

## Life Together

Ephesians 3:20-21

(Preached from the pulpit of Warren Crossbridge—Launch Sunday, January 14, 2024)

One of the most powerful, yet sometimes painful forces in life is that of EXPECTATIONS. So much of how we view, process, experience, and what we communicate about life has to do with expectations!

Maybe you've heard about a young man who received a text telling him to get on top of a news story about a local wildfire. He was instructed to get to the airport and a plane would be there waiting. He hurried, rushed to the lone Cessna plane with its engine running, jumped in, and they taxied out and took off. As they ascended, the young reporter said to the pilot, please fly over the valley and do your best to get low because I want to try to get some close ups of the impact and expanse of the fire... to which the rather stunned pilot replied, "So what you are telling me is that you are not my flight instructor?"

I wasn't sure what to expect today at Crossbridge, but this moment has exceeded every expectation of mine, and I am deeply grateful!

William Carey (1761-1834)—known as "father of modern missions"—was preaching from Isaiah 54:2. He summarized his message with this simple statement: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

I never imagined or expected all that has unfolded in the life and ministry of our church since COVID (not an entrepreneur; just a pastor), but today, I am reminded again that while we are a limited people, we serve a limitless God. His promises never expire even as His power is never diminished.

So as we gather and think about this day and all that it means to the mission and ministry of the future, our church, our families, and our community, I want us to think about and focus on "Life Together."

Join me in the Book of Ephesians. Paul was always concerned about our common life together in the church. In fact, Ephesians is a book about Christian identity—who we are in Christ and what Christ is doing in us.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21. In this passage, we see the summit of a prayer—*Praying for More in '24*. Yet this prayer ends with a call and a prompt toward great expectations in our life together.

I love the end of this prayer as it lifts us, calls us, challenges us, and encourages us because God is at work within us!

So here, Paul is saying, affirming, and reminding the church of the need to embrace and surrender to these great realities:

- Whatever you ASK—God will exceed your understanding. No request is too big for God and God's delivery will often surprise us.
- Whatever you THINK—God defies human intellectual comprehension. See Isaiah 55:8-9.
- Whatever you DO—When we have done all we can, we learn to trust in the One whose ability is never limited by humanity or predictability.

**This text is a testimony to the limitless power of our great God! Yet all of this is focused on the current and present work of God in His church today.**

Let's be clear. Warren is not my church or your church; it is God's church! We exist for His honor, glory, purpose, and praise.

Today I want to do my best to give you a picture, to create a point of memory, and to establish biblical expectations of God's church looking forward.

So, let's pass the plates! This is a first! Talk about something unexpected?!?!?! [Offering plates were used to distribute a quarter to each person in attendance]

I want you to look at the coin you have in your hand. It is a nickel-copper mix, polished and intended for durability. It is a small item and yet with others, it has incredible impact and influence.

But let's consider this simple question: What is the purpose of this little item you hold? To buy something. Here is the first insight regarding our life together in the church.

### **1. The Purpose of the Coin/Church is Redemption**

To redeem simply means to *purchase or buy something*.

The distinguishing mark of the church is that it is composed of a group of people—"called out" and "called together"—because they have entered into a new relationship with the Father through our Savior Jesus Christ.

*Church is a redemptive community, and a community of the redeemed!... redeeming love has been my theme...*

Thus, the purpose of the church, like a coin, is to fulfill God's redeeming mission in this world. Lest I come close to heresy, let me quickly say, "Salvation is NOT *in* the church." Salvation is in Christ and Christ alone.

But the defining message of the church is that of salvation in Christ. The Bible is filled with the message of the coming of Jesus Christ to redeem us from sin. See Galatians 4:4-5 and Galatians 3:13-14.

We are all in a bondage of debt called *sin*. The word, *redeem*, was specifically used to identify the amount of money needed to ransom or redeem a slave. You are lost without Christ, but a person of great value to God!

The purpose of the church in the world today is to express and fulfill the redeeming mission of Jesus Christ.

## **2. The Pattern of a Coin/Church is for Authentication**

Every coin is marked with certain faces and features. These serve to officialize or authenticate the value of the currency—U.S. and foreign. [Image of a quarter on the screen]

Many years ago, I took the family to Philadelphia and the Franklin Mint. What an experience!—impressive foyer and beautiful coinage on display... three floors of display. Finally at the top and after quite an extensive educational journey, you turn and suddenly look out over some hot molten metals with workers laboring diligently to establish blanks, then plates, next press, and finally a finished product. Each coin bears the mark or image of its designation.

The church is a manufacturing plant for devoted followers of Christ so that we authenticate the message of the gospel in our daily lives. The church is a place where we grow to become image bearers of Jesus Christ. Our lives are to become authentic expressions of the person of Jesus Christ.

Just as a coin with images and symbols expresses common heritage, ideals, and values, so the church of Jesus Christ is aimed at producing Christlike followers. See Ephesians 4:11-13, 15-16.

**Authentic Biblical Churches** (See Matthew 28:18-20):

- **Make Disciples**—"follow me"

Disciples are followers of Christ. This begins when people hear and respond to the message of Christ's redemption.

We don't do it ourselves. We only have one message. See Acts 4:12. Discipleship begins with conversion, not maturation.

- **Mark Disciples**—through the proper administration of the ordinances... baptism (watermark of the Christian life). A watermark is an identifying image or pattern in paper that appears as various shades of lightness/darkness when viewed by transmitted light (or when viewed by reflected light atop a dark background) and caused by thickness or density variations in the paper. Watermarks have been used on postage stamps, currency, and other government documents to discourage counterfeiting.

- **Mature Disciples**—teaching the Word of God, caring to strengthen community, serving, praying, and giving. [Worship–Connect–Serve–Disciple–Send]

What we do here should help to accomplish our redeeming mission and to shape the character of others into Christlikeness.

### **3. The Power of a Coin/Church is in Circulation**

If all we do is sit in display cases, we are not of much use. Thus, the challenge is to be put in circulation. The Christian faith is not for “Sunday Showcase,” but for “Monday Marketplace.”

During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, the British Military of the 17th Century began to run low on silver coins. Lord Cromwell sent his men to the cathedrals to see if they could find any metal there. They returned with this report: “The only silver we can find is in the statues of the saints standing in the corners,” to which the radical soldier and statesman replied, “Good! We will melt down the saints and put them into circulation.”

This is the practical goal of authentic Christianity: To fulfill our redemptive mission as image bearers in the mainstream of life where life transpires in all its raw realism.

In His parting words to the church, five times Jesus affirmed His intention for the church not to congregate in stained glass buildings, but to circulate in and among the stained world.

In His prayer, Jesus didn’t pray for them to be removed, but preserved in circulation. See John 17:15.

**What you get here on Sunday is not intended to help you endure the pew, but to face the challenges of life and to circulate with a message of hope, joy, and peace in a world overwhelmed by doubt, fear, and pain.**

Honestly, I’m disturbed and discouraged by the condition of the world around us today, but I am encouraged by the sure promise and bright future we share in God’s Word today!

God's church is and always will be His "Plan A" for glory—not the buildings, programs, schedules, and ministries we've come to adopt and activate. But it's His people! How do I know? ... "throughout all generations."

Warren is a church for all generations. This is what I love about Warren. We're not one generation or one demographic; we are diverse in age, race, background, culture, and more!

God works in all generations. His work is neither limited to the young nor lost in the old. Neither is it contained in buildings nor protected by rituals. It is the legacy of living faith, proved in the hearts of a believing people—people who are maturing and becoming like Christ; people who are embracing and living out their faith.

When my son, Joseph, came into our family, a retired New Jersey police officer, painter, started a collection of Silver Dollars and sent one each year on his birthday. Joe Markovich died on May 9, 2004, the year Joseph turned 18 and graduated from high school in Dallas. Surprisingly, yet faithfully, His wife, Clara, sent the last coin and said, "Joe had it and wanted to be sure it was delivered." Faithful to the finish.

So here we are today at the starting line of something new, something important, and something of great value—Warren Crossbridge! We have an opportunity to share and invest our lives together with confidence and full expectation of God's promise.

See Ephesians 3:20-21. We have seen and shared what God has done in our lives together over these 15+ years, but we haven't begun to imagine all that He can and will do in our lives in the days yet to come because God is able! He is unlimited and His work in our lives is a work that is unlimited by His grace and goodness.

"The holiest moment of the church service is the moment when people strengthened by preaching go out of the church door into the world to be the church. We don't go to church; we are the church." —Ernest T. Campbell