Text: I Corinthians 11:17-22
Title: "Meaningless Meetings"

INTRODUCTION

Before I get into my message today I want to give you some great news. Last fall we launched "For the Children … For God's Glory," our effort to raise the resources and to begin to build a new preschool/children's building. Since the building was going to be about $5 million we decided that in order to not incur debt, we would raise $2.5 million before we started. Church, you have prayed and sacrificed for these several months now, and God has heard our prayer. I am happy to announce this morning that God has opened the flood gates of heaven and poured out blessing upon blessing and as a result, we have reached our mark of $2.5 million. Praise the Lord!

> Where do we go from here? The Master Plan Team will get the plans finalized so that our builder can give us a firm cost on the building. Costs may have gone up or down a little since the original plans were drawn. On Sunday evening, September 16 we will have a church-wide discussion and vote to give the go-ahead to break ground on the new building. And if all goes as expected, we will have a groundbreaking ceremony on the last Sunday of September. Let's pray together and give thanks.

Open your Bibles to I Corinthians 11:17. We've become good friends with the church at Corinth over the last several months as we have slowly made our way through the book. It's a great book to preach through chapter by chapter because it addresses just about everything a church has to deal with, whether it is in the 1st century or the 21st century. In I Corinthians 11 Paul begins to move into something that we will study over the next several weeks, and that is what goes on, or at least what is supposed to go on when the church gathers together. Now follow along as I read vv.17-22.

1 Corinthians 11:17 (NIV) - In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

Now the Apostle Paul writes the Corinthian church about some matters that had been brought to his attention. Perhaps one of the leaders of the church had sent some questions about various matters, including some unhealthy habits had developed in the meetings or gatherings of the church.

When we talk about the meetings of the church, maybe what comes to your mind is that the church in Corinth had built a building on some busy road through Corinth. Maybe they had a cross on the door, and a sign out front indicating that this was where the church met. They came together at 8:30 for worship and then broke up into small groups for Bible Study. (Or they came for Sunday School at 9:30 and then went to worship at 11:00). Then they went to their homes for lunch, or down Corinth's version of Chili's for lunch.

> Well if that's the image you have in mind of the church gatherings in Corinth, you must erase them. Because that's not at all the way it worked there.
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> You see, the early church's pattern for gathering looked something like this (at least in Corinth): During the evening of the Lord's Day they would get together, not at a building, but

in the home of one of the wealthier church members who had a house big enough to hold a large group of people (maybe 20 to 30). They gathered in the evening because Sunday was not a "day off" for most people in the Roman world. So they met in a home on a Sunday evening.

First, they fellowshipped together around what was called the Love Feast. This was a pot-luck supper where everyone brought what they could, pooled their resources, and shared the meal together. This shared meal was a powerful picture of the oneness they shared in Jesus Christ, and it strengthened the fellowship of the church.

Then along about the end of the meal they would move very naturally into an observance of the Lord's Supper using the wine and the bread that was already available.
Of course, we remember that Christ had instituted the practice at the close of the Jewish Passover meal.

Now we are not in possession of an ancient manuscript of the "order of worship" and the schedule for what happened when the church gathered. But apparently it was during these meetings that the church prayed together, they sang songs, read Scripture, and certain people stood to give prophecies or some teachings.

But there were several things that had happened in the Corinthian church to take away from the Love Feast whatever love it had and to create a situation so bad that Paul rebuked them strongly.

So you get the picture now as to what was in the background when Paul chastised the church in with these words in v.17: "Your meetings do more harm than good."

They were <u>meaningless meetings</u> in that they didn't accomplish the purpose for which God wants His people to gather.

So let's just drill down a little deeper here to see that there are some pitfalls we must avoid if we are to have meaningful gatherings of the church.

PITFALL #1 – <u>DISUNITY</u> IN THE <u>FELLOWSHIP</u> OF THE CHURCH (vv.18-19)

1 Corinthians 11:18-19 (NIV) - In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church…

Note: "Come together <u>as</u> a church…" not "come together <u>at</u> the church." The church is the people, not the building. The buildings are only important because of what happens in the lives of people. But Paul continues

…there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. [19] No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

Note: What makes for "meaningless meetings" in the eyes of the Lord isn't exactly the way we would gauge them. It has nothing to do with the kind of music, the length of the sermon, or any such thing. In fact, we don't know if all the other churches in the NT times gathered exactly the way they did at Corinth. That doesn't seem to be as important to the Lord as the quality of the relationships that are happening in the church.

"There are divisions among you…" Remember several months ago when we first started this series on First Corinthians we talked about the divisions in the church. Let's just turn back and be reminded of this.

> **1 Corinthians 1:10-12 (NIV) - I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. [11] My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. [12] What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."**
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> And the division in the church was a symptom of a much deeper spiritual problem.
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> **1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NIV) - Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. [2] I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. [3] You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?**

This disunity in the church was being caused by immature, carnal, worldly believers. And Paul says that is one distinction that God clearly sees. As we come back to our text…

> **1 Corinthians 11:19 (NIV) - No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.**

Some division is inevitable. There are those who are mature (approved or qualified) and those who are immature (disqualified).

I believe one of the great strengths of our church is the powerful unity that we possess. We've all heard the war stories about the horrible damage that division and disunity causes in churches. Some of you have come out of that in other churches.

> Divisions exist only if they are allowed to exist. The Corinthians could do something about the divisions if they would. Harmony and unity could be restored to the church if they would work at it.

Ephesians 4:3 (NIV) - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

I think that is part of the great history of our church … that we have worked hard to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

> We are about to move into the next stage of our building program. We will have the opportunity to make the decision together as a church to put our name on the line of a contract and actually build a building. It's important that throughout the discussions and deliberations that we keep pride in check and preserve the unity of the Spirit in our church that is such a precious part of our life together.

But that's not the only pitfall to avoid.

PITFALL #2 – <u>DISREGARD</u> FOR THE <u>NEEDS</u> OF OTHERS (vv.20-22)

Now let's move on into the text.

1 Corinthians 11:20-22 (NIV) - When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, [21] for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. [22] Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

Now this goes back to the practice of having a pot-luck supper as part of the gathering of the church each week. Now apparently, some folks came early and just gorged themselves on the food and the wine. They could care less about whether there was enough left for everybody else. Some of them actually got drunk at church!

> Paul says, "Hey folks, you've missed the whole point, the whole meaning of the gathering of the church. It isn't about you. You have homes you can eat and drink in. That's not the main point of the gathering of the church. Or maybe, just maybe this goes deeper. Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?"
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> Paul is livid. "I don't know what to think about you. This is awful. You deserve no praise for how you are doing church!"
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> In fact, Paul goes on in I Corinthians 11 and warns them that they are really eating and drinking judgment from God upon themselves. God takes this seriously.

Church, this is a very real pitfall that we have to avoid. It's so easy to come to church to get your "Jesus buzz" for the week. Does the music juice <u>me</u>? Does the sermon make <u>me</u> feel good? Are the people nice to <u>me</u>? Is the coffee hot enough for <u>me</u>?

> If that's the agenda for church for us, then all we've had is a meaningless meeting. There's been more harm done than good.

As much as we want to get our needs met when we come to church, it's really not about me. It's first about the Lord. We are here to focus on Him. And one of the ways we honor the Lord is to obey His commands by loving each other.

> Does it occur to you that there are people sitting around you who are hurting … really hurting? They've come with a broken heart. They're hoping that they will get some word from God that will give them the light and the strength to make it through another day.

EXHORTATION – When you come in and sit down to your Bible study class or in your pew in the worship service, before you sit down, visit with the people around you. Get acquainted with them. When we have our Wednesday night meal, it's there for fellowship. It's not just a fast food stop on Wednesday nights. Sit with a different group of people from time to time.

And God forbid that anyone should come in and feel that because they don't have much money or nice clothes that they are somehow out of place with us. Let's just be reminded of what the Scripture says …

> **James 2:1-6a - My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor.**
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> **James 2:8-9 (NIV) - If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.**

CONCLUSION

Let me show you what this looks like. It looks like what happened when a couple of Sundays ago, a family walked into the 11:00 worship service. And as they walked to their seats in the balcony, one lady stood and hugged the woman for the longest time. Then another lady stood and hugged her for a long time. Maybe you saw that and wondered, "What's all that about?" Answer: It's about church. You see that was on a Sunday. Just two days before that families' 18-year-old daughter had died tragically in a car wreck. And they were in church that next Sunday. God just arranged that as they walked in they happened to walk in very near where two of the mom's co-workers happened to be seated. They knew what had happened. They were not just there for themselves. Those two ladies became the arms of Jesus to wrap around this hurting family.

Now that's a meaningful meeting.