

## **Look to the Rock**

### **Part Two: Our Core Calling**

This morning we come to the second in our sermon series about what makes Covenant Covenant.

Last week we began by looking at the three bedrock beliefs that define who we are as a church.

#### **Covenant Church Essential Beliefs**

We believe Jesus Christ alone is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

We believe the Bible is trustworthy and authoritative.

We believe the Church exists to proclaim and live out the love of God.

This morning we turn to look at what we consider to be our core calling, which comes directly from our bedrock beliefs.

But before we come to our calling, think for a minute with me about what is an appropriate response to a belief. What do you do with a belief? You believe it, right? Be confident of it. Build your life on it. Trust it to be true.

We believe these are life changing truths. Do you?

And if any one of those three bedrock beliefs is not something you are able to affirm, that's probably the place for you to stop and spend some time, wrestling through whether or not those things are true, and what that would mean for you if they were.

In the end, belief is about authority. To who or what do you give the right to have the last word in your life?

If you have questions about those beliefs – if you come from a different faith or not faith at all – I challenge you to be curious about these claims. Read the Bible, talk to a Christian friend, call the church and ask to talk with a pastor. Bring your questions, bring your doubts, bring your curiosity.

So the central question about a belief is, do I believe it? If not, why not?

Today we shift our focus and look at our calling, which spills straight out of our beliefs.

So if the thing you do with a belief is to believe it, what is the thing you do with a calling? You answer it. Obey it. Carry it out.

So the two questions we are asking this morning are:  
First, the question I'm trying to answer: "What is our calling?"

And, second, the question you need to answer, and we need to answer together: “Will I say yes to it? Will we commit ourselves to it?”

I want you to take a minute to look at two images. Both of them are images of calling. What aspects, what dimensions, of calling, do you see in these pictures?

Here’s the first one.

### **Commander Sending in Soldier slide**



Now look at the second one.

### **Coach Sending In Player slide**



Here are some of aspects of calling that I see reflected in these pictures.

Calling is personal. At its simplest, a call is something one person speaks to another. It happens in the context of relationship. It is not a rule or a requirement, even when it comes with the expectation that it will be fulfilled. It is an invitation, something one person asks of another, invites someone else into.

Calling is connected to someone in authority over us. Someone who has the prerogative to tell us what to do, like a coach or a commanding officer.

Calling is individual and it’s corporate. There were other soldiers and other team members in the background. So a call invites a response from all of us – our unit, our team – but a call also invites a response from me – me as an individual soldier, me as an individual team member.

Answering a call costs us. The volleyball player’s knee pads and the soldier’s helmet and armored vehicle remind us that saying yes to a call involves risk and

sacrifice. A yes to someone else means a no to me, to my desires, my plans, my comfort.

And at some level, answering a call, even when it is risky, even when it is costly, brings us joy. Did you notice the smile on the volleyball player's face?

I think all five of those dimensions of calling enter into what it means for us to respond to God's call for this church.

This morning as we talk about our calling, we're really talking about four statements or affirmations.

They answer the questions

Who do we believe has the authority to call us?

What is our relationship to him that would make us want to say yes?

And what is he calling us to, both broadly and more narrowly?

So who has the right and the authority, who has the prerogative, to call us?

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We begin with the affirmation that is declared by our crown logo.

### **Jesus is King**

*Crown Logo image*

Last week we said that our core and defining belief is the belief that Jesus is the only King.

### **John 18.36-37**

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not an earthly one."

Pilate said, "So you are a king."

Jesus answered, "You are right to say that *I am a king.*"

Whether recognized or not, Jesus is the king over all existence, and He is ushering his kingdom into this world.

Wherever Jesus reigns as king in the heart of a man or woman or child, there is the kingdom of God. The first words Jesus speaks in Mark's gospel are: "The time has come. The kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mark 1.15).

In just the same that the sun stands at the center of the solar system and defines it, so Jesus stands at the center of our church and defines us. We recognize Him and celebrate Him and serve Him as King.

Our crown logo is meant to capture this absolutely crucial starting point for understanding who we are as a church. Jesus is King.

Every other dimension of our calling is a consequence or outworking or implication of that truth.

In his book *A Quest for More*, Paul Tripp contrasts the small kingdoms we make for ourselves, and over which we try to rule, with the kingdom Jesus is establishing, over which he rules.

At the center of the kingdom is the King; and therefore the center of kingdom living is a deep, abiding, life-shaping affection for the King. This one central love fuels everything else we are meant to pursue as we exit the narrow confines of our self-defined kingdoms and begin to enjoy life in the big sky country of the Kingdom of God. (167)

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Jesus is King. It is from this central belief that we receive our calling. But that's not what comes next.

We don't go from affirming who Jesus is to declaring what we are called to do. There's a crucial in-between step. We go from who Jesus is to who that means about who we are and what that means about why we exist: our identity and purpose.

### **Our Identity and Purpose**

We are His people who exist for His kingdom and His glory.

There's a jarring and provocative passage – especially for those of us raised in the United States, who place such value on our independence and our rights and our freedoms – that is found in I Corinthians 6. It says,

You are not your own; you were bought at a price. (I Corinthians 6.19-20)

If through his death Jesus purchased our lives with his, and if when he rose he ascended to heaven and was seated on the throne, then that means those who trust Jesus as Dying Savior are also called to entrust their lives to Jesus as Risen Lord and surrender their lives to Jesus as heavenly King.

We who are his followers are his subjects and his possession. We are his people.

Through His sacrificial death He purchased our lives and reconciled us to God.  
We belong to Him. We are His.

### **I Peter 2.9**

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, ***a people belonging to God***, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

We belong to him, and we exist for him. As His people we are concerned above all else with His work and His reputation in this world.

We exist for his kingdom, displaying and advancing his reign wherever God sends us in this world.

### **Luke 12.31**

***Seek the Kingdom of God above all else***, and he will give you everything you need.

And we exist for His glory, increasing his reputation in the eyes of others.

### **I Corinthians 10.31**

Whatever you do, do it ***all for the glory of God***.

We are His people who exist for His kingdom and His glory.

## **Communion**

We're going to pause now and take communion, which as you may know is a remembrance of the death of Jesus.

Every time we observe communion we focus on some aspect of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Usually we focus on the way that Jesus through his substitutionary sacrifice offered his own life in exchange for ours to secure our redemption and to reconcile us to God.

This morning our focus will be a little bit different. Instead of focusing on how Jesus purchased our *forgiveness* with his life, we are going to focus on how Jesus purchased *us* with his life, ransoming our lives with his own.

If you are a follower of Christ, we'll be taking the elements together after I consecrate each one. As you receive these elements, give thanks to Jesus for giving his life for you, and consider what it means that your life has been purchased and given over to God.

If you are not a follower of Christ, I encourage you to use this time to think about that execution, and to ponder whether there may have been something more going on there than a mere martyr's death. Is it possible that Jesus gave his life, rather than having it taken? You might even pick up a nearby Bible, flip to John's gospel in the New Testament, and read chapter 19.

**The Bread:**

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and broke it and said, "This is my body, broken for you. Eat this, remembering me."

I Corinthians 6.19-20 says: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price." Jesus gave his life for yours.

**The Cup:**

At the end of that same meal, Jesus took the cup, and he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Drink this, remembering me."

Romans 6.22 says: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God." Jesus purchase your life with his own lifeblood.

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We've considered the starting point of it all: Jesus is King. We've looked at our identity and purpose. We are his people, who exist for His kingdom and His glory.

Now we come to our calling.

**Our Calling**

Know Jesus. Grow with His people. Go to the world.

If we're clear about who Jesus is, and we're clear about who we are and why we exist, then our calling makes perfect sense. It has three parts.

**Know Jesus**

God made us for relationship with himself. That relationship is made possible through Jesus, who came to earth to reconcile us to God. He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14.6).

Our relationship with Jesus begins with a step of faith. We recognize who Jesus is and entrust our lives to Him. And there is nothing more important than our relationship with him, because it is for this that we were made.

**Philippians 3.8**

Everything else is worthless when compared with ***the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus*** my Lord.

Our relationship with Jesus deepens as we learn to abide in him through our worship and prayer life and our study of Scripture.

The second dimension of our calling is to take steps to grow together with God's people toward spiritual maturity.

## ***Grow with his people***

### **Ephesians 4.12-13**

His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.

God created us for community. We grow as God's people when together we worship, study scripture, serve and encourage one another, share life together, and love one another.

The Christian life becomes a rhythm of coming in and going out. We come together as God's people to grow, and we go out as God's people to show and tell the love of God to the world. This is the third part of our calling.

### ***Go to the world***

Jesus sends us to the world. We are called to show the love of Jesus through acts of compassion and to speak of His love by sharing our faith, both here and around the globe.

### **Matthew 28.18-20**

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

God places us in the world as a colony of heaven, and he sends us into the world as his representatives, so that through us the world would come to know him.

That leads us to the final aspect of our call that I want to touch on this morning.

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### **God's Call to Live a Life of Love**

In January of last year, just before the virus hit, I shared with you the result of a year-long process of discernment that culminated when our lead team was away on a retreat and we began to have a conversation over lunch.

That was when God really began to bring some things together.

First, Andrew asked, "What is the thing we want to be known for most in the community?"

When people encounter us in the grocery store, at the gym, at the lunch cafeteria, what would we want them to experience from us? Wouldn't it be our love?

Not first our moral convictions or our political affiliation, but our warm welcome, our kind regard, our thoughtful questions, our acts of compassion – the Love of God pouring through us to them

And then Travis asked, "If Covenant were suddenly removed from the community, would we be missed? If so, what would we be missed for? And what is the thing we would *want* most to be missed for?" Again, wouldn't it be our love?

That got me thinking about my experience when Sharon and I were in England for my sabbatical three years ago.

I'm convinced that, in terms of spiritual climate and secularization, the UK today is the US in about 30 years.

Here's what struck me during our time there. In England there is a sense in which the church has become completely irrelevant to the society

Despite efforts on the part of the church to be faddy and relevant, with miniature golf courses and laser light shows in 800 year old sanctuaries in an effort to draw crowds, none of those are really capturing the attention of the culture around them.

On the other hand, though the church has lost its stature, it hasn't lost its real relevance at all. In fact, the relevance of what it offers in a broken and isolated world has only grown.

What is the one thing the church uniquely has to offer? Not trendy programs. Not political power. Not cultural change. The love of God, fleshed out in Jesus, lived out within a loving family called the church, and poured out into the lives of those around us through love of neighbor.

That's something you can't find anywhere but in the church. And that's what we experienced in England: small vibrant churches with the deepest sort of relevance because they were simply communities of love – and in them the love of God was met.

So it all came together, and the session affirmed that this was God's call to us for this season: to become a community known for its love.

I Corinthians 14.1 says, "Follow the way of love." And I Corinthians 16.14 says, "Do everything in love."

We believe that is God's focused call to us as a church for the foreseeable future: to become a church known for its love.



In the first three hundred years of its existence, the church was a small minority community within the larger Roman world, and it was just one option among a whole mish mash of faiths and philosophies from the familiar Roman pantheon of gods to the Emperor Cult, the mystery religions, and the self-help advice of the Stoic philosophers.

How did the early church make its message stand out?

In his book called, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark points to what he believes was a decisive factor in the acceptance of the Christian message when it was still a small minority voice in the culture. Its love.

Ironically, given the divisive and acrimonious response of some Christians during the past 18 months, it was during two pandemics – one in 165, the other in 251, both of which killed as many as a third of the population – that the church’s love in a pre-Christian world really shone.

Listen to how it was described.

Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, described in a sermon the Christian value of love and the Christian norm of serving neighbors in need, and how that contrasted with those who had pagan beliefs. Christians stayed and “nursed the sick and dying” while “the heathen behaved in the opposite way. At the first sight of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled.”

The pagan Emperor Julian complained to one of his pagan priests about the growth of the Christian church, which he said was caused by their “moral character” and by their “benevolence toward strangers.” And to another he lamented, “Everyone can see that our people lack aid from us.” But “the Galileans support not only their own poor, but ours as well.”

Tertullian, a Christian writer in Northern Africa, summed up perfectly what the ancient world experienced whenever they bumped into the small band of Christian believers. “It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. “Only look,” they say, “look how they love one another!”

What if that was what our opponents said of us? What if it was our loving kindness that branded us in the eyes of those who viewed us negatively?

In **John 13.34-35** Jesus said

A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another.

That is exactly how we believe God wants us to be known as well. By our love.

Over the past two thousand years, speaking in broad terms, the church in the Western world has walked through a pre-Christian era and then a Christendom era. Now we find ourselves more and more in a post-Christian era.

Which means in many ways we find ourselves back where we were in the pre-Christian era, as a minority community in a world swirling with religious options. But with this difference: today, for a variety of reasons, many in our world already have an opinion about the church, and they don't want to have anything to do with it. According to a new Barna poll, only one in three Americans have a positive view of evangelicals.

How do we gain a hearing in a world that is not only cluttered with a panoply of religious options, but is disenchanted with, put off by, even offended by what they perceive as the narrowness and arrogance and judgment of the church?

We believe the answer is so simple that it seems ordinary rather than revolutionary. Love. Go back to the original blueprints, follow the example of the early church, and love.

And that means two things: For us to rediscover the church as a community of affection, to learn how to lay down our rights and our preferences and our divisions, and to learn how to truly love one another . . .

### **John 17.23-26**

May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. . . . I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them.

And then it means our going out into the world as one, "standing firm in one spirit, contending as one for the faith of the gospel" as Paul says in Philippians 1.27, and living a life of love.

### **Matthew 22.37-40**

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

determined to obey the second great commandment as faithfully as we do the first.

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**Jesus is king.**

**We are his people who exist for his kingdom and his glory.**

**Our call is to know Jesus, grow with his people, and go to the world.**

**And God's invitation to us in this season is to become a church known for our love.**

If you're part of this church, we want you to know this, not just to be familiar with it but to know it. We'd love to have all of you be able to name those things and to understand that this is the call we are responding to together,

And, if you are part of the Covenant family, we want, we expect, you to say yes to this, to commit yourself to it.

If you are a member of this church, one of the questions you answered when you became a member is this one:

Do you promise to serve Christ in His Church by supporting and participating with this congregation in its service of God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability?

This calling that we've just been reviewing this morning – this is what you are committing to when you say yes to that question.

Think back for a minute to the picture of the soldier and the athlete, and what the idea of a calling implies.

A calling is connected to someone in authority over us. Someone who has the prerogative to tell us what to do.

A calling is personal. It happens in the context of relationship. It is something one person asks of another, invites someone else into.

A calling is individual and it's corporate. A call invites a response from each of us and from all of us.

Answering a call costs us. Saying yes to a call involves risk and sacrifice.

And at some level, answering a call, even when it is risky, even when it is costly, brings us deep joy.

All of those things are true about the call that God puts before us as a church.

So . . . what do you say?

How do you respond to the call?

**Announcements**

Welcome to visitors

Updating our online directory - Photo booth

**Benediction**

## Communion

We're going to pause now and take communion, which as you may know is a remembrance of the death of Jesus.

Every time we observe communion we focus on some aspect of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Usually we focus on the way that Jesus through his substitutionary sacrifice offered his own life in exchange for ours to secure our redemption and to reconcile us to God.

This morning our focus will be a little bit different. Instead of focusing on how Jesus purchased our *forgiveness* with his life, we are going to focus on how Jesus purchased *us* with his life, ransoming our lives with his own.

If you are a follower of Christ, we'll be taking the elements together after I consecrate each one. As you receive these elements, give thanks to Jesus for giving his life for you, and consider what it means that your life has been purchased and given over to God.

If you are not a follower of Christ, I encourage you to use this time to think about that execution, and to ponder whether there may have been something more going on there than a mere martyr's death. Is it possible that Jesus gave his life, rather than having it taken? You might even pick up a nearby Bible, flip to John's gospel in the New Testament, and read chapter 19.

### ***The Bread:***

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread and broke it and said, "This is my body, broken for you. Eat this, remembering me."

I Corinthians 6.19-20 says: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price." Jesus gave his life for yours. (*eat the bread*)

### ***The Cup:***

At the end of that same meal, Jesus took the cup, and he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Drink this, remembering me."

Romans 6.22 says: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God." Jesus purchase your life with his own lifeblood. (*drink the cup*)

## Notes

### King

Matt 25 – seated on the throne  
Revelation 1

You may be aware that each major portion of the Christian church has a different primary image that it uses for the Christian faith, each one pointing to a different aspect of his redemptive work. The Roman Catholic church uses the Good Friday image of Jesus on the cross, emphasizing that he died for our sins. The Protestant church uses the Easter Sunday image of the empty cross, celebrating that Jesus is the risen Lord who triumphed over sin and death. And in the Eastern Orthodox church, the primary image is the Ascension Day image of Jesus seated on the throne, Jesus as Pantocrator, which means the ruler over all.

One Sunday when we were worshiping in England, during our sabbatical three years ago, I realize that the stained glass window in the church was divided into three parts, and central to each part were these three images: Jesus our Savior on the cross, Jesus our Lord risen from the dead, and the cross empty, and Jesus our King seated on the throne. That's some great theology.

### Kingdom

Also Matthew 6.33  
Matthew 6.10

### Glory

Also Ephesians 3.21  
Romans 11.36