

## Vintage Church

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Most would agree we now live in a “post Christian” era in Europe. The church is no longer in a place of political or moral power in the world around us. We can't thunder forth the Lord's declarations like the Prophets of old. Instead we need to build relationships where we are given permission to speak. Some in our society would even say the church has no business being around. Some are angry with the church others out right antagonistic towards a supposed concept of a God. Many like Richard Dawkins pay good money to launch their personal bus campaigns to say things like “There's probably no God.” Love the choice of their words – “probably” – glad they are keeping their options open!

More to the point there are now whole generations coming through in our nation who have little to no regard for the church. They view the church as out dated, old, with no real meaning to their daily lives today. Most would agree the subject of church doesn't rise very often in the talk of modern youth.

A large percentage of people both young and old in the western world would hardly ever give church a second thought, much less a first thought. Jesus is a swear word – few would consider a personal relationship with him – some might say he was a good man but few would pledge their loyalty towards Him fewer still would be willing to die for Him. Even those who are Christians at time feel ambivalent towards the church feeling there is a political atmosphere which they can work with.

So our effort is to prayerfully enlist the person of the Holy Spirit to assist us to raise the profile of a Vintage Jesus Christ and in turn show the true glory of His church. We seek to encourage a deeper appreciation of the body of Christ on earth and to somehow bridge the gap between the 1<sup>st</sup> century church and the 21<sup>st</sup> century church of today!

God loves the church. Jesus is building His church. With the help of the Holy Spirit we will seek to return a God perspective towards the church and return value to the church. In this process it is also our desire to reveal the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christ and His divine character and nature which is reflected in the and through the local church. As we do this we hope as a church and as individuals we will seek to freshly embody Him and engage with His church in a context for today.

We want to connect you with the Jesus of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century so that the perceptions and pictures you hold about Jesus are in line with scripture and the facts portrayed in the bible. We want you to know the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jesus and that He is the same Jesus of today and not some picture of a warped imagination. We want you to connect with the Vintage Jesus in today's 21<sup>st</sup> Century context, as the writer of Hebrews say “But we see Jesus!” **Hebrews 2:9**

The vintage church of Acts should in fact be the church of today, but 2000 years of church history has blurred our vision of what the church is and who Jesus is today. We need a vintage look at the Jesus of 2000 years ago and reject the unclear and hazy pictures of Him represented today by church traditions built up over the centuries, we need to discard the indistinct and doubtful images of Him represented by fashion and popular culture.

With Vintage Church we will seek to go back to original principles not so much a harkening back to yester year but a going over the core values of the church from the 1<sup>st</sup> century – this is a look at Vintage church. It's not old but vintage – like a vintage wine not like vintage jeans, designed to look like old jeans but are actually new and quite expensive – we're not talking retro church were talking classic church; essential church. It's all about taking the elements, contexts, principles and characteristics of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century past and bringing them alive and active into today.

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How can I be more like Jesus if I don't know who He really is today or how do we co-labour with Christ in building the church of His dreams if we don't know what the church was really meant to be – how do we become an accurate representation of Christ and His church if we don't know what it was He sought to represent.

The bible is quiet clear – **Hebrews 13:8**, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” In the very words of Jesus spoken to John on the Island of Patmos we read **Revelation 1:8** which says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

So Jesus is involved now in His one last great work – after He had secured salvation through His death and resurrection for all who would believe He is now building His church. This church is people who are living stones, motivated by a common cause united in spirit one in purpose – a people who regard persecution as joining with Christ's sufferings and a people willing to only die for the cause but to truly live for the cause.

Jesus is fashioning a place where people can connect and find salvation and start a relationship with God which will last though into eternity! It was to be a house of awe – a house of passion, fire and vibrancy, a house of innovation, power and creativity, a house filled with people fully engaged with His mission motivated by His cause serving His agendas.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**, “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God; for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”

**1. Context is vital to understand:** Corinth or even Rome would be a better context for us than Jerusalem. If we were to simply study the context of the Jerusalem churches expansion we would not understand the power of the gospel as it effected people from outside the Jewish faith. Had it not been for Paul and Peter the Christian faith would have remained some obscure Jewish sect.

It was men like Paul who took the good news to every place in Asia Minor and Western Europe. Paul understanding the Old Testament writings was quoting the Prophet Isaiah when he said in **Acts 13:47**, “For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Corinth was to all extents and purposes the sex capital of Asia Minor. It was a place of pagan rituals and notorious immorality. The worship of Venus, whose temple was on Acrocorinthus, was attended with shameless decadence where 1,000 male and female slaves being maintained for the service of worshippers.

In Paul's day it was the capital city of Achaia, a region and city re-founded by Julius Caesar and had become a centre for Greek philosophers. It was also a place where many Jews had fled during the reign of Roman Emperor Claudius and hence Paul's initial outreach was to them. But soon his ministry went beyond just the Jewish community and he broke out into the other communities speaking with great boldness and the Lord was with him.

Much like Europe today Corinth posed a great challenge to Paul and his team as they sought to preach the good news there. The similarities to our society today are encouraging. Because Paul and his team were

successful in planting a large and significant church there. Corinth was pre-Christian – there was no understanding of Jesus there – most had no knowledge of the scriptures, most had never heard of Jesus Christ most had never seen a Bible, most had never known there was the possibility to have a relationship with the God who created it all – in the truest sense of the word the people of Corinth were ignorant of Christ and His claims. Much like Europe of today, Corinth was a hot bed of darkness and sin. Paul and his band of preachers had a huge task before them.

Some say we live in a nation defined by the bible. Most of you here today wouldn't believe that and it deeply disturbs us all. The church today is small and weak. Many commentators suggest the Anglican Church in England will virtually be non-existent come 2045 as old church members die off not replaced by a new generation.

The name of God is not even mentioned in the new European Union constitution. We live in a nation and are bordered by nations who have forgotten God – we live in a world where we are struggling to rid God's name from every possible place – from Universities, schools and from every political arena.

Europe once the hot bed of revival is now regarded by many as ***the greatest mission field on earth!*** The spiritual darkness of Europe is now our challenge – which we can say with Paul, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' Thousands are still without salvation – we have a big job in front of us.

**2. Content:** Though the context is staggering and it has to affect our style and communication it should never affect our content. Let's make sure the message remains vintage. Let's be sure we are seeking to communicate all that God desired us to communicate!

Paul said in **1 Corinthians 2** that he “did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom” His resolve was to know nothing except “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”. It was not a matter of accident, or chance, that Paul made Christ his great and constant theme, but it was his deliberate purpose.

Paul knew the Greek world had a liking for philosophies, intellectual debates and the subtleties of language with its flourishes and its graceful and finished elocution. His determination was to not fall for their Gnostic beliefs and existential explanations. No his determination was to make sure the message was of one grand theme – his resolve was to know nothing amongst them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified!

This message he sought to communicate relied upon a God of miracles, a God of power and substance. The message at its core was a supernatural message – this is why he said he had come to them “in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.” He didn't come in the showiness of his brilliant personality nor did he flaunt his educational credentials. The message he communicated was a miraculous message about a God of love who had prepared the world for the arrival of His Son to show us what He was like – this same Christ became the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the entire world.

In a world familiar with religions, cults, gods and goddesses, blood sacrifices, atonement and redemptions they were able to relate to this message of a Christ or Messiah who had come to die for the sins of all mankind. The imagery of blood was understandable by most in the ancient world. The message though required even demanded the authority of the one who had commissioned this message.

Paul knew and understood the power of this. He said, “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”

The message of Christ is not only supernatural and miraculous at the core but also timeless and unchanging –and if you will dare to believe it you will connect to the power source that created the heavens and the earth – this power source will bring with it a salvation that can only be explained by a risen Christ and the awesome authority of the God’s Holy Spirit. You will connect to a Jesus who promised not only a plan for today but a hope for tomorrow – He “came so we can have real and eternal life, more and better life than we’ve ever dreamed of.” **John 10:10 The Message**

The message never changes – The message is Jesus Christ; A Vintage church needs to preach a message about a vintage Jesus. Here at Proclaimers we not primarily about worship styles, or ministries, or gift. Our church is seeking to reflect a Vintage Jesus and his desire to build a vintage church with an authentic message of salvation and the power of a new life.

The Vintage Jesus was driven by a Mission – so His church is to reflect this. Many churches today though seem to have got this a bit wrong – some churches are music driven, others are miracle driven, others still are ministry driven, while some others are driven by a special message. But as Rick Warren so aptly put it we need to be purpose driven – driven by a mission that originated in the heart of God before the world was even created

The Vintage church of the NT was all about Jesus, His mission and His message. There can be no place for a man driven church where we serve personalities and make them our super stars! No more putting people on a pedestal. In the last few years we’ve seen too many of them fall from the heights. Jesus said in **John 12:32**, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” An as John the Baptist said in **John 3:30**, “He must become greater; I must become less.”

The vintage church is not focused on style but on content, style is merely a response to the climate and environment of the times. As important as style it is context that dictates both style and structure. The message never changes and the Mission never changes simply because Jesus never changes – but our context changes repeatedly and at times rapidly hence our style and structure need to remain fluid and easy to change.

Pauls message – the Gospel – or the Good News – comes with power and an undeniable demonstration – that demonstration is salvation – a new life – sins forgiven and an introduction to our Father in Heaven – the demonstration is the power of a new life where as it is described in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” That demonstration was a connecting with God – life and hope and love! That demonstration is a faith and an assurance of eternal life.

Christ is the message – of this Paul was clear - The Message is Jesus Christ God’s only Son crucified – the message is about the power of His resurrection. The message is all about salvation, forgiveness of sin, transformation of a life now filled with God’s Spirit. All who connect with Him know firsthand the power of this transforming salvation!