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| **What is the Church?** |  |

What is the Church and why does it matter? If the last two years have taught us anything, it is surely that the Church is not the building, but the people. We are living through a time in Scotland when, simultaneously, the Church is in decline, yet interest in faith is growing. We are at an urgent juncture in the history of the Church in Scotland and never has there been a time where we reclaim and re-establish our identity and our purpose as the people of God.

In this short series, we ask “What is the Church?”. Each week, we will look at key passages from the Bible, and ask key questions, about what the Church is, why the Church matters, how the Church can make an impact, and what Church life should look like.

It is our prayer that in studying God’s word together on this important topic, each of us might be challenged and encouraged to examine afresh our attitude to church and that we might reinvest ourselves in our local fellowship at Bellevue, so that, together, we might be the people that God is calling us to be in our generation.

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| **Date**  Sunday 5th September | **The Identity and Purpose of the Church: What is the Church and Why does it Matter?**  **1 Peter 2:4-12**  “Biblical religion is inescapably corporate” (Bruce Milne, Know the Truth, p209)  Central to the understanding of the Old Testament is God’s promise of a nation that he would bless and that through them, “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3). God’s covenant with Noah (Genesis 9) is followed by covenants with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12, 15, 17). These covenants are applied afresh to Israel at the time of Moses (Exodus) and David (1 and 2 Samuel), promises God makes that, while containing conditions for humans, ultimately depend upon the grace and power of God.  Jesus, through his death, establishes a new covenant in his blood (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). Through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we become part of the people of God.  This wonderful passage from 1 Peter affirms our identity and purpose as the people of God. | **Speaker**  Scott Hamilton |
| Sunday 12th September | **The Church is The Body of Christ: Why Should I bother with Church?**  **1 Corinthians 12:12-31**  Paul uses this image of the church to speak about how belief in Christ draws us together with other believers.  Christ is the whole, of which we are part, and we must play our part, recognising the privileges and responsibilities that this brings (Rom 12:3-8; Eph 1:3-14; 1 Cor 12:12-31) and submitting to Christ, who is the head of the church (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18, 3:19) from whom our life flows. | Jim Gladstone |
| Sunday 19th September | **The Church is The Vineyard of God: How Can the Church Make an Impact?**  **John 15:1-17**  The Old Testament image of Israel as God’s vineyard, planted and nurtured by God to bring forth fruit (Isa 5:1-7; Ezek 19:10-14; Hos 10), was often used to speak about the failure of Israel.  Jesus echoes that failure of Israel in his parable of the vineyard tenants (Matt 21:33-46; Mk 12:1-12)  Jesus declares himself the true vine, on which the church depends for its life and existence and restates again the promise and purpose of God that his people should bear fruit. | Alex Warren |
| Sunday 26th September | **The Church is a Fellowship of People: What Should Church Life Look Like?**  **Acts 2:42; Romans 12:9-13; Hebrews 10:24-25**  Key to church life is that our life in Christ is something we share together. That fellowship should lead to love and devotion to one another (Rom 12:9-13)  Our shared life in Christ is expressed practically in self-giving love for each other and includes gathering together (Heb 10:25), hospitality (Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9), practical provision for each other’s needs (Acts 2:42-47), bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), encouraging one another (1 Thess 5:11; Heb 3:13), and praying for each other (Eph 6:18-20).  This rich communal life, as well as being a major encouragement and commitment for each of us, should be one of the outstanding attractions of Christianity to those outside the church (John 13:34-35). | Alan  Paterson |