

# The church is not Six Flags over Jesus

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My very best memories as a boy growing up are often linked to my time around the church campus and with the church family. I will never know what it's like to grow up disconnected from the life of the church. My days as a boy were spent building friendships with people in the church. I married a girl from our local church (we don't remember the first time we met). Basically, I grew up in the church. I'm eternally grateful for my time spent on the church's campus playing games with friends, playing basketball in the gymnasium, and going on church related trips. However, I'm most grateful for the time spent on the church campus gathered in one room worshipping God with the church.

Today, there are various and sundry opinions on how to make the church successful and relevant to a modern culture. Sadly, many pastors and church leaders are turning their local church campus into an amusement park for Christians rather than a campus designed for discipleship and worship. Everything from a fire truck baptistry to indoor fireworks and weekly rock concerts are being used to attract people to church.

As we consider the importance of God's church – the very bride of Christ – we should likewise evaluate the methods, strategies, and techniques that are being employed in our day beneath the umbrella of gospel ministry.

## **Pastors are not performers**

As a pastor, I've attended many different conferences designed for pastors and church leaders. I've likewise attended many denominational meetings designed for the local church and pastoral ministry. What I've seen in those conferences have troubled me through the years. It seems that new categories for ministry have emerged onto the scene including gospel ventriloquists, gospel puppeteer, gospel comedian, gospel magician, gospel power team, gospel actors, and more. It's almost as if today's church has lost confidence in the simple and straightforward proclamation of the gospel.

Many of today's pastors are quite comfortable organizing special events and engaging in various types of entertainment to grow their church. It's not uncommon today to see pastors dressing up in costumes and acting out their sermon as opposed to preaching it. Are pastors performers? Did Paul write to the church at Corinth in order to remind them that it pleases God to save sinners by foolish entertainment? Did Paul instruct Timothy to dress up and entertain the people of Ephesus or did he charge him to preach the Word?

The pastor is not called to entertain goats. His duty is to shepherd souls by faithfully feeding the flock of God.

## **Worship is not a roller coaster**

When I go to Six Flags with my children, they often want to get me on as many roller coasters as possible. My children are thrill seekers. If you look at the design of the roller coaster, it's built in such a way as to get immediate results. From the first drop to the final sudden stop, the track is designed with the goal of entertainment. Nobody wants to ride a boring roller coaster – right?

When it comes to the worship service, many church leaders and pastors are now designing their worship services in similar ways. The goal of entertainment from the opening of the service until the benediction is evident from the time you walk into the church's worship center. The choice of lights, their music, the lack of dead space, the lack of silence, the length of their prayers, the method of preaching, and the use of technology all point to a foundational goal of making people satisfied with the ride.

However, today's evangelical church needs to recognize that worship is not a roller coaster. Our goal is not always to have an immediate result of happiness and success. Sometimes worship isn't fun. Sometimes worship isn't a thrill. Sometimes genuine worship leaves us with conviction and tears rather than the giddy laughter of a thrill ride.

## **The need for healthy church membership**

We do live in a day where puppets are often preferred over preachers and where the worship service is expected to be designed like an exciting roller coaster ride. There is much need for spiritual growth and maturity within the evangelical church today.

Although I critique the evangelical church in these areas, I am one who believes in God's Church. I think it would be foolish to repackage the local church or to abandon it altogether. God has ordained the church as His plan for His people, but there is a need for greater health among the children of God in the area of ecclesiology. As we consider the next 500 years of church history in light of the approaching anniversary of the Reformation this October, the area that needs the most attention in our day is biblical ecclesiology.

The church is not a waste of time nor is it a broken road. The church is God's special and unique plan for all Christians. We must not give up on the church.

As we consider the need for health in the local church today, here are some areas that need attention:

- Biblical preaching (verse-by-verse preaching).
- The need for a high view of church membership. What does it mean to be in a covenant with one another?.
- The need to guard the front door and the back door. Is it too easy to join and leave your church?
- Functional church discipline in accordance with Matthew 18.
- Healthy and biblical leadership (church government that finds its roots in the Bible rather than corporate America).
- Congregational involvement in singing.
- Congregational engagement in the preaching (expositional listening).
- Spiritual maturity that achieved by biblical discipleship (a church of Bereans).
- A firm reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit for ministry.
- Evangelistic zeal undergirded by theological conviction.
- A biblical understanding of conversion (centered on God's sovereignty resulting in man's response).
- Central and worshipful observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Any method of growing the church that deviates from God's design is foolish. When people become willing to employ gimmicks to "grow" their church – they've officially traded the Holy Spirit for schemes of man. No matter what plan someone thinks up in the future, the very best church growth strategy is simply this – "We preach Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead."

Can we have fun with the church? Can the church provide a wonderful atmosphere where we build lifelong memories? It absolutely can. However, we must not forget that the church is the bride of Christ – not Six Flags over Jesus. We as pastors and church members must be careful in how we treat the bride of Jesus.

*This post originally appeared at [Delivered By Grace](#).*