if you think this church has problems, we do, and other churches have problems, they do. But little do you know about the problems in this church of Corinth? This church [in Corinth] had extremely gifted people boasting and trying to get power in the church, visibly arguing for power. This church had Christians suing each other and taking each other to court. They aren’t even just mad at each other. They are actually taking legal action and dragging each other into court. This church was rampant with sexual immorality and idolatry. This church was proud. They put it on their website that they have a case of incest in their church where someone was sleeping with their step-parent and they were proud about it.

This church in Corinth had a lot of issues, and you would think, that if Paul was going to write a letter to this church with so many problems, you’d think he’d write a slap-in-the-face letter, a stern letter, a howler of a letter. Instead, what does he say? “I thank God for you.” Notice how he compares himself with the church. Notice this in verse one. Paul says a couple things about himself, “I’m called by the will of God to an apostle.” Now look at how he describes the church, “² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”

Scholars tell us that Paul is doing something very subtle, but something his ancient audience would have caught immediately. The way that Paul describes himself, the great lofty apostle, being called by God, set apart, is the exact same way he has just described this church with so many problems. That'd be like you, going to work, and realizing that you forgot to submit something important for a client. You basically lost the contract and your company lost a lot of money. Then you get a memo from your boss, saying, "Me, your boss, Mr. On Time, Mr. Never Miss A Deadline, Mr. Always Come Through For My Company, to you, who I believe also can be someone who makes their deadlines and makes a lot of value for this company." Instead, that's not the memo a lot of us would get from our bosses. How about a grade? Your teacher writes to you, "I'm really disappointed in you. I know you can try much harder. I just thought you'd put more effort into this." But instead, the teacher says, "You know, I'm going to give you this grade. You who are intelligent, you who can have reason to believe in yourself and try harder, and you who I have hope in."

Paul is just so gracious because he has so much hope in them. He believes in them and the base of that hope, look again, comes from verse 9:

"9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul's hope is rooted, not in them, but in God they believe in. Friends, this is the first thing I'd like for us to consider as we journey into this here. If I had a spiritual thermometer that I could place into your tongue or hand, and it was a thermometer of your passion and hope of what God will do in this church, this leadership, your small group, your fellowship, your team. If I could somehow measure that... Or how about this, because this is a largely Asian church, we'll use the same method: If when you walked through those doors, I would see printed a big number or words about your passion-level, like "very hopeful", "hopeful", "passionate", "about to leave BCEC" what would it be?

The reason I ask is because I don't think we often think about our level of hope in a church. I don't even know if I think about the level of hope. I may not think about my level of hope, but I feel it, experience it, operate on it, make decisions on it based on my level of hope of our leaders, our workers, in our future. We don't even know half the bad stuff about this church and Paul has written really nice letters to other churches, like the church in Philippi. This church [of Corinth], arguably the worst church in entire New Testament, has the longest letters because it has the most problems. This apostle Paul has a lot of hope and that hope can make him gracious.

Friends, maybe you are a regular part of this church. I'm not asking you, but I think the Holy Spirit is calling us. If Paul can have hope in this church of misfits in Corinth, can we have hope here? That hope isn't just an optimistic, blissful hope. It's a hope rooted in something else, which is our next point. Our hope rooted in the urgency of the church.

2. In Christ, we can have urgency.

The urgency that the church has a mission, a purpose, a mandate. We looked at the hope of the church rooted in Christ. Now we're going to take a look at the urgency rooted in Christ. Let's take a look at the urgency in one single verse, verse 7:

“7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ”

This is just the introduction. Most commentators don't even talk about this part of the chapter because it's not the meat of the letter. Here we have something so profound. Besides measuring our level of hope in the church, we can measure our level of anticipation of the coming of Christ. This life will end. I don't mean just when we die, but when Christ comes. In fact, some scholars, historians, and theologians think at any moment.

I was reading a book recently on decision making and studies. There was a study talking about how kids will go to arcades and when the kids get a stack of quarters, they would put them into machines. This was the study: they gave two groups of kids the exact same amount of quarters. One kid group got a big, huge stash in which they burned through the machines. The other kid group got the same number of quarters, but rather than giving them to the kids all at once, they divided them into three cups. As the kids in the second group finished the first cup, they looked down and realized, “One cup is empty. I only have two more.” Researchers found that the kids in the second group would pace themselves better.

Another study, ostensibly, was about taste testing cookies, that's what they told you, but actually it wasn't about taste testing cookies, as I am about to tell you. This study told people it was about taste testing cookies and sent two groups of participants home with a big box of cookies. Both groups had the same exact number of cookies. The first group was given just a big, box of cookies; the second group, however, had a big, box of cookies, but each cookie was individually wrapped. The first group finished the box of cookies in something like six days versus the second group that finished the cookies in something like a month. Other than the fact that this is a cool story, the point is this: when they realized there is an imminent end, they acted differently.

My own son is going to participate in this worship service, given he graduates from the children's school in a few minutes. As I think about that, that's just six or seven years left; he is almost half way out of my house. My other son is almost half out of my house. My youngest son, my baby, is almost one-third out of my house. In youth fellowship, we used to tell students, “Okay, if you factor out all the holidays and breaks and conferences, we have only 32 Fridays left in the year.” 32 Fridays left in the year doesn't sound like a lot. Or the ultimate: if I were to tell you as a college student how many days you have left in your quarter relative to the number of pages you have to read, it might move you. There are deadlines.

Here's this ultimate deadline. Paul glosses over this, but for us, maybe we would profit by considering that there is an urgency.

Do we realize that we live on a really short time? Time is fast. I thought I was going to have lunch with Phil one of these days, but now I have to fly all the way to California to have lunch with him. That better be a good lunch.

The point is time is short and time is fast.

I was at this wedding yesterday that some of us had the privilege of attending. I was at the rehearsal dinner table and I thought, "You are all my former teens or youth middle schoolers. This is like youth ministry eight or ten years ago. You are all old." My second thought, "You all look old." The third thought was, "I can't wait until you look older than me."

I went on Facebook and saw the pictures my friends posted from their impromptu twenty year reunion. I look at the pictures and I think, "Man, they look old. I must look like people who look old. Therefore I must..." Okay whatever.

The reason why Paul has hope in this church is because it is rooted in what God has done. The fact that He sent His Son to die on the cross and that blood bought the church and the souls in the church. The Spirit gives gifts and powers and missions and purposes to the church. He wraps all that not lackingness with a deep urgency. Time is running short. Most of the people in this room will not spend the rest of their lives in Boston. Some of you are here because you are visiting. Some of you are here for work or school. Some of you are here for traveling. The point is, regardless, prepare for the fact that most of us will not be in Boston for the rest of our lives.

If you knew that, and I knew that, what urgency would that bring to the church? Urgency is a way of focusing, making us do and think about what is the most important task. Paul is going to go into these things, but we need to move on.

These verses and this passage are really going to say this: there is hope in the church rooted in Christ and we need to be considerate and mindful of the fact that how we live and the amount of hope we have will drastically determine the decisions we make, will drastically determine the amount of prayer we offer, will drastically determine the amount of urgency we have.

3. In Christ, we can have thanksgiving.

[This is all over the passage. Take a look at the first part, verse 4-7:

“⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Do you know what is so astounding about that? Paul is saying this, “I give thanks for you because God has blessed with so much. You are not lacking in any spiritual gifts.” Do you know what Paul spends several chapters on in this book because it is the source of their problems, their conflicts, and their boastings? Spiritual gifts.

The very thing that is giving Paul a headache, that makes him write such a long letter, is the very thing he is thankful for. Maybe we can relate. Maybe you’re like me and you have a backyard and you have to mow your lawn because it’s been a couple months since spring. I’m complaining, “Stupid lawn. Stupid grass. Stupid fertilization.” I’ll walk into my garage and kick some toy that’s on the ground and think, “oh, stupid child’s toy. Why is it there?” Or I go into my house and see that pipe is leaking and all these problems. I’ll sit down, open my Bible, and read, “give thanks to the Lord” and I’ll realize that many of the things I complain about are problems that come from prosperity. Many of the things I am frustrated about come from God’s blessing.

Proverbs says this, “With no oxen, you have a clean manger. But with many oxen, you have an abundant harvest.” You can imagine the ancient people thinking, “Stupid oxen.”

The wisdom writer says sure, you can complain about that, but God is saying that these are blessings. Here is what Paul is saying, “You guys have a problem in Corinth. You guys fight and argue about who is better. You have people speaking prophecy and speaking in tongues and that’s so weird. You guys doing all these amazing things. I thank God that you have these problems.”

You know what one of the biggest headaches is in this church? The lack of space. This is not new. There has been a problem with the lack of space for the last fifteen to twenty years. We have to form these expansion committees. We have to raise funds. We have to have these campaigns. We have to pray. We have to spend time finding these buildings and land or we have to rent this public school. One day, someone goes, “God could say, ‘Oh you guys have problems with space. I’ll just shrink your church. You don’t have to help more people. You don’t have to see more people come to the saving knowledge of Christ.’” Expansion is an enormous problem, a tremendous drain on this church’s resources. We’ve never done something this big and we don’t know what we’re doing completely. And yet, I am so thankful for every single person, Christian or non-Christian, that God has brought on the path to this church. For one day, or for a lifetime.

The problems that are causing Corinth to have all these conflicts are the very things God has given them. This is Paul's introduction. He hasn't even started. Paul's introduction is reminding us of a few things. Because it is really just an introduction, just pick one of these three things that might stand out to you.

Maybe you'll be one of our college or adult small groups and you're going to discuss this in a few days or this week because that is what our small groups do. We go into the passage. We struggle with the texts.

Where is your level of hope in this church? Maybe this is your first day. Let me tell you that you have ultimate reason to have hope in this church, not because of who we are, but because Christ is the head of this church. Where is your level of hope in your church or in our church?

Where is the level of urgency that we as a church have to focus on the most critical, most lasting, most important things? The Great Commission: reaching those who haven't heard the Gospel, also known as missions. Where is the urgency to spend thousands of hours or dollars penetrating places overseas that don't have a Bible? Where is the urgency?

Where is the thankfulness? The thankfulness that we have a borrowed classroom. Yes, we get problems because people think we leave garbage on the floor; maybe we do, maybe we don't. Yes, we come in the whole gym is gone. Yes, we have random things here in this wonderful facility. I'm thankful for the problems of having to be in a rented facility because I am thankful that we have a rented facility. I'm thankful that we have to deal with the problems of growth because God is kind and has seen it fit in His mercy to grow this humble church for His purposes.

There is one more thing I want to say, as my way of connecting you and the Gospel. It's another subtle thing Paul does. I want you to take a look at this in verse 2, specifically how Paul addresses his readers:

“²To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:”

Did you notice that? He refers to them twice. The first time, he says, “to the church of God”. It's a corporate entity. You are the church of God. He then refers to them, “you are a church of those individuals sanctified, called together, called to be saints together in one place.” Let's bring it down to a real level. When we say God gives us reason to have hope in the church, that's sort of easy. Sure, I have hope in the church. But, let's bring it down really close.

When Paul writes, “I have hope in God for the church of Corinth”, he's saying this: all the specific people, sitting in their worship services, all the specific people sitting in their membership services,

every single individual, especially the people that profess Christ and claim the name of Christ, Paul says, “I have hope in you collectively.”

In the Bible, God promises that every single church family will have everything they need to do what God wants them to do. Every single church, no matter how big or small it is. No matter how rich or how poor it is. No matter if it is in the countryside, the suburbs, or the city’s center. Every single local church is a body complete in Christ. It might be a smaller body. The point is: every local church, God says, “I believe in you”.

If we were a highly expressive church, perhaps another ethnicity majority-wise, I might tell you to turn to your neighbor and say, “I believe in you!” but I won’t make you feel uncomfortable. But I do. This is the lesson I’m learning. I believe in you. Not because you or I are awesome, but because God is awesome. That is what this letter is about and that is what this year is about. As we consider this, I want to have a special word to those who are just coming to Boston or just visiting Boston. This is your new home, at least for the next season of life. We’d love for you to join our church. We’d love for you to find a church. We’d love for you to know Christ.

For those of us who are here, we’re excited for what God is going to do. There is a lot of transition and a lot of change. We just hired two new guys and we just lost one of our most seasoned ministers in the English ministry. But God is still good because the Lord Jesus is the reason why we have hope. This is a man who would die on the cross for our sins and then rise from the dead, overcoming the power of the grave. That’s the person who says, “You know church, I did some pretty impressive things with miracles, but you’re going to do greater things.” The Bible says, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” You’re going to do awesome things, do even greater things. That is a pretty astounding thing that Jesus Himself, the Son of God, the Miracle Worker, the Healer, the Teacher, says. “My people are going to do greater things than I am, by the power of the Spirit.” That is the power of the Gospel.

My friends, where is our hope? Where is our urgency? Where is our thankfulness? It should be in Christ.

Let’s pray together.