

Jesus Rules the Church

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Preacher: Stephen Murray

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, friends. Welcome to the Union Chapel. If you are visiting, a special warm welcome to you. My name is Stephen. I'm the pastor here. It's good to have you with us. We are going to read from Scripture this morning, and so if you've got a Bible, you can turn to the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians chapter 4. We're going to read two sections. So we're going to read verses 1 to 16 of Ephesians 4, and then we're going to jump over. You might have to turn a page to chapter 5 and verses 8 to 20.

Several of you asked this morning as you came in whether I was doing better, and I said I'm feeling much better, but I still have this lingering cough, so the usual rule applies. You've heard me tell you this rule before, but if I break into a fit of coughing and I'm unable to complete the sermon, whoever runs up and touches the pulpit first gets to finish the sermon.

Ephesians chapter 4, verse 1. The Apostle Paul writes, and he says, As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. And there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

[1 : 1 9] But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.

What does he ascended mean except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of service. So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people and their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

[2 : 3 3] Now jump down to verse 8 of chapter 5. For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for the fruit of light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, and everything that is illuminated becomes a light.

This is why it is said, wake up sleeper, rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you. Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit.

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray together.

[3 : 42] Let's ask for God's help as we study this. Amen. Father God, we come to your truth again this morning, as we labor to do every single Sunday.

We come looking to be built up, looking to be encouraged, looking to be strengthened in our knowledge of you, in our trust in you, and in our wonder at the sacrifice that has been made through Jesus Christ.

Father, won't you be merciful to us? And won't you allow us to gain all those things? Not because we are worthy, but because you are merciful and kind.

And so meet with us in the Scriptures this morning, Lord, we pray. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So you can keep that passage open in Ephesians 4, those two passages.

We pick up our series again, Jesus Loves the Church. It's going to be, I think this is week seven now of the series, although we've broken it up in several places. I'm going to keep trudging in the series for quite a while still.

[4 : 58] This morning, I want to start off by talking to you a little bit about what makes me incredibly uncomfortable in a public space. If you ever want to make me incredibly uncomfortable in a public space, this is what you've got to do.

You've got to take me to a very, very busy restaurant. You've got to order your food. And then when your food comes, you've got to notice that something is not quite right with your order. You've got to call the waiter over.

And then at a level that's just kind of loud enough so that the people at the other tables can hear, you say these dreaded words. I want to speak to the manager, please.

That is my cringe moment. That is kind of my cue to sink underneath the table and disappear. And I know for some of you guys, you're like, whenever there's slightly wrong, you're like, excuse me. That's not me. I'm the exact opposite.

I'll just eat it. It might have worms. I'm going to carry on going. I hate experiencing moments like that, whether it's at the queue in checkers or the queue at home affairs.

[5 : 57] Whenever there's someone who asks to speak to the manager, but they're asked to speak to the manager in a way that's just loud enough so that they know that you are asking to speak to the manager.

Now, at the same time, though, when you are struggling with a particular institution and you feel like they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing, it's at that point that you do actually want to know who's in charge.

You want to know who the manager is, who's in charge. And that's equally true in the church. Last time when we were in the series, we looked at the biblical case for church membership. And I think a natural follow-on from that discussion would be to discuss power and authority in the church.

Who is in charge? If I'm going to be a member of this body, if I'm going to commit to this, I want to know. I want to know who's in charge. So when things go pear-shaped, I know who to speak to. And the Bible has a very clear answer to the question, who is in charge?

Jesus is in charge. Jesus rules his church. Not the pastor, not the elders, not the bishop, not the congregation, not the pope, not the state, not any sort of denominational body.

[7 : 06] Jesus rules the church. And so here's where we're going to go this morning. Number one, I want to make a biblical case that Jesus rules the church. Number two, I want us to see how Jesus exercises that rule in his church.

And then in the third place, we'll kind of look at some implications of the first two. So does Jesus rule his church and how does he do it? And then what does it mean for us? Here's the first one. So there's that Ephesians 4 passage.

It's a pretty key passage in the Bible about the nature and the structure of the church. Look down at verse 4. We actually read this last time, but verse 4, There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called, to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Now when the Apostle Paul says there that there's one Lord over this body, he's not talking about God in the sense that God kind of rules over everything.

Like we often talk about the fact that God is sovereign. He rules everything. We've discussed that at different points in different sermons. Because he actually goes on, you might have noticed in that list, he distinguishes this one Lord from the one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

[8 : 19] So who is this one Lord over the body then, over the church? We'll look down at verse 15. All the way down at verse 15. Speaking the truth in love, Paul says, We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ.

Now Colossians 1, which we recited in the creed earlier today, that's why we did the same creed for two Sundays in a row, because we were supposed to do it last week and then I got sick. But we did it again this week. Colossians 1 has a very similar idea.

So here's verses 15 to 18 of Colossians 1, this big, beautiful vision of who Jesus is. It says, The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things have been created through him and for him.

So that sounds similar to what Paul just said about God the Father. He's before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

[9 : 25] So you can kind of think about it this way. Because Jesus is the second person in the Trinity, so we know kind of classic Christian doctrine, there's one God, but he exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Because Jesus is part of the Trinity, well he is God himself. There's a sense in which he rules over everything, because God rules over everything. God is sovereign, just like his Father does. That's the point that Paul makes at the beginning of that confession, that profession in Colossians 10, verse 15 and 17 of Colossians 1.

But then there is a special sense in which he rules over the church, and that's verse 18. And the way that this is most often described in Paul's language in the New Testament is that he talks about Jesus being the head of the church.

Now Jesus being the head of the church doesn't mean, it doesn't only mean that he has authority over it. It means more than just authority, it also means he animates the church with his life, he's the source of life in this church, he fills this church with his life.

So Christ's headship is more than just authority, but it's not less than authority. Christ governs his church. And one of the ways you can kind of very clearly see this is the way that he actually delegates power.

[10 : 40] So in Matthew chapter 16, there's a passage that I've actually always found quite confusing, where Jesus gives his apostles the keys of the kingdom. And now we're actually going to come back to this passage later on in our series, so don't get too confused or too distracted about what these keys of the kingdom are and who exactly they're given to, because there's big debates about that.

But for our purpose today, just notice how Jesus gives out authority. So it all kind of starts with a conversation about the true identity of Jesus that he's having with his apostles, with his disciples.

Matthew 16, verse 13. When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say the son of man is? And they replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

Well, what about you, he asked? Who do you say I am? And Simon Peter answered, you are the Messiah, the son of the living God. And Jesus replied, blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

[11 : 57] Now, as I said, you can straight away see there's a lot that needs to be unpacked in that particular passage. What does he mean there? Particularly that meaning of the keys of the kingdom. What we can say, just today at least, is we can know that the keys of the kingdom have something to do with authority in the church.

And the reason that we know this very, very clearly is because two chapters later, Jesus speaks about discipline in the church, and he uses exactly the same language. So here's Matthew 18, verse 15.

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. And if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. And then he says this, he says, Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

So there he uses that same binding and loosening language that he just said was part of the keys of the kingdom. So it seems that he is giving, back in Matthew 16, he's giving some sort of ecclesiastical, that is church governing power or authority to his disciples.

[13 : 20] He's handing it over. It's not an authority they have in themselves. It's not an authority they have by virtue of being disciples or by, on the basis of the strength of their character or on the strength of their gifting or their charisma or their leadership skills.

It's an authority given to them by Christ. Which means, de facto, Christ rules his church. He gives out the authority.

Now the next really important question then is, well, how does he rule? How does he exercise this rule? And it's an important question because there's no palace, there's no castle, there's no presidential estate on earth where Jesus kind of sends all his directives out from.

So the elders and I, we don't kind of go on an annual pilgrimage to the global church head office somewhere. I know some people in some churches do that. It's a little bit weird, but we don't do that. To go and get instructions from Jesus to then, like, this is what you're going to do and preach and teach for the rest of the next year.

We don't do that. Jesus is not here on earth in that sense. After his death and his resurrection, he ascended to the right hand of the Father. That's actually what our passage, Ephesians 4 verse 8 says, that we read just now.

[14 : 32] And the ascended Christ rules from heaven. So then the question, the natural question is, well then, like, he's not here anymore to say, Stephen, here are the keys of the kingdom.

Dave, here are the keys of the kingdom. Sean, here are the keys of the kingdom. To the elders and that. So how does he exercise his rule now? That's an important question.

And the answer is, he rules by his word and his spirit. He rules by his word and his spirit. Here's our second point. Have a look down at verse 7 of Ephesians chapter 4.

Paul says, but to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, when he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.

Now, in keeping with this idea of Jesus as the head of the church, Paul actually envisions Jesus as a victorious king who's just triumphed at the cross. And he quotes from the Old Testament.

[15 : 32] He quotes Psalm 68. And there's this image of a king who's returning from a military campaign with all his captives in tow. And he's handing out the spoils of war, his victory gifts. That's the image of Psalm 68.

And in the same way, Paul is envisioning Jesus comes. He's defeated sin and death at the cross. And now as the king of the church, he's coming and he's giving out gifts to his church, to his people.

And here are these gifts in verse 11. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers. Now, you'll know that if you've read other lists of gifts in the New Testament, this is not a comprehensive list of gifts.

It's a very focused list of gifts. And there's a whole lot of debate about this very focused, about whether it's five or it's four and a half gifts, as to whether or not some of these gifts continue today or don't continue.

We'll actually touch on all of this. We'll get back to this passage later on as we talk about the offices in the church. But the one thing that everybody agrees on is that these are all word gifts. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are all speakers, proclaimers of the word of God.

[16 : 44] They all teach the word of God. And look what happens when they do their job properly. Verse 11 again. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

So how do people know how to become Christians? How do people know how to grow in holiness? How do people know what Christ's will is? How do people know how to order their religious life together and individually?

Well, it's through the word. It's through the word teachers doing their job properly. Christ rules his church through his word, which is the Bible. It's administered by gifted and qualified teachers, but it's not the teachers that rule themselves.

It's Christ who rules through his word. You see that? So there's an objective standard there by which Jesus rules his church that transcends the minister, transcends the elders, transcends the denominational councils.

But it's not just by the word. It's also by his spirit. So Paul actually goes on from that section there and he gives all sorts of directives of what holy, mature Christian living looks like.

[18 : 15] The maturity of someone who's kind of growing up into the head, that is Christ. He's now unpacking that. He's got a long section where he unpacks all these directives. At the very end of that section, in chapter 5, where we read, he closes out all of these directives with these words in verse 15.

He says, Be careful, very careful then, how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. So how does, how does Paul conclude this section on growing in maturity?

He says, Be filled with the Spirit. So I want you to see the big picture of what's going on here for a second. Step back a second. At the beginning of the directives, we have the Word of Christ.

At the end of the directives, we have the Spirit of Christ. We need to know God's will in His Word, and we need the power and the presence of the Spirit in order to obey His will, and it is through those two means that Christ exercises His rule over the church.

[19 : 38] That's how it works. Louis Burkhoﬀ, a famous Reformed theologian from the middle of the last century, or early part of the last century even, he says this, he says, the reign of Christ is not in all respects similar to that of earthly kings.

He does not rule the church by force, but subjectively by His Spirit, which is operative in the church and objectively by the Word of God as a standard of authority.

So the Christian experience really then in the church is one of subjectively being kind of pushed and prodded, challenged, encouraged towards conformity with God's will by the Spirit of Christ working in you, convicting your spirit.

And how do you know what conformity to God's will looks like? Well, you have the objective will of God in the Word of God, the Word of Christ. That's your standard.

And so Christ rules by His Word and by His Spirit. Now the obvious implication of this, I think, is the centrality of the Word and the Spirit in the life of the church.

[20 : 46] Or that they should be central. The Word of God, Scripture, should be central in the life of the church. When Scripture is no longer central in the life of a local church, then Christ is actually no longer ruling that church.

Someone or something else is. That's what's happening. And what I mean here, and I want you to be very clear, what I mean is, I don't just mean that we should regularly preach and teach the Bible.

We should do that, definitely. But I actually mean more than that. I mean that Scripture then comes along and it governs all sorts of things in the life of the church as well. Things like how we worship when we gather.

Things like who should preach and teach. who should serve as elders and deacons. What do elders and deacons do? How do decisions get made in the congregation?

How do we deal with issues of discipline? How do we relate to other institutions outside of us, other churches, other organizations? How should we do evangelism and promote the gospel? All those sorts of questions.

[21 : 48] Scripture should, and here's an important word, Scripture should regulate all those sorts of things to ensure that Christ actually rules this church. That's how we do it. That's how we make sure that Jesus stays king of the church.

This is going to happen at least, at the very least at the foundational level. The big picture level. Because you might think well obviously not every single detail of how church operates has a verse in Scripture to kind of undergird it, right?

Berkoff actually in that same work he says this, going back to him, he says, reformed churches, Presbyterian reformed churches, do not claim that their system of church government is determined in every detail by the word of God, but they do assert that its fundamental principles are directly derived from Scripture.

They do not claim just *divinum*, I don't know if I'm pronouncing that right, divine law, divine justice for the details, but only for the general fundamental principles of the system. They are quite ready to admit that many of its particulars are determined by expediency and human wisdom.

From this it follows that while the general structure must be rigidly maintained, some of the details may be changed in the proper ecclesiastical manner for prudential reasons such as the general prophet of the churches.

[23 : 03] So for example, let me give you an example of this. There is no Bible verse that tells us what time on Sunday to hold worship services. Should we do it at 6 o'clock in the morning? Should we do it at 7 o'clock in the morning?

Should we do it at 8 o'clock in the morning? Should we do it at 9? Should we do it at 10? There is no verse in the Bible that says this is the time of Sundays you must hold your worship services although I will say Isaiah 5 verse 11 says woe to those who rise up early in the morning and I might be quoting that out of context.

Scripture doesn't tell us what genre of music to use in worship. It doesn't tell us that. It doesn't tell us what form our formal membership process should take.

Should we do a 6 week newcomers class or a 10 week newcomers class? When new members come in should they sign a document a membership covenant or should they just make public vows in front of the congregation?

Scripture doesn't tell us that. There are numerous areas of church life where we need to apply wisdom and a level of pragmatism. That's why there's a whole part of the Bible that's dedicated to wisdom literature. But at a foundational level everything needs to be driven by Scripture and not by pragmatism or human wisdom.

[24 : 18] In that way what we do is we ensure that Jesus rules his church. That he's king. But I also want to say that the church is not just the business of kind of a purely rational intellectual exercise where we take out the good book and we go oh look that's what it says okay well let's do that then.

End of story. It's a deeply spiritual exercise. It is God's spirit that embeds God's word in our heart so that we obey God's word out of deep conviction not just kind of out of rote learning of the Bible.

And so our engagement with God's word then I think must always always always be prayerful. We call out to God. We call out to God to work by his spirit through his word.

Prayer is how we do that. Prayer is how we appeal to God for his spirit's work in our lives. I think I'm going to take a dig at my own tribe here in this sense but I think it's a fair criticism of many reformed Presbyterian churches that are very Bible centric that prayer and therefore the spirit of God often gets short shrift.

And there's a pretty easy way to see this. Go to a church as described just like ours and a church described that way organize two events in a month on the church calendar.

[25 : 38] One a Bible study and one a prayer meeting midweek events. See which one gets the biggest attendance. I think this is a hard word for us.

A hard challenge. It's often brought by churches in other traditions not in the Presbyterian and Reformed world kind of saying well guys you need to look at this and we might rightly bemoan poor Bible teaching in some of those traditions.

We might rightly bemoan a misunderstanding of the work of the spirit or an excess of emphasis on the spirit in some of those traditions but do we take on board the criticism when our prayer meetings are empty. But we have people queuing up for Bible studies more and more inductive Bible studies.

We need the centrality of the word and we need the centrality of prayer in our churches if Christ is to reign by his spirit. Now friends I want to tell you you might say well this is just you're just like kind of outlining rules and regulations here.

I want to tell you why this is really good news for you and for me this morning. Because it means there's a level of authority, there's an objective level of authority that sits above human authority in the church.

[26 : 55] It sits above the pastors, it sits above the elders, it sits above the congregation, it sits above any denominational boards or councils, it sits above the civil government of the country even.

The Bible, prayerfully discerned, sits as an objective standard above every earthly power. I think that's incredibly good news.

Incredibly comforting news. Now listen, I know, and I know this comes to mind because this is what came to my mind when I thought about this, I know that people can trust scripture. I know that even in churches where the Bible is the supreme stated authority, sinful human beings can still manipulate and rig the system to serve their own ends and so we can still end up with situations where we have abusive leaders or rogue congregations or corrupt denominational bodies.

I get that. I have seen that. I have been on the wrong end, the wrong receiving end of that in my life as a Christian. But think about it this way. If that is how self-centered and how self-serving we are as human beings, that even in a community where we say we prayerfully submit to the Bible, we still, even in that community, we still kind of figure out ways to serve our own interests at the expense of others.

If that is how self-centered we are as human beings, then imagine, just imagine how dangerous a church is where the Bible isn't central. Where the pre-commitment isn't even there at the beginning.

[28 : 29] Where they're not even putting in their documents at the beginning. Or at least saying it up front on a Sunday. Imagine how incredibly dangerous a church like that is. Imagine how much higher the risk of abuse and manipulation is when Christ is not ruling by His Word and His Spirit.

You see, what's crazy about all of this is we talk about rules and ruling. It's actually through the rule of Christ by His Word and His Spirit that we get free. We think freedom and rules don't kind of go together.

But that is just patently, patently untrue. Take something silly like dieting for example. If I eat and I drink what I want, when I want, all the time, I'm exercising complete freedom.

I do as I please. I'm totally and completely free. But then, well, along comes liver disease and along comes diabetes and a whole host of other nasty things and an early death.

And all of a sudden, what's happened is my freedom has been horribly, horribly curtailed in all sorts of different ways. So by exercising unbridled freedom, I've actually ended up curtailing my freedom.

[29 : 41] freedom. But, if I put some rules in place, don't overeat, don't eat too much sugar, only go to McDonald's once a month, don't binge drink, put some rules in place, see what happens.

I actually start to become freer. Did you see that? I have better health. I'm able to do more. I live longer. Finding the right rules increases my freedom.

It doesn't limit it. Rules and freedom are not at odds with each other. Finding the right rules increases your freedom. And I want to tell you this this morning, church. I want to tell you the right rule.

The rule to rule all rules is the rule of Christ. It really is. You will never find more freedom than you will find in the rule of Christ. Think about this problem of selfishness.

Our deeply ingrained, self-centered nature that we have. This is a source of so much heartache between us and in the church life, between leaders and congregation members, and it goes in both directions.

[30 : 51] I've seen it go horribly askew in both ways. If we could just be rid of selfishness, if we could just be free from the slavery and from the tyranny of selfishness, just imagine how beautiful this church community would be.

Imagine. I caught a glimpse of that beauty this week in a kind of roundabout, soul-crushing way for me. Timothy Keller's memorial service was on Tuesday evening.

If you don't know Timothy Keller, he's a former pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and the founder of Redeemer City to City and very influential on our network of churches. But his memorial service was on Tuesday evening.

Over a thousand people gathered at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Thousands more were watching on the live stream from around the world. I didn't watch it live, but on Wednesday morning I woke up at four o'clock in the morning, couldn't go back to sleep, so I thought, well, let me get up and watch it.

So I watched the recorded version. And it was a beautiful service, beautiful memorial, remembering Tim's life. The songs, he actually all prepared himself beforehand with little write-ups about each song.

[32 : 00] So you have these super rich gospel-centered songs. And person after person came up and talked about Tim's character.

People from early on in his life, people from later on in his life, they talked about his character, his character, his character. Sam Albury, the minister who did the actual sermon, he got up and as he was about to preach, he pointed out that all the people who got up before him, haven't really talked about Tim's achievements.

And he has a lot of achievements, overachievements. But they didn't talk about his achievements. They spoke about his character over and over again. And so it was an incredible, incredible testimony to the man that God made Tim Keller to be.

But you know what I was convicted by after watching that memorial service, where the Holy Spirit kind of came along and jabbed me in the heart? I sat there on the couch at 5.30 in the morning and I thought this, this thought crossed my mind.

I will never be like Tim Keller. I will never be like Tim Kiver. I will never be like Tim Keller because I'm just too narcissistic and self-serving.

[33 : 12] That is the thought that crossed my mind. The greatness of Tim was how over a lifetime God kind of stripped him of selfishness and replaced it with genuine selflessness.

The greatness of Tim is really the greatness of Christ's rule that frees us. And in that moment, I was just hit by how enslaved I am to selfishness.

What a powerful hold it actually has on me. And I just sat there feeling, with a feeling of desperately wanting to be free. Desperately wanting to be free of the slavery of self.

And friends, I suspect that if we look at our hearts long enough and prayerfully enough and allow Christ's Spirit to poke and to prod, prod, we will all see how desperately we want to be free.

Free from the tyranny of self. Because think about this. Imagine who you'd be. Imagine who you would be, the beautiful creature you would be if you were free from the tyranny of self.

[34 : 25] The rule of Christ, the rule of Christ, by His Word and His Spirit is the only way you're going to get that freedom. It's the only way you're going to get that freedom. It's the only way for the chains to fall off.

It's the only way that Tim found it. And so I actually love this doctrine. I love this doctrine of how Christ rules the church by His Word and His Spirit because it fills me with incredible, incredible confidence to stand up here week in and week out and promote this church to you.

Whether it's from the pulpit or when I'm standing up here doing announcements, to promote this church to you. I have incredible confidence to say this to you every week. To say, come into this community.

Join it. Participate in it. To the full. Give your energy to it. Give your time to it. Give your money to it. Give your resources to it. Give your life to this community. I have incredible confidence to say that to you every single week.

Not because I believe my preaching and my teaching leadership are worthy of your investment. Not because I believe that our elders and our deacons are incredible people and they will care for you and they will meet all your needs in different ways.

[35 : 29] Not because of the quality of our worship or our Sunday school or our midweek groups. My confidence is in none of those things. My confidence is in the truth that here you will find true freedom.

to the extent that we submit to the word of Christ and remain prayerfully dependent upon the spirit of Christ you will find the freedom of freedoms right here.

And so I have no hesitation saying to you, come. Come. Come and find freedom. Pour out your life here into this community.

because this community is ruled by a king. It's ruled by a king who poured out his life to free you. It's ruled by a king who took on the limits of a frail human body and nature so that you could be set free.

So that you could be set free from the strangling life quenching limits that sin constantly places upon you. This community is ruled by a king who allowed himself to be bound beaten so that the chains of your heart would break apart.

[36 : 46] This community is ruled by a king who constrained himself to death so that death will never have the final rule over your life. Friends, I want to ask you to pray.

I want to ask that won't you pray? Won't you pray that the Lord would make us a church? Where Christ truly reigns? Where he rules by his word and by his spirit.

Won't you pray that God would make us a beacon of freedom in the midst of an enslaved world? That's what we want to be because we can't get this freedom anywhere else.

Only through the rule of Christ. Let's pray together. Our Father and our King, we take, look at doctrines like this sometimes and they can seem a little bit abstract.

Jesus rules his church. We go, okay, it's good to know. But when we do that we fail to see, we fail to see how much we need that rule.

[37 : 55] We fail to see how enslaved we are to ourselves and to all manner of things and that it is only in Jesus, Jesus' loving and gracious will that we will be free. Father, there are people sitting here and people standing in this pulpit who are enslaved this morning in different ways and we are crying out for freedom and so we ask that you would grant us that freedom, Lord, that we might look upon Jesus and his love to us, his freeing love to us at the cross and we might submit ourselves to that love, trust in it and submit to his lordship so that we might experience that freedom.

Be kind to us, Father. I pray for anyone who is sitting here this morning, Lord, who has never known that freedom at all, who has never known the gospel of Jesus. I pray that you would bring them to repentance and faith, that they would trust in you this morning.

And then I pray for us as a church, Lord, may we give ourselves to the word and to prayer so that we might ensure that Christ rules here by his word and by his spirit.

that way we will be that beacon of freedom to a world that is enslaved. Make us those people, Lord, we pray. We ask this for Christ's sake.

Amen.