

# The Church, Is It Relevant for 2020?

Matthew 28:18-20

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## Intro

True story – Football team is getting killed – a guy fumbles and the ball rolls over by a teammate. The guy who fumbles yells, “pick it up” to which his teammate responds, “you pick it up. You dropped it.”

Well, I’ll tell you what, God is looking for some Christians, some church congregations that are willing to pick up the ball and run with it. And no matter what the opposition or risks, or the fears, to realize you can’t score, you can’t make a difference unless your willing to pick up the ball an do something with it.

Jesus gave us our commission in Matthew 28 where he said, “All authority and heaven and earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded...”

He’s saying, here’s the plan, here’s the agenda, now pick up the ball and run with it.

Unfortunately, across this country you will find church after church that is afraid to pick up the ball. Afraid to take a risk. Afraid to try something new. Afraid to make themselves vulnerable, and so what we see is church after church where people come in the front door and back out the back door because they can't see how it connects to their lives.

I titled this message "The Church: Is It Relevant for 2020?" The problem is that many churches don't seem to be very relevant today. To often people walk in the doors and they find places where people are fighting over this or that. They find churches doing things and looking the way they have for years. They find attitudes that are holier-than-thou. They find lots of things, but rarely do they find a community of believers that are loving, accepting, merciful, and genuinely concerned about people's needs.

And yes there are risks to being that type of church. It can be challenging and stretching and uncomfortable. But we need to realize that we were never put here to just warm a pew on Sunday to put in our time. We were put here to make a difference.

It was C.S. Lewis that said, "If Christianity is real, then it stands to reason that those who become Christians should be better people than they were before." And we should. And we should make a difference.

Now, if we don't want to make a difference in the lives of people then here are some basic ingredients to make us that kind of church.

If we want to be a church that is not relevant, that is not effective then:

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## **#1 Make traditions more important than people**

I came across an article called, "Ways to know your church is unfriendly. Here are some ways;

- When the sign out front says – Members only
- When the parking lot has a sign that says – unauthorized vehicles will be towed
- When the church lobby has a sign that says – no loitering
- When you say, "Praise the Lord" and the guy behind you says – we don't do that here

- When the pastors message is entitled “The Theological Significance of the eschatological dimensions of the sanctified life in the pre-millennial view of predestination”
- When they pass the plate – twice
- When, a fellowship, coffee is 1.50 and donuts are \$1.00 – limit one
- When the church’s motto is – We’re getting smaller but purer

And we can add on more – When traditions are more important than people’s needs.

You show me a church that’s losing people and I’ll show you a church that puts more emphasis on church traditions than on people’s salvation I can almost guarantee it.

And the sad thing is that America is filled with them.

I heard one of my elders in a previous church say, “If 1960 ever rolls back around our church will be in a perfect position to reach people.”

But 1960 isn’t going to roll around and so if we want to reach people and not lose them right away we need to be willing to know where people are, take some risks, make changes, be uncomfortable, in short, pick up the ball and run with it.

Jesus warned about traditions. Throughout the Bible we see Jesus breaking the traditions for a more important cause. One of the obvious ones was the healing of people on the Sabbath Day. The Religious leaders of the day considered that to be work and thus broke the Sabbath tradition of resting and not working. And almost every time Jesus responded in the same way by saying that people’s hurts were always more important than traditions.

And yet how many churches refuse to make changes, refuse to do anything new to reach out to lost and hurting people because of those big seven words, “We’ve never done it that way before”. Sadly I know many, have been part of churches that operated on that phrase. And people are going to hell, and needs are not being met, because churches are too afraid to go against traditions and do the things we need to do to change people’s lives.

There is a story about a monastery in Europe preached high on a cliff several hundred feet in the air. The only way to reach the monastery was to be suspended in a basket which was pulled to the top by the monks. Obviously the ride up the steep cliff in the basket was

terrifying. One tourist got exceedingly nervous about half-way up as he noticed that the rope by which they were suspended was old and frayed. With a trembling voice he asked the monk who was riding with him in the basket how often they changed the rope. The monk thought for a moment and answered, "Well, whenever it breaks I guess."

I'll tell you what, sometimes that's what it takes to get a church to move or change something, and those churches are losing people and missing their call.

Dick Alexander wrote the following. He said, "With the (amount) of human need touching us today, the church can scarcely afford business as usual. In practice, many traditional churches view their mission as holding Sunday services, satisfying the members and doing a little good here and there. Such churches are on the way out. In a few years they will be dinosaurs. Not because their doctrine is bad, but because they've lost their mission. Only churches serious about rescuing the hurting will survive and make a difference."

Well, a church that loses people is a church where traditions are more important than the needs of people.

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## **#2 If you want to have a church that's not relevant then water down the Gospel**

It's an amazing thing. People think to have a vibrant growing church you need to water down the Gospel and don't preach on sin, don't challenge people, don't step on toes, and don't ask much of anyone.

But you know what we find, when we look around at the churches that are growing and keeping people, they're most often the churches that have stood fast on the absolute truth of Scripture.

There's a movement called the Alpha Project (Alpha being the first letter of the Greek alphabet signifying the beginning) it's a movement that began in England and is now sweeping through many mainline churches that have been declining. And what is that movement? They are returning to the Alpha, to the Bible, to the truth and it's revitalizing them

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### **#3 A church that's not relevant is a church that makes worship a thing to endure rather than a God honoring, meaningful experience.**

Psalm 42:1 says "as the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you O God." Does that describe worship for you? A meaningful experience in which we search for God. Does this describe worship in the majority of churches that you know?

Howard Hendrix in his book "Exit Interviews" asked people who left churches why they left, and he said many of them said, "I just didn't find God there." Why, because God is a God of love, and a God of emotion and excitement.

It's like a church where a visitor came in. And he found the people to be some of the coldest, grumpiest people he'd ever met. And he finally asked the man sitting next to him, "Does anyone ever smile here?" To which the man said, "I don't know, I've only been coming here for three years."

Psalm 122:1 says I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." Do you feel that way? Is worship service something people look forward to? I hope so.

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### **#4 Churches that's not relevant are churches that have no vision for the future.**

I think sometimes the biggest plans that most churches have are to make sure the doors are open next Sunday. Where are the dreamers, the visionaries, those willing to try something new or big. Something that's dependent on God.

There's a story in the book of Luke chapter 24. It concerns the two men on the road to Emmaus. It takes place after the death of Jesus. And Jesus appears alongside these two men but keeps himself hidden in the sense that they don't recognize who he is. And they're down and discouraged and Jesus says to them, "What's wrong?" And they say, "Well, it's Jesus he died and yet we had hoped that he would be the one to restore Israel to power."

Now I want you to think about that. Jesus came to redeem spiritually all mankind that will turn to him, to restore our relationship to God the father, to deliver the defeating blow to Satan, to ensure that all who follow him, will never have to really die. What an awesome mission that he had. And yet the hope these two men had was limited only to what they could see.. "We had hoped he would be the one to bring us to political power."

They weren't lacking in faith, they were lacking in vision. And aren't we sometimes as well. So often, our dreams, our visions, our hopes are so limited in regard to what God wants for us. And we see that not only as a church but in our individual lives.

We say, God, don't let me go through that trial, not realizing that going through that trial is the only thing that will prepare me for what lays ahead. We say, God, let me be financially comfortable, not realizing that comfort may be the very thing which draws me away from God. We say, God, take away my sickness, not realizing that by enduring through my sickness I may be used by God to bring other people into relationship with Him.

And these men were saying, God, let Jesus be the one to restore Israel to political power, not realizing that Jesus would be the one to restore all believers back into God's family. The problem is not a lack of faith, but a lack of vision.

Helen Keller said, "The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but has no vision."

Healthy churches have a vision, they try something new, they take risks. Churches that are not relevant are content to do it the same way they always have.

So can we be content? No. And we need to expand our vision. Maybe what worked in the past, still works. Great, we'll keep it. But maybe it doesn't. And we don't change the message. But the methods need to be examined from time to time.

Methods are many, Doctrine are few,

Doctrine never changes, Methods always do.

We need a vision to know where people are and what their needs are and what best helps them come to Christ in today's society. And we need a vision for that.

Let's go on.

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## **#5 Churches that's not relevant are churches that underestimate the need for prayer.**

They quit talking to God. Now sometimes people have the hardest time communicating with someone else.

Do you remember that commercial I think it was for a cell phone and there was some cellular static which was causing some confusion? The wife was asking her husband to bring home a movie, something old. The next thing you see is a monkey lying on the couch with a thermometer in his mouth. The husband thought she said, "Bring home a monkey with a cold."

Well sometimes people have the hardest time just communicating with each other. And that includes prayer. But it shouldn't be. Prayer is just communication with God and yet it holds such power and such significance. And I can tell you this, no great movement or revival ever started without prayer. And no great church was ever built or sustained without praying people. Churches that are not relevant quit praying.

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## **#6 and last - Churches that's not relevant are churches that don't challenge anyone to make decisions.**

There's been a push in recent years to not make anyone uncomfortable that is visiting your church. And to a degree that make sense.

I remember a cartoon that shows a person who is visiting a church. And the Visitor Awareness Commandos are giving him the works.

Well, certainly people don't want that kind of attention, and we don't need to do that, but what happens is we let the pendulum swing too far the other way and people come year after year and are never called to make a decision.

People that have never taught, or gotten involved in a ministry and yet they know that's what is in God's plan for them. People that have never tithed or invited a friend or used their gifts for the kingdom.

And part of the reason is that no one's ever challenged them to make that decision.

In Joshua 24:15 Joshua calls on the people to make a decision. For God or not for God, but don't live in the middle. Decide once and for all. And churches that are not relevant don't challenge anyone because that don't want to offend anyone, don't want to push anyone and as a result are not reaching anyone.

Well that's six ways. You want a church that's not relevant, then we need to do these six things:

Make traditions more important than people.

Water down the Gospel.

Make worship a thing to endure.

Have no vision for the future.

Underestimate the need for prayer.

And, don't call for anyone to make a decision.

Well, what about you? As we come into the year 2020 is there a decision that you are ready to make...