

Anabaptist History - 'Be History Makers!' (Day 22 Final Day)

by Dean Taylor

The church must recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church and become a thermostat that transforms society.

Duration: 58:48

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:5, Matthew 4:19, Matthew 28:19-20, John 3:3, James 1:22, Revelation 3:16

Topics: "Prophetic Ministry", "Christian Witness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being history makers rather than history stoppers in the church. It challenges individuals to be prophetic voices, to speak God's truth boldly, and to make a difference in the world by following Jesus wholeheartedly. The speaker urges the audience to be thermostats, influencing and transforming society, rather than thermometers merely reflecting the culture around them.

Transcript

Amen, amen, amen. All right, well, praise the Lord. All right, what I wanted to do today is, again, besides just running over it, I also wanted to just give a cap on where are we now that all this has happened.

You know, it's all come down to us now. You know, it's our turn, it's our history now. It's time for us to be history makers and not just read history.

Or maybe you'll have to get an allergy like me to old books if you can't stay out of old books. Oh, I forgot my Bible, I need that today. So, right back.

They clean with that pine saw, it smells just like the army. That's good flashbacks. All right.

All right, well, who recognizes this picture? Of course, maybe it's giving it away and anybody know who that is besides this side of the room we got here earlier? What's that? Number 7089, that's right. This is Martin Luther King, Jr. And this is when he was put in jail. And I have there April 16th, 1963 in the Birmingham jail.

Interesting, this particular picture, this copy of this picture was found when the sheriff's desk or deputy's desk in the day that he was died and that he was dead. And it's a little suspicious because that was where

he was shot. So it's kind of interesting, but this was a younger picture earlier time when he was put in jail.

And he was an impressive man. I don't think we would agree with marching on Washington and that type of thing. I think Jesus would instead show a shining example of the kingdom to the world instead of marching on Washington.

But nevertheless, I appreciate a man who can have strong convictions and speak out against some evils of the day. He spoke not just to the country, but he also spoke a lot of times to the church. He spoke on non-resistance, spoke against Vietnam and some of those things.

And again, I may not agree with everything Martin Luther King, Jr. did, but it's some interesting things that he did accomplish. Sometimes, like I said, he would come against the state, the country, but sometimes, like I said, he came against the church. In this particular time in Birmingham, when he came to Birmingham, he was aggrieved with the church.

He was, you know what his big thing was. He was, the African-Americans of this country were getting terrible treatment all over the country. And he was speaking out against that.

And he really, in many ways, changed the face of the country, perhaps a lot of ways the world with his efforts of getting the African-Americans more into the rights, even the privileges they have in this country. And so, but in Birmingham, when he was there at one of the meetings, before he got there, all the churches in town got together and published some things in the newspaper calling him an outside agitator and how all these things, and he just needs to settle down and all this, and we don't really have all these problems that you think we have. And he was very disappointed with the church.

Well, when he got to Birmingham, he was arrested. And as he got arrested a lot of times, this time was particular time that impressed him. And while he was there in jail, he grabbed together old pieces of newspaper, scraps of different things, and he wrote a letter.

And a letter is impressive. And I want you to hear an excerpt from that letter. And I want you to think about some of the words he said, because on this letter, particularly he's speaking to the church.

Sometimes he spoke to the nation. This time he was speaking primarily to the church in Birmingham and to the world. And I have an excerpt from that, and here's how it goes.

He says, there was a time when the church was very powerful and the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days, the church was not merely, now watch this now, the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion. It was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.

Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power become disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being disturbers of the peace, he's quoting from the letters that were sent to him, and outside agitators. But the Christians pressed on in the conviction that they were a colony of heaven, called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment.

They were too God intoxicated to be astronomically intimidated. Do I hear an amen? By their effort and example, they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiator contests. Infanticide is when you had a baby, just threw it out in the cold and it died.

Because of their example, they put an end to those things. But then he says, things are different now. Things are different now.

So often the contemporary church is weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arc defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often even vocal sanction of things as they are.

Now listen to this. But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions and be dismissed, watch this, as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the 20th century.

And he says, every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust. And he goes on. He says, I'm a raised church, I was raised a pastor's son of a pastor's son of a pastor's son, I think it was, at least two.

He said, I'm not talking from the outside, I'm talking from the inside, that the church today has got to wake up and stop just following. And this is the concept that I wanna give to you. And I hear it sometimes in your speech, in your talk, the way you talk about church life, the way you talk about the troubles, the way you talk about missions.

And I asked you the question that Martin Luther King Jr. asked the church in Birmingham. Are you a thermometer? Or are you a thermostat? A thermometer would look like the world, if the world's singing a certain way, you'll sing a certain way. The world dresses a certain way, you'll dress a certain way.

If the world has a certain kind of economics, you'll copy that. You'll just go along the way and be a thermometer. If it's cold, it's cold, you're cold.

If it's hot, you're hot. Or are you a thermostat? Martin Luther King Jr. said the early church was a thermostat. In other words, you go into your house, you set the thermostat, what happens? You turn the heat up, you're the one controlling it.

You're the one going into society and saying, I don't like this, and I'm going to change what I see. We may not agree with all the motives of Martin Luther King Jr., how he went about and accomplished this, but wow, we better get a hold of the idea that it's the church's job to be a thermostat and not a thermometer. You know, we find ourself in the constant debates that happen amongst young people of, so what's wrong with this music? What's wrong with this clothes? What's wrong, what's wrong, what's wrong, the answer is what's right about it.

What are you as a church doing that's setting a clear conviction and a voice that points to and glorifies God? That's the thermostat that I think he's talking about. Are you a thermometer? Or are you a thermostat? Every day, I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust. You know, eventually, if we continue to be thermometers, eventually the world wakes up, and there's really no point to go to church anymore.

I mean, let's face it, if it's really, sounds like the world, thinks like the world, personally, I'd rather stay home and have a pizza. You know what I'm saying? There's not much point in it. Christ came to plant his kingdom on this earth, and I believe with Martin Luther King, Jr., that he came to plant a thermostat.

He came to plant a thermostat, not an irrelevant social club. So let's just have a, let's think about this whole five weeks. We have before us a great cloud of witnesses who've done good things and done messed up some things, right? And hopefully what you can see today is that you're not alone.

There's been a long line of people who have tried to serve God with everything they had. And when you go about now to be history makers, realize that you're part of this family of saints that have tried to do these things. But let's just cap through the caps, to the tops of the, where we went through this week.

You know, we started with, we talked about that Russian evangelist, Mennonite evangelist, who gave the concept of the kingdom starting right there in the Garden of Eden, as a people of God. God's people there in the Garden of Eden. He went on to say, remember it was, went into families like Noah, and then to Abraham, and finally to Israel and Judah.

And then to the prophets. And the prophets foretold of a time when the Messiah would come. And in that time, the church would come to a kind of fruit and an existence that all nations would flow into it.

Let's look at a few of those scriptures. In Ezekiel 36, I read this first or second day, I can't remember. We heard that even our salvation is not about us.

It's about Him. It's about glorifying God. It says in Ezekiel chapter 36, when he's giving a prophecy, is when God's name has been blasphemed everywhere.

In Ezekiel chapter 36, verse 27, he said, God looking at all this, he said, but I had pity on my name, on my holy name, which the house of Israel hath profaned among the heathen everywhere they went. Therefore saith in the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God, verse 22, I do not this for your sake. What I'm about to do, I'm not gonna even do for your sake.

I'm not gonna do it for your sake, but I'm gonna do it for your sake, brother Dale. Oh, house of Israel, but for my holy namesake, which you has profaned among the heathen everywhere you went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which you profaned in the midst of them, and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their very eyes.

When I raise up a holy people that are zealous for me and jealous for my holy name, the Gentiles, the whole world, will know of it. And that's what I'm gonna do, he said. But guess what? It's not about you, Jacob.

It's about his holy name. It's about his holy name. Another prophet, Isaiah, spoke of it.

And he said there'd come a time when the wars of all the wars and the rumors of wars shall be just wrapped up in their uniforms and their boots will be used for fuel for fire in Isaiah chapter nine. And then he said that there's gonna be this incredible thing that happens. He says, for then a virgin is gonna conceive, and he says in verse six of Isaiah chapter nine, for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Now watch this now. Of the increase of his government, this government that this child shall bring in, of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end. Upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth forever.

Watch this. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. And he did.

He did. Jesus did come. And I can't tell you how much I love that he did.

I love Jesus. And I simply cannot wait to see him and spend time with him and talk to him. I love Jesus.

And Jesus, when he came and held that Isaiah scroll in his hand in Luke chapter four, it was a memorable time. Right out he got out of the wilderness. And he said, they're opening it up.

He walked up there and he took it. And Luke chapter four, verse 16, excuse me, Luke chapter four, verse 16. He said, and he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up.

This is the place he grew up. And as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up for it to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah.

And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me. Watch this.

To preach the gospel to the poor and has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recover the sight to the blind and has set at liberty them that are bruised. And watch this now, verse 19. And to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, the jubilee.

And he closed the book and he gave it unto the ministers and sat down and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened onto him. I love this one of my favorite whole moments in the whole Bible. And he began to say unto them, this day, this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

You heard it right now. These prophets of Isaiah. He went on then and he began to show us not only this incredible fulfillment of prophecy, but a plan, a plan that would change the world.

And he sat down on the top of a mountain and God came and preached a sermon and gave us a blueprint, a manifesto, if you would, of how he wants the whole world to be changed. And he gave it to us. In Matthew chapter five, he sat down, he began to preach what's called today the sermon on the mount.

How many of you have ever read a sermon or downloaded a sermon or heard somebody else preach a sermon? I have, but this is a good one to download. You know what I'm saying? It's the best one. It's a sermon from God.

And he went through there and he talked about that he's gonna have a people and these people are gonna change the world and they're gonna be different. They're gonna be meek. They're gonna be thirsting for righteousness.

They're gonna be coming to him and wanting more from him. He says in here that they're going to be able to even take anger that's in men so often and crucify that. That's what his people are gonna be like.

They're not gonna have the hypocrisy with their things like gifts. He took the marriage covenant and this blows my mind, but he made it so strong. He raised up the role of the family so strong that he said that bond between a man and a woman could never be broken.

So that even looking at a woman differently than your wife is adultery. He said marrying someone else's covenant woman is adultery. Raised that family to that height.

So there are words of his people would be so clear. They won't even swear oaths. In a world that was caught up with war, he said that his people and his plan for the whole world and humanity would love their enemies.

He went on to say they won't even sue if something is taken from them. They won't go into lawsuits. In chapter six, he talks about their whole prayer life and that their prayer life would be something that's genuine and they go into their closets and meet with him.

He says here in that prayer life that his people are gonna ask for this kingdom of heaven to come on earth. On earth, like it is in heaven. Not just wait till we get to heaven, not just wait for some far off dispensation, but that his people would pray, oh God, bring this kingdom here on earth.

And that would be a mark of who they'd be. He talked about their fasting, coming before them and fasting. He even talked about their economics.

The same people who were strong with their marriages and strong with their non-resistance, he talked about their economics. And they would have this radical view of not storing up treasures and being able to share the things that they have with each other. And this would be a kind of thing that would change the face of the earth.

It's right there with the rest of the things. He talked that this people would be this zealous, but yet not have a judgmental attitude with one another and not go against people in that way. And then he goes on to say that, but these people are gonna be a disciplined people.

And he gives us the idea of a straight gate. Now it's not spelled like straight, like S-T-R-A-I-G-H-T, straight. It's straight gate, which means like this.

Remember what Leonhard Schemer said. It's like going through that vase. But there's some kind of principle that when people apply themselves to the word of God and just squeeze through that just to follow him, it's just a beautiful fruit.

And he says, if you do that, you'll have life. It's just, it's a principle in that. And then he lets us know that, he lets us know that these things that I'm teaching you, they're, if not everyone who just goes around calling me Lord, they're gonna be with me forever in heaven.

These are very important to him. And then he lets us know just a common principle. Any society, any church, any people who builds their principles of life, their kingdoms, their nations, their philosophy of life, if you build it on any other thing than these teachings that I just gave you, any other teaching than this manifesto that I just laid out, this will cure the world.

And if you do it on any other principle, it'll be like building it on sand. And when the rain comes, it'll wipe it away. It'll wipe it away.

He gave us a design to change the world. But then he talks, when he gave us that plan for the kingdom, he told us in John chapter three, that you're not gonna get it. Things that I'm talking about, you're not even gonna understand.

Unless you're born again. Unless God from heaven has come and you don't become just born of this world, but you actually become born of God. Born of God.

And then if you're born again, then you'll, he said, see the kingdom. You cannot see the kingdom unless you're born again. And then he said a little later, you can't enter this kingdom unless you're born again.

Let me ask you today. All these things we're talking about. If you're not born again, you're never gonna get it.

You're never gonna understand it. You must come to God. And then he says in that same passage, we tend because we like our sin not to come to God.

He says, people don't come to the light because their deeds are evil. But if you desire to come to God, you'll let your deeds be seen and you'll see your sin. And you can bring those before God and he will take those sins away and let you see this kingdom.

We don't even do that in our own strength. In John chapter 16, he told us, he's gonna bring something here that's gonna stay with us. Not just something, someone, the Holy Spirit.

And in John chapter 16, he said that I'll go away, but I'll let the Holy Spirit come. And it's this Holy Spirit that will remain in you and within the church. But when that Holy Spirit comes, the first thing he's gonna do is to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

If you have sin in your life, you can bring those things before a Holy God and a Holy Spirit will bring those things to be able to let the blood of Jesus forgive you of your sins and be able to enter into this kingdom. He then goes just one page over next from that in my Bible, from John 16 to John 17. Again, to say all this is gonna be looking like a church, this kingdom.

And he says there in John chapter 17, and if we could get ahold of this, he says, and I pray for them, and I pray not for them in the world, but for them which thou hath given me, for they are thine, speaking to his heavenly father. And all mine are thine, everything I have is yours, and thine are mine, and everything you have is mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, for I am glorified in them.

And as I come to thee, holy father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hath given me, that they may be one, just like we're one. Oh, that attribute and nature of God's oneness there. His, the unity, the brotherhood of the Trinity, the community of the Trinity there is powerful, and that attribute of God needs to be represented in the brotherhoods today.

He goes on across my page and says, neither I pray for these alone, but for them which shall believe on me through their word. That's us, thank the Lord, he's prayed for us there too. That they may be one, again, as thou father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, why? That the world may know that thou hath sent me.

And watch this, so he stakes his testimony on this. And the glory which thou giveth me, I have given them, that they may be one, just like we are. Get a hold of that, get a hold of that.

And then he took us to Pentecost, and right before he went up in the book of Acts, he talked about the kingdom of God, and they were still asking him questions. And they knew they couldn't even with all that, even getting rights with their sins, and being born of God, they still needed to be empowered. And so they prayed, and he said, wait, and I'm gonna give you power.

In the same way, church, we've got to be able to, be able to rest upon and wait upon God until he gives us the anointing and power. And when he did that, he fulfilled it, and he gave a Pentecost, a revival, a powerful Pentecostal experience there. And look to see the way the church behaved.

They were a church that gave up their regular lives. They shared their stuff, they shared their lives, they shared their thoughts, and they became a church that was moving on the move, and it didn't matter the things of this earth, their material possessions, their thoughts, and they were going somewhere. Already you get to Acts chapter four, and they're needing it again.

In Acts chapter four, they prayed, and it said the place shook, and they came, and again, God did the same thing. Again, it took them and it shook them in both their economics, their spirituality, their life, their plans, everything about them was directed towards propagating the kingdom of God. It was a powerful, powerful move of God.

You get to the end of Acts, and it ends kind of abruptly, doesn't it? You ever notice that? Acts 28, it just kind of says, was that it? You know, I think there's a reason why. Because Acts 29 is what we just spent five weeks talking about, and Acts 29 is today. The Holy Spirit plans to continually pour out his spirit on the church, and it goes through.

It goes through. As we went through the weeks, what'd we do? We saw the early church, and we saw them struggle. We saw them being a church, though, that was, like Martin Luther King Jr. said here at the beginning, he said that they were a people that were changing the mores of the society.

They were able to be a separated people from the world, but separated unto God, but yet, in their spiritual and physical separation, they still were there among the people, showing them that. The women, we see lots of teachings, and I gave them some of them living in modesty, and we see this beautiful concept of these veiled women. We see men, even, with their modesty, and being able to deal with anger, and warfare, and materialism, and those sorts of things.

They dealt with it. It was impressive. We saw them, as they went on, they had to deal with different heresies and different problems.

We saw the Gnostics raise up, and the Gnostics were people, remember, that said, well, what happens on the outside doesn't matter as long as your heart's right. Christianity is mental, and they fought against that, and prevailed. Church kept going.

We took it up to a church that went through different struggles and things. We got to a man, Constantine, and one man, Constantine, an emperor, and we see a church that kind of equestians to him, and allows him to be able to take over, and suddenly, the church and the state are never the same, as he brings the church and the state together, but still, we saw a persecuted remnant church go on through different mistakes, through different things. We traced that through the first week.

We looked at people like the Waldensians, the Albigensians, even with their mistakes, the people that were trying to put the Sermon on the Mount into practice, and we did that. We came right up to different people. We looked at Hus.

We saw the different, like the Iona Island with St. Patrick, the different monastic communities that were this mission-based community, kind of like the Moravians that were going from the Isle of Iona into Germany and those types of places. We then came to some men that were enlightened, and we talked

about the lives of people like Martin Luther, the original Martin Luther, and we saw some beautiful things that he did and talked about raising up the word of God and salvation by faith and those sorts of things, and then we also saw that, quickly, the temptation of power and how it kind of tainted things, and when the kings and the emperors were in charge of the Reformation, how the Magisterial Reformation took on a kind of a violent way. We saw how the peasants, the common people then, went on and just took it into kind of a revolution, took some of these thoughts and ran with it, and these people like Thomas Munzer who thought there was gonna be a bringing in a whole peasants' revolution.

Out of that turmoil, we saw some people that carefully looked at the scriptures, people in Zurich. We saw the birth of the Anabaptists, so-called. We saw them die for their faith, people like Conrad Grebel, Felix Mons, George Blaurock.

We saw those brothers there, persecuted for their faith, killed, and we saw that persecuted around Switzerland. We saw a whole migration of people going to Moravia. Some of those hiding in the different mountains around Switzerland.

In Moravia, we see a whole 12,000 people that made it there, finally giving birth to the Hutterites and the different Moravian Anabaptists that was one of the most incredible mission operations this world has ever seen. Still today, virtually hardly unknown, which is a cry in shame, except now we know. We see that then, we trace these people, we see them try to make it through persecution, having some terrible problems, revived by revival, and then again, making it over to Russia.

Here we see in Switzerland, we see different people trying to come and going through ups and downs, and finally through martyrs and missionaries, people like Hans Landis, who had their heads chopped off in Zurich, again, bringing light again. We see people like Lieutenant Heinrich Frick, who was converted and then bringing up the Ulrich Miller and the traveling evangelist that led to the Amish and led to the different Swiss brothers that were there. We saw powerful people.

Going the other way, we saw Milkier Hoffman going up to Holland and spreading up the gospel there, but taking a little bit of a bad turn with the spiritualism. Brought into this whole Munster tragedy, and we learned what it means when you don't look and don't have the sure word of prophecy be your sure word, and you allow all these dreams and visions to be able to confuse us. Sure word of the word of God needs to be our only God, and we learned that lesson in the tragedy of Munster.

We saw people that just because they're baptizing adults, doesn't mean they were part of this New Testament people. We saw that there as well. In Holland, we saw, again, a revival of people.

We saw mass baptisms and revivals, and finally, we saw also church splits and some of the lessons that we can learn from that, getting our eyes off Jesus, getting our eyes off the important things of that manifesto that'll change the world. From there, we traced the people into around Poland and Prussia, and we saw them go into Russia, and there in Russia, we saw them go through things and had their issues and their struggles. There, we saw revivals happen again, and we saw missionary life happen, but then we started to see, again, a people that were on fire for the Lord, wanted to study, and we mentioned how they even started to go to evangelical seminaries.

They were actually sending their, the Russian Mennonites were sending some of their fiery preachers to German seminaries in Hamburg. It's interesting, I didn't share this, I kept meaning to, but I kept forgetting. Remember when those Russian Mennonites finally made it to Canada, we saw them, and then from

Canada, because Canada was saying they had to educate their children, said, no, we're going to Central America.

They went to Central America in Paraguay, but then Paraguay changed their rules, and the community that started way back in Russia in Chortice moved again, but another one came in, one that was a little more influenced by the evangelical seminaries, and it's interesting, I didn't mention this, I never got to it, but I'm gonna mention to you right here. I don't know if you all remember the Bruderhof was one of the newer Hutterites that were started during Nazi times in World War II. When they got kicked out of Germany, they, the Mennonite Central Committee sent them to Central America, and they got there, because no one else would take them, and when they were there, this whole idea of what happens, we see the mistakes of what happens when our people get involved with politics.

Later on, I remember in the revival time, we saw how our own people got wrapped up in the whole prohibition things, and how Church of the Brother Men even became governor. Well, down in Paraguay, this German people started to hear in the early 30s about a zealous man who was crying out for the rights of the German people, and they were, for almost 100 years, being trained in German seminaries. Zealous Russian Mennonites.

And so, what happens when we start to get involved with politics, and we think the politics of this world can cure our problems? Bad things happen. The Bruderhof show up for church one day near Ascension in Paraguay, and this is the picture they snapped in the church there in Paraguay. You can't see it from there, but this picture over the altar is a picture of Adolf Hitler.

They didn't know better. Yeah, we know who he was. At the time, it's politics.

Now, don't point your fingers and just say, you know, the Russian Mennonites get enough black eyes. The point that I wanna get across is that they thought this was a cause. When they got down there, they said, oh, you're from Germany.

Oh, they said, yeah, and the Bruderhof was like, listen, fortunately, they went right in this very church and preached nonresistance and preached about this and helped them to bring this back around. And praise God, they did that. Later on, they repented of it.

Obviously, the whole world knew who this man was, but all the lessons when we let that kingdom design get mixed up with the kingdoms of the world. Happened with Constantine, happened with the Church of the Brethren, it happened with Mennonites in the 1950s, it happens today, and it happened here. Let it be something you remember.

So from there, we came into the Mennonite revivals, came into the Mennonite enlightenment. Even before that, we saw the revivals in America, and again, we saw the temptation of being a revived church, but then kind of getting caught up with the revolution and seeing men that were starting on really good terms, but then entering in with swearing oaths to the nation and things like that, and again, that simple message, that manifesto of Jesus Christ that said, wait, I've got a plan that'll change the world. And you know what? I like Jesus's plan.

I think it's great. And again, we have to keep coming back to that and coming back to that and that. So here we are through the 1800s, we went through that with revival time, we went through the 1900s, and we went through the 1950s and the different things with the Brunk revivals, and now here we are today.

I hope that when you look over this five weeks that we can look at some of these things and don't point fingers at some of these mistakes, but point fingers here and say, how is my thinking getting involved with this world, with the politics of this world? How is my thinking looking at some of these things? I have two books. Oh, let's take a quick break. I'll grab these two books.

I have one little last word and then we'll do our trivia questions. So quick break, I wanted to show you these two books, make it real quick so we can have fun with our trivia. Sorry, I got preaching too long.

Welcome back. All right, as we remember the slides from Holland, we got a warning from Holland. They were speaking to us with a warning.

You remember the pictures that showed the big minnow, medium minnow, and the little minnow? Remember that? And they were showing the population of the Dutch, the Mennonites in Holland during the 1600s, 1700s, and now today. We heard Esther's dad, Benueel, ask, well, how many people were here in a church that seats over 2,000, the Single Kirk Church? How many here were Sunday, 25? But I appreciate their spirit there, a very honest spirit, and they were almost giving us a warning. This is what happened to us.

I found a couple books. And I'll show you just a few statistics here in the ending here. One is called Anabaptist World, USA by Donald Crabill and Nelson Hostetter.

And this is an interesting one that Esther's dad made me realize. It's right here in the library. It's Road Signs for the Journey by Conrad Carnegie.

It's forwarded by John D. Roth. And both of these do a good thing of going through and showing some statistics. And these statistics are very revealing.

And it's written by them. I appreciate it. Again, I don't want to point fingers at anybody.

My whole idea and design is for us to point fingers at ourself and let us wake up to some of the, some of our thinking is gonna go down these same lines. They're waking up their own people, okay? And that's some of the things they're trying to do too. And I appreciate that.

But this one here, Crabill and Hostetter, give this idea, they try to put the families of churches into three categories. They have the category of the Old Orders here, okay? And they're putting Old Order, Groffville Mennonites, Hutterites in here. And then they have the, in the middle is kind of all of us.

That middle road always scares me to be in the middle. But we're in the middle, all right? This is like my analogy where I say, everybody who doesn't drive horses but doesn't have TVs, you're kind of in that middle. That's kind of, all right, here we all are.

And then the other ones, they have Transformational is the title they give. Brothers in Christ, Church of the Brethren, Mennonite USA would be in there and some of those different things would be these that they would, in their wording, would say be transforming from here. The question that I bring to us here is, are we solid here out of conviction? Or are we also transforming in some of the areas that they're seeing in their own people that I'm gonna bring out today, where are we? And I'd like to also show, well, we saw in Holland, I asked the question, did it work? All those same things that people were saying in the 1700s, people are saying today, let's worry about the things that are important.

Let's not point on small things. Let's stop this and stop that. Well, did it work? No, it didn't work.

Let's see what's happening today. Let's see what's happening today. In this book here by Carnegie, in this book here, he demonstrates something that's happening within his church.

It'd be the Mennonite USA, and praise God, they've kept these records through all these years that he could go back and take a survey again and repeat the same surveys. I really wish that we could critically analyze ourselves like they do and be able to look at some of our trends because I think it's very healthy what he's done here. So please, don't point fingers at them.

Let's look at ourselves. And they're showing that the proportion of members under the age of 45 is drastically decreasing. And they're saying, wake up, church, we're dwindling.

And we're dwindling quick. Now, here in the early 1900s, all those Russian Mennonites came to the Midwest and most of them joined with the General Conference. And so Roth brings out in his histories, I mean, the Russian Mennonites saved the General Conference.

It was, they made them exist. And so they had that gigantic boost, but still now again, they're starting to see dwindling here. He also brings out in the book that a lot of the ladies are getting higher education.

And in getting higher education, they're no longer having children anymore. The average rate of children amongst the Mennonites today, the Mennonite USA, is 1.4. 2.1 or 2.2, he mentions that, yeah. 2.1, oh, that's just the national average.

Oh, no, it started in 2.1 at 72. But yeah, it has to be, I mean, it has to be at least two. That was with no one dying or no one leaving, all right? So we're here seeing, we're seeing a trend that if they're bringing out saying, wake up, and that's the spirit he gives this book, wake up.

If this trend continues in this way, we're not gonna exist anymore. So let's look at ourselves, and which way are we, are we buying into any of these kind of worldly philosophies? He also mentions in his book different attitudes that are affecting the church, okay? Well, if you're not having babies, you better be at least evangelizing. So let's look at evangelism.

So in the book, Carnegie brings out these facts. Well, let's talk about personal evangelism. How many people speak out about their faith outside the church? And you can't really see on your chart, but there's a different graph between the pastors and the people, oh, here it is down here, you can see that.

So 51% of the people tell people about the church or speak about faith and persons outside the church. That means half the people, even on an interview, say they don't even ever speak to people outside the church. Try to convert others to Christ, only 18% people do.

That's a problem, okay? When it comes to invite non-Christians to attend, 13%. Now, maybe in some of their areas, we're not around. A lot of our problems is we're not around non-Christians, and that's a problem, too.

We've kind of cloistered ourselves away. Belief in God. I can't hardly read that.

Let me read it from my book. I know that God really exists, and I have no doubt about it. The pastors of the Mennonite church, he's bringing out, wake up.

Only 83% of the pastors said, I know that God exists. Okay, and that's a good high number, but these are pastors of the church, okay? And again, now, please don't point fingers. I appreciate these pastors' honesty.

Other ones that he talked about, and why I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God. 15% were that 12% of the laity. Then beliefs about Jesus.

He brings that up. Beliefs about Jesus. Jesus is the only way to God, and those without faith in Jesus will not be saved.

Only about half the pastors believe that, 54%. After a while, I'd rather stay home and have pizza. You know what I mean? And people catch on to this.

Again, what I'm trying to do is not look at them. I keep saying that. Let's look at ourselves, and I wish that someone amongst us would do a survey, and I wish somebody would be as honest as these people are being in our surveys, okay? And the other one was, Jesus is the clearest revelation of God, but God may save people who don't know him, who don't know Jesus.

43% of the pastors say he'll save people who don't know Jesus, and 24 of the laity. He brings out in the book that there's a big difference, though, amongst the minorities and the poor people of the church, and his cry through this whole book is the hope for the Mennonite church is amongst the poor and the disenfranchised people, that their faith was very high and much higher statistically than the ones that I'm showing you in almost every single situation. All right, so let's look at that.

Now, so let's look at some other graphs. I turn to the other book here, and this is the Mennonite Church Membership USA, and this is, again, from the Crabel and Hostetter book, this one here, and he shows the growth and what's happening here recently, and the growth here in the 1950s, again, we see a lot of evangelism, we see revivals, we see all that happening. Remember, we talked about that during that period, and then we also had also still Russian Mennonites pouring into that period, but then we come here, and it's peaking out, but now it's starting to decline, and what I've read recently is even now making some other decline.

They're saying, and I'm glad that there's prophets in their church already speaking out like this, saying, let's do something about it, and amen for that. How about a group that was more revivalistic from the beginning, a group that was very much into revival, but a little less clear on the sense of community, the Church of the Brethren. Let's look at their chart.

Hmm, being a revival man, this one scares me to death. All right, I don't point fingers at them. I like the Church of the Brethren, but wake up.

When you have no clear understanding of who you are as a people, sometimes it's very difficult. You just wanna sound like the modern American evangelicals and be like the modern American evangelicals, guess what? The modern American evangelicals are doing it better than you are. There's no point going to our churches anymore, all right? What are you standing for? And I think that's what a lot of these people are beginning to realize.

So what about, unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, so that we don't get a big head or a complex, the middle group's not graphed. So let's go to the other extreme. What about people who are staunch to the other side, clear sense of community and all this? Well, you gotta be curious, what do their graphs look

like? I mean, you know, people who just can't get it right, right? Let's look at their graphs.

Here's the Hutterites, okay? See an incredible growth, and it's going still. And in the last one that I have, let's see the Old Order Amish. Okay, what do you think it looks like? The sharpest rise out of them all, there it is.

So, granted there's different factors in all this, your mind can go, yeah, but what about this, what about that, but okay, just saying what it is, just saying, just saying, all right? Wake up, wake up, wake up. All right, final line. Somebody asked Margaret Mead, Margaret Mead's what's called an anthropologist.

An anthropologist is a person who studies cultures, studies tribes, and she was a famous anthropologist. And somebody asked Margaret Mead once, is ever a little group of people ever made a difference in this world? You know, let's say a little group of people like this, has there ever been a little group of people that have made a difference? Her reply was this, never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Get that, get that. Small groups of committed people with a clear vision, a clear sense of who they are as a people, and an on-fire purpose, it's the only, those are the people that have changed this world for the good or for the bad. And it's never gonna be anything different.

I close with this statement that I was so impressed with in this Midnight Church, Midnight USA book by Carnegie, and this was the quote that Esther's dad sent me. And I have it, it's three or four paragraphs, and it's so good that I put it up here and I also gave you a copy of it here in your, here in your paper there, and I'm gonna read it to you. It's excellent, excellent.

He is a prophet, obviously amongst his people, Carnegie, and he's saying these things, again, just trying, he's a member of their church, but he's just trying to say, hey, let's listen. And his last words of what he says, I want us to hear in our background, let's hear it. This is from Roadsides for the Journey, a profile of Midnight Church USA by Conrad L. Carnegie.

The Middle and the Margins, here's what he says. Some may be surprised by my use of the book Jeremiah as a biblical narrative around which to organize a sociological analysis of Mennonites today. He uses Jeremiah all through his book.

I do so as one who believes that the Old Testament, seen through the life and teachings of Jesus, offers a prophetic challenge that many of us would prefer to forget. Spending time in Jeremiah has strengthened my conviction about the need and opportunity for Mennonites to give a prophetic witness today, to boldly proclaim God's plan and purpose to the world. Like all prophetic voices, this witness comes most effectively from those whose lives contrast with the values and lifestyles of the larger culture of the world.

And society, who intentionally challenge the dominant culture narrative. In other words, prophetic voices are most often from the margins of society, from the alienated, disenfranchised, and devalued by those in the middle. Biblical examples of such prophetic responses from the margins include Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself.

Any relevant and effective call to follow Jesus rarely comes from those in the middle of society, those focused on protecting their power, status, control, or affluence. While Mennonites historically shared a place on the margins of the broader culture, it is clear from the data of Mennonite members profile 2006 that not many of us, with the exceptions of the racial ethnic members, remain there today. Listen now, and

don't you dare point a finger.

Most Mennonites are more like the broader culture, something our parents and grandparents often refer to as the world than ever before. Our ability, our unwillingness to step away from the comfortable middle where North American Christians find themselves today is a primary reason that the church, including Mennonites, has lost its prophetic voice. We have stopped speaking the whole truth about Christ to our neighbors, our friends, our communities, the nation, and the world.

Too often, when we attempt to do so, it is in diluted, popular language that ensures that we and our potential converts won't lose our skin over the deal, that nothing too radical will become of such a decision to follow Jesus. Last one, Begum, this Old Testament scholar, suggests that those in the middle of society, and here's the whole point, I love it, those in the middle of society and of the middle of the church are what he called history stoppers. History stoppers, we've been talking about history.

Those in the middle of the society or the middle of the church are history stoppers rather than history makers. History makers, including the prophets, speak on the edges of their culture and society, shouting God's truth to those in the middle, to the history stoppers who are too busy preserving their own position and status to bother with God's truth. History makers, by speaking the truth, begin to shape and to put into motion the plans and purposes of God.

The radical, off-the-wall words of history makers become the foundation for the new thing that God wants to do. The problem is that most of us in North America have achieved our current status by siding with the history stoppers. Preserving our position and protecting our investments while watering down the truth about our sinful condition and a costly gospel.

The church in North America is in desperate need of a few more prophetic history makers and a few less pathetic history stoppers. What a perfect conclusion to this five week of church history. I bring us the challenge today.

Are you a history maker? Are you a history stopper? It's one thing to study history. It's another thing to make history. We can read books, we can get rashes like I do when I read old books.

We can do all those things until we're blue in the face. We can make A's on a history class. But to be a history maker, it's gonna be a challenge.

And I believe that's the challenge that we have before us. John F. Kennedy once said, I was thinking he was quoting from Dante's Inferno. He said, the darkest part of hell are reserved for those, Dante says, he said, in his pictures of the Inferno, the darkest parts of hell are reserved for those who in a moment of moral crisis maintain their neutrality, the middle road, the easy way.

Are you a thermometer or are you a thermostat? Are you a history stopper or are you a history maker? I pray that we can look at this cloud of witnesses that we've had over these five weeks. We can let that simple message that Jesus gave us. And as I've been bringing it all the way, Dean, could you sum up, could you sum up everything you have in 30 seconds? I can sum it up in two words.

It was the same message that Jesus gave to Matthew, the tax collector, when he saw him. It's the same message that he gave to those people who were fishing in their nets that were there. It's the same word that he says over and over again.

Follow me. Let's make it real easy. Let's bring it down real simple.

What if Jesus really meant every word he said? We take this with everything he has given us. Take that Holy Spirit that convicts us of sins and makes us born again of a new spirit of God. Takes that and ignites that into a church with a purpose and then sends us out on a great commission.

It's also one of his commands. And we take that to the ends of the earth. I guarantee you if we do that, we'll be history makers and not history stoppers.

We'll be thermostats and not thermometers. Let's pray. Oh, dear heavenly fathers, we just survey over Zion, over all these faithful men and women of God, people who have tried, people who have messed up.

And we say, God, please have mercy on us. And Lord, we want today to be one of those history makers. There's anyone here this day, father, who truly have never given their life to you.

Lord, I do pray that you would just wake them up and show them their sinful condition, but for a holy God. And I pray that you would let your spirit cause them to be a new creature. I pray that every one of us, Lord, would just receive that Holy Spirit that wants to bring purpose and quicken our mortal bodies and transform us into the image of Jesus Christ.

I pray for our churches, that they may be on fire communities of God that will light a fire in this world that nothing can put it out. Oh God, we can't even start to do this in our own flesh. It is only by your grace and by your Holy Spirit would you ask that father today.

It's in Jesus name that we pray, amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/V4ETZEtcag.mp4>

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