

## ***The Church Spreads Throughout the Earth Uniting Heaven and Earth***

Kenwood Baptist Church

January Sermon Series: Why Church?

Pastor David Palmer with Elder Eiro Fukuda

February 10, 2019

**TEXT: Revelation 1:10-20**



**PASTOR DAVID:**

Good morning, Kenwood. This morning we conclude our sermon series, *Why Church?* As we said at the very beginning, many people today say that they're interested in God, but not really in organized religion. Many think: Well, I can know God, but I don't really need the church. Some of us, if we're honest, have been hurt or wounded by a negative experience at church and we want nothing to do with it. There are 7.5 million Americans who identify themselves as nonreligious compared with three years ago, and yet, in the New Testament, the gathered church is the most recognizable evidence in the world of what God has done in Jesus Christ. The church is the place. It's a group of people that come together and come into being by God's eternal plan and purpose. The church is this multiplying entity that spreads out throughout the world through global missions and individual mentoring. The church is the primary place where God's wisdom is on display, and it's on display in you. The church is a living, moving, fully functioning body of Christ in the world where every person has a vital role, and as we will see this morning, the church is the place where heaven and earth come together.

We started this series with a nod to a famous nursery rhyme, and I gave you instructions in the first week how to position your hands: "Here's the church, there's the steeple. Open the doors, and there are all the people." You see, heaven and earth are joined together, not in a building, not in an organization, but in a people, the family of God, a holy community. We preached this series with the help of our elders, and each week a pair of elders has preached together. We

started in the Gospels, the church in the Gospels: *Why Church?* We moved to the Book of Acts: *Why Church?* Then we spent two weeks looking at *Why Church?* in the letters, and this morning, we will look at the church in the Book of Revelation, and I'm privileged to preach this text from Revelation with Eiro Fukuda, one of our elders.

EIRO:

Good morning. The Book of Revelation may seem to be mysterious, difficult to understand, and a little scary. I used to think this book is for pastors, but as I studied this book and our passage for this week, it has been a wonderful blessing for me to have a deeper understanding of who Jesus is and what He is doing now and what He is going to do at the end. This book is not meant to confuse us, but to make things clear for us. Revelation is, in fact, the climax of the Bible. It fills us with hope and confidence in Jesus. In Revelation, we also see how Jesus cares about the church, loves the church, and how He is deeply connected with the church.

Where is the church? The church is spreading throughout the world. There are 2,500 churches



in Cincinnati, 400,000 churches in the United States and 37 million churches all around the world. There are churches in all seven continents. Actually, there are seven churches in Antarctica. New Christians are born every day all through the world, and where the Christians are, there is the church. In Revelation, the church is the place where heaven and earth are joined together in Christ. This is the place where God and

man make contact. This is the people among whom God actually dwells. The church holds heaven and earth in dynamic tension through prayer, Scripture, suffering, and witness as we await Christ's glorious return to make all things new. I discovered that at the end of the Bible, heaven and earth will come together. We will be in God's presence forever. But can we really experience this now? Our passage allows us to see this reality. Let's look closely at Revelation 1:10:

*"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet."*

John was filled with the Spirit. It was on the Lord's day. He was worshiping God on Sunday. And he heard behind him a loud voice, like a trumpet. As our praise and prayer go up, His

compelling, powerful voice comes down. Do you hear? Can you see? Heaven and earth come together in Christ! This loud voice is instructing John to write down what he sees and send it to the seven churches. Jesus knows what His churches are going through, all the temptations and struggles, and He deeply cares about them. Heaven and earth are connected with direct communication flowing between them through Christ. This voice is compelling. It commands our attention. It is natural for us to turn our gaze to find the identity of the Speaker who joins heaven and earth at His command.

PASTOR DAVID:

When John turns to see the voice that is speaking to him, he describes what he saw. He says in Revelation 1:12:

*“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands,”*

It was a heavenly glory, a luminosity. We have to notice that the lampstands are those structures that illuminate the sanctuary. Just as Eiro said, John was worshiping. He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. He was there, holding worship in his heart on Sunday morning. What he sees is heavenly worship: seven golden lampstands. Then in Revelation 1:13, he continues:

*“ . . . and in the midst of the lampstands one like a Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.”*

Jesus Christ is walking in the midst of lampstands. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: “When the Word of Christ is proclaimed, Jesus Christ walks in the midst of the congregation.” I believe that with all my heart. It is no small thing to gather together in His name. When John looks, he sees this Son of Man walking in the midst of the lampstands. He is depicted and seen with the glory that He has had since the foundation of the world. The hairs of His head, they are white like white wool, like snow, with brightness and luminosity. It's an image that recalls Daniel 7 where the Ancient of Days is depicted in this way. Jesus' eyes are like a flame of fire. There is a luminosity, a radiance to His presence. As John looks at Christ, exalted, Lord of the church Son of Man, his feet are like burnished bronze refined in a fire. Jesus Christ looks radiant and glorious when he sees Him. When you think of Christ this morning, it is Revelation 1 that gives us our only picture in the Bible of what Jesus Christ looks like this morning. The cross, we remember, is empty. The grave is empty: “He is not here,” the Angel said. “He is risen!” Where is He now? He is enthroned in glory, and we see Him, and as awesome as He looks, the most striking feature of this exalted Jesus is the sound of His voice. John says in Revelation 1:15:

*“ . . . and His voice was like the roar of many waters.”*

I remember on a family vacation driving back from Boston, we made the decision to see Niagara Falls. “We’re going to deviate from our route. Who cares about how long it takes? Let's see

them.” I wondered how close we would really be able to get to the falls. We were graduate students at the time so didn't have the resources to do the boat tour, get on the slick outfits,



and I thought: “How close can we get to the falls?” To my surprise, you could get right next to the falls! Praise God for the railing by the walkway. That’s a biblical idea, by the way, to have safety railings. Praise God for the railing. We were just a few steps from the falls, and I heard the falls. As impressive as they were to look at, I heard them. They moved with power – 750,000 gallons of water that cascade over

Niagara Falls every second. One gallon of water weighs eight pounds, so 750,000 gallons a second cascading over the falls, falling down at 32 feet per second, land with 2,500 tons of force!

John said His voice sounded like that – powerful, authoritative. When Jesus Christ speaks: “Little girl get up!” there's no hesitation. When Jesus Christ says: “Your sins are forgiven,” they are! When Jesus Christ says: “Whoever believes in Me will live,” you will! As he looked and heard, John saw, and he tells us in Revelation 1:16:

*“In His right hand He held seven stars, from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and His face was like the sun shining in full strength.”*

John sees Jesus as He is this morning – exalted Son of Man, Lord of the church, standing in the midst of the lampstands, the glorious Son of Man. His voice resounds with divine authority, like the roar of many waters; His face, shining like the sun in full strength. This face is illuminating, providing light, dispelling darkness, radiant in purity. At any moment, the sun radiates  $3.86 \times 10^{26}$  watts of energy. I know that number means a lot to most of you. I’m a preacher, and I hit the math ceiling in high school, hit it hard. I’ll never forget it – it was math without numbers, in calculus. I thought: “What kind of math is this? There are no numbers,” and I hit that ceiling hard and ran to the humanities, so much so that I had to double check with Steve Mills because I didn’t want to misspeak this. But,  $3.86 \times 10^{26}$  means that you add 24 zeros to that number. That's how much power goes out from the sun. That is a lot of power! Most of the sun's energy goes off into space, and yet we receive 174 quadrillion watts, and that keeps us going, and John said His face was like the sun in full strength. One of the times we see Him most clearly is during the time of worship in church. Eiro is going to describe John's reaction to seeing this glorious Jesus.

EIRO:

When John saw the exalted Lord. When John saw exalted Lord, he was completely

overwhelmed by His glory and greatness. John fell at His feet as though dead. He is in fear and awe. It also shows his honor and total submission to the Lord. John was like a dead man, yet Jesus Christ places His right hand upon John and says in Revelation 1:17: *“Fear not.”* Jesus’ gentle touch is like a resurrection from the dead. He actually makes physical contact with His life-giving healing touch. Heaven and earth do come together in Him.

I grew up in Japan not knowing anything about the God of the Bible. I had never been to church; I had never met a Christian; I had never heard about the Gospel. In Japan, the Christian population is just less than one percent. Ninety-nine percent of the people do not know Christ. I was one of them. I went to college, got married to Chisato, and joined Procter & Gamble in Kobe, Japan. I thought my life was going pretty well, but our lives were literally shaken by a massive earthquake in Kobe in January 1995. In ten seconds, my life and the lives of millions of others had changed. We lived in the level 7 area, which is the highest level of damage. We were not Christians at that time, but God protected us in a miraculous way. We lost many things, but we didn’t get hurt, not even a scratch. Our building was one of only two buildings left standing in our neighborhood after the earthquake. All the other buildings were destroyed or had to be demolished due to the damage. This experience made me think really hard about what life is and the things that I thought I had. After the earthquake, we got a six-month assignment here in Cincinnati. The company offered spouses, Chisato, to take English lessons from International Language Plus, where Chisato met an English teacher named Lois. John and Lois Bascom invited us to Sunday worship at Kenwood before we went back to Japan. I was 31 years old when I experienced the worship of God for the first time in my life. When we went

back to Japan, we started going to a small church in Akashi, outside of Kobe. We visited there a few years ago, and this is the whole church. This is everyone, and everyone matters. After the last pastor retired, there was no pastor, so one of the members volunteered to preach on Sundays. They welcomed us like family. They went through the same earthquake. The sanctuary was destroyed, and this is a new building. They too lost many things, yet they are so kind, generous, and strong. Chisato said: *“This church is the good news.”* She went through the depression after the earthquake, yet these people were filled with peace and joy. I tasted the fruit of the Spirit there, and I wanted to know the secret. We went there for two and half years until we moved



back to Cincinnati in 1999. We were reunited with John and Lois and started coming to Kenwood. We also connected with the Japanese church in Lexington and Louisville. John and Lois prayed for me, shared Scripture, and were a living testimony of God's love. At the Christmas Eve service in 2000, I was sitting right over there, and I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior in a pew of Kenwood. Praise the Lord. Church is really the place where heaven and earth come together in Christ.

PASTOR DAVID:

This is where it's at! This is the place where miracles happen, new life begins. Jesus is the Bridegroom; His church is the bride. There is direct, real, ongoing communication between Lover and beloved. In Revelation, Jesus speaks to the church, speaks to us, assuring us with who He is, instructing us on how to live, then promising us the glorious future that He is preparing for us now. In Revelation 1:19, we hear Him say:

*"Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this."*

Jesus' voice to us primarily comes to us in a text, in a Book. As Jesus speaks directly to His bride, He communicates from heaven through human agency, and says: "Write these things down." The Bible is the Word of God to us as His bride. "Write what you have seen," Jesus says in Revelation 1:20:

*"As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels [or the messengers] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."*

They could be messengers coming up from the prayers of the church. They might be messengers or angelic messengers communicating back down, but Jesus says of the lampstands, they are the churches. Communication from heaven and earth in Christ is for the church. In Revelation 2 and 3, we hear Jesus then speak to us as His bride. Each of these letters begins with a piece of self-identification so that we can know the One who is speaking. Each of the letters speaks with a kindness to identify the speaker as Jesus Christ, and it is some part of the vision from Revelation 1. Each of the letters addresses the spiritual condition of the church and reveals Christ's will for us. Each of the letters ends with a warning for those who disobey Christ and a promise of blessing for those who obey Him. These promises are played out in the final chapters of Revelation. Revelation is singular. It's not Revelations; it is a revelation. It is really not about the end of the world. It is not about the end times. It is really about Jesus Christ and His people. It is a single, coherent vision. Each of the congregations is addressed, and just as the rest of the New Testament letters apply to us as followers of Jesus, all of these letters apply to us as Jesus speaks with specificity. To Ephesus, Jesus says that He is the One who holds the stars in His right hand. He commends the church for their good works, their hard labor,

their patient endurance. Sometimes you wonder if Jesus really sees me. I'm working hard. He does, and yet Jesus warns the church of Ephesus that somehow along the way in their heart's service, they lost their first love. They have all the right doctrines, all the right convictions, and yet their heart has managed to grow cold somehow. Jesus warns us that a dead orthodoxy will cause our lampstand go out. Yet, if we overcome by obeying His words, Jesus grants an extraordinary promise. He says in Revelation 2:7:

*"I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*

We haven't seen that tree since Genesis, and Jesus says: "If you listen to My Word, you can eat and live forever."

To the church at Smyrna, Jesus says: "I am the first and the last, the One who died and came to life." Jesus knows that this church is about to suffer greatly. He sees that coming. He knows that they will pass through this trial. Some of the congregation will be put into prison; others will suffer a martyr's death, and yet Jesus admonishes them to *"be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."* No one gets to choose the shape of their discipleship. Polycarp, the leader of the church in Smyrna, who died this martyr's death early in the second century, all the way to the Korean martyrs in the 21st century, use this verse: *"Be faithful unto death."* In a time of great stress, Jesus sees and knows and promises: "The one who conquers by faithfulness will not be hurt by the second death." Remember Jesus' words in the gospels, and I'm paraphrasing: "What's the worst they can do, kill you? Don't be afraid of that. Let me tell you what should what you should fear: You should fear the One who has power to condemn you to hell." That's terrifying. To be killed? A little less of this world? A little more of glory?

To the church in Pergamum, Jesus identifies Himself as the One with the two- edge sword. He wields the authoritative Word of God. God's Word is likened in Scripture to a hammer that shatters the rock. God's Word is described as sharper than any two-edged sword. It is able to divide between thought and intention. That's a fine line. Jesus Christ is able to wield the Word of God as the sword that sets the prisoner free. We pick up lies from the enemy; we pick up lies from the culture, and we find our movement and our thinking increasingly restricted or limited to self, and Jesus Christ, with His powerful Word, can come in and set us free. Like a surgeon's scalpel, like a champion's armor, it is liberating weaponry. Jesus rebukes the church because they accommodated themselves to society to avoid persecution, and yet He promises those who conquer by obeying His Word: *"I will give you a new name, the name of the city of my God."*

To Thyatira, the fourth church, Jesus identifies Himself in Revelation 2:18, as:

*". . . the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished*

*bronze.”*

Jesus warns this church against spiritual compromise for worldly acceptance. We face this, don't we? "I want to fly under the radar. I don't really want to be identified that publicly as a Christian. That might interfere with my promotion. It might cause my grades to suffer." Jesus warns this church and says to hold fast to His teaching. He promises them that those who overcome will receive the Morning Star and share in His everlasting rule. Whenever I'm tempted to seek worldly advance at the cost of minimizing my commitment to Christ, I need this Word: "Hold fast to Christ and reign with Him forever."

To the church at Sardis, Jesus says He is the One who speaks with the seven spirits, speaking out all over the world, holding the seven stars. He knows this church, and the church at Sardis has a great reputation. Everyone knows about this church, and yet Jesus says they are dead. Our reputation means very little to Jesus. Jesus says: "You have the reputation of being a live and vibrant church," but He sees through the reputation and that this church is dead or sleeping. So He admonishes them with a word that I need sometimes, and I know that you do as well. Jesus says: "Wake up! Wake up!" There are people all around us needing Christ. God can use an English teacher, can't He? This week, I had an opportunity with someone at a restaurant here in town that I've been trying to get to know, to build a bridge to with the gospel and have been seeking to create a relationship with for the last couple of years. A group of us had lunch together this week. When we finished our lunch, the others all walked out of the restaurant, and then, just for a moment, for the first time ever, I was alone with the owner. There was just a small table of workers there, and we were alone in the privacy of the restaurant. He had overheard our conversations, and he came right at me. He said, "Where is your church?" I said, "It is just up the road. It has a big stain-glass window. You can see it from Kenwood Road." He said, "You know, I live in the neighborhood of Mariewood Court, right across the street." I said, "Do you hear the church bells from your house?" He said, "Yes, I can hear them." I said, "You should come. Have you ever been to a church?" He said, "I've walked into a church." I said, "How would you describe yourself spiritually?" He said, "Well, I'm supposed to be Buddhist, but I don't really practice that." I said, "You should come." He said, "What do you do there?" I said, "Well, if you come, I'll be towards the front. I love to bring my friends here to your restaurant, and I'd love for you to come to our church." I think he will. Wake up church. There are people all around us needing Christ. Wake up! Jesus promises of those who walk with Him: "I will never blot his name out of the book of life."

Jesus speaks of the church of Philadelphia. He says in Revelation 3:7:

*"I am the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens."*

Jesus has set before this church an open door of ministry. There are open doors in front of you, and Jesus promises in Revelation 3:12:

*“I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from My God out of heaven, and My own new name.”*

Lastly, to the church of Laodicea, Jesus identifies Himself as a faithful and true witness. He rebukes the church at Laodicea for they are neither cold nor hot. Laodicea was just six miles south of the famous hot springs at Hierapolis. This church was just 11 miles away from famous cold springs at Colossae. They were right in-between life-giving hot springs and life-giving cold springs, and Jesus said: “You are neither. You are lukewarm, apathetic.” You know how you become lukewarm? It is just by the ambient temperature around you. Some of us are hot. I mean really hot – in-your-face hot. You know that kind of Christian? Confront your sin – ouch! Call you out – ouch! Spotting your compromise – ouch! Telling you after the service, “That sermon went too long” – ouch! We need those people. Some of us are cold in a refreshing, wonderful, good way. You get around them and you are renewed, like a glass of cold water when you are thirsty and hot. Be who you are in Christ. We need the hot ones; we need the cold ones, but can’t be people just picking up the ambient temperature of the culture. Jesus promises in Revelation 3:21 to those who overcome:

*“I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne.”*

Each of these letters ends with the same summons: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” *Why Church?* is answered in Revelation because it's the church where heaven and earth come together in Christ. Christ's Word, His direct communication, isn't spoken to the world at large. It is given to His people, to live, to hear, and to put into practice. The church is the place where heaven and earth are joined together in Christ. So, what does this mean for us at Kenwood this morning? Two points.

Number one: ***Raise your expectations of why we gather as a church.***

EIRO:

The church is the place where we meet the King of the universe. The church community is God's family. The church is place where God reveals Himself. The church is where we express our love to God and experience His abundant blessings. He is going to do great things in you and through you. God really wants to meet you as He did to me, right there in that pew.

PASTOR DAVID:

The very first church experience of my life was when I was brought to church by my uncle,

Mike. He was the only Christian I knew in our extended family. I didn't know Christ, didn't trust in Him, and yet Uncle Mike brought me for the first time to church. I sensed that God was there, and I wanted to be where God was. After trusting Christ, at the first church I went to as a new Christian, I was overwhelmed during the worship. My first impression was that these people are singing as though God is real and that they know Him and that they can hear Him. Jesus Christ is alive. He is active, involved. He cares for the church. He sustains the church with the revelation of Himself, and the gathered church is His idea. Raise your expectations, number one, of why we gather. What happens when we do?

Number two: ***Prioritize your involvement.*** Get involved in what Jesus is doing in and through His church.

EIRO:

Church is where we will be part of God's grand vision. He is inviting us to work together to complete His plan. Not because He needs help, but because He wants us. This is a high honor to be even a small part of God's work in the world. When we trust God and step out of our comfort zone, that is where we meet Jesus. Church is a place where we love our neighbors, and from here we can share our blessings to those still outside of church. We may not see the results of our work right away. We don't have to worry about the outcome because God will take care of that.

At Proctor and Gamble, I do new product development. We come up with 100 new product ideas and out of that maybe five make it to the market. It's a huge investment of talent, time, and resources. Maybe only one of those products will produce a significant profit for the company, but the investment is worth it. We have been supporting our missionary friends, Marc and Yumiko. They served in Japan for almost 20 years, reaching out to young children and students. Can you guess how many students accepted Jesus over their 20 years of the hard work of ministry? When they first asked me that question, I was thinking like 100, maybe more? But do you know the answer? Only two! Japan is a very tough field for the seeds of the gospel to grow. In Japanese culture, we care so much about rules and traditions and conformity. There is a fear of being different from others, and being one percent is a tough decision. Also, the idea of God's forgiveness for the one who has done wrong just doesn't seem right. Maybe you also struggle to receive God's forgiveness. Marc and Yumiko came back to the US, and prayed about the next stage of their ministry. After much prayer, they decided to go back to Japan, trusting God's promise from Isaiah 45:6:

*“. . .that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides Me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.”*

They are again connecting with the students who are now adults and more independent from

our traditions and parents and more open to the gospel. I praise God for their faithfulness and hard work and stubbornness. For me, six months after I was baptized, God pushed me to help start the Japanese Fellowship in Cincinnati. I was a new Christian. I was not a pastor. I did not know the Bible well, but I just said: "I am willing," and this group has been meeting and gathering for over 17 years. There are worship services, a children's ministry, women's ministries for young mothers, Bible studies in many homes, and a men's ministry. We have seen people come to faith in Christ, people changed, marriages strengthen, and healings by God's power. What is Jesus Christ calling you to do today?

PASTOR DAVID:

Jesus's last word to the church is really an invitation. I'd like to ask you to stand and hear His word in Revelation 3:20. Jesus says:

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me."*

With all authority in heaven and on earth, Jesus is a polite sovereign. He knocks at the door of our lives. He doesn't knock the door down. He knocks. Jesus asks all of us: *"If anyone hears My voice."* That means that as He is standing at the door knocking, He is speaking. *"If you hear My voice,"* Jesus says, *"and open the door."* That's all you have to do. It doesn't matter the state of your house; it doesn't matter if you're ready to receive visitors. He's knocking, and if you hear Him this morning, then just open the door. When you open the door, Jesus promises: "I will come in. I will come into your life. I will come into your home. I will eat with you, and you with Me." Jesus, as the Bridegroom, invites us, the church as the bride, into an everlasting fellowship. He desires to take up residence in your heart and in your home. Let's make this song our prayer to offer the Lord our hearts and be found in Him.

Lord Jesus, we praise You, exalted sovereign, yet near. We praise You that You are all powerful, yet gentle. We praise You that You hold the stars in Your hand, and yet You are able to touch our shoulder. And we praise You that Your voice is like the sound of many waters, and yet able to speak to every human heart. Speak to us now, Lord, and help us open our lives to You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.