

## Rejoicing in the Lord's Day

Jonathan K. Dodson | Ps 118; Act 6:1-7 | May 17, 2017

Good morning. My name is Jonathan if I haven't met you. I'm glad all of you are here. As a pastor, I realize gathering on Sundays *to worship God and hear from his Word* is a *counter-cultural act*. Most Austinites don't do it. Participating with a church in worship is an act of rebellion against: laziness, indifference, and Sunday brunch. But gathering is also a *formative act*, a habit that nurtures love for the risen Christ. In fact, the church has gathered on Sundays for a couple thousand years because on a Sunday morning, three days after his death, Jesus rose from the dead and kicked sin, death, and Satan in the teeth. This is the better brunch. The eternal feast in the presence of Jesus and his people.

Today is significant for a lot of reasons. I'd like to cover three with you:

### 1. "This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24).

Every day is a gift from God. We are not guaranteed another second; we do not deserve another breath. Some of us are more aware of this than others. Suffering has a way of putting you in touch with your evanescence. But God in his grace has given us all another day to breathe, to sing, to rest, to worship. "This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it." This may be a familiar verse, but what may be unfamiliar is why the psalmist thinks it's so great. The day that the Lord made, in context, is the day, "[The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone](#)" (22). Now why is that significant? Well, it takes us back to the days of Israel's return from exile. As they returned, they found Jerusalem and her temple in utter ruin. The glory of the Lord departed. So they rebuilt. It began with a ceremony in which a old discarded stone from the former temple would be placed on site to form the corner of the new temple. This created continuity between the old and the new. Once the stone was brought out, it was accompanied by shouts of joy, songs of triumph, a sense of the privilege of returning to the city of God to worship in his temple. In the Gospels, Jesus picks up this idea and applies it to himself. He creates continuity between the old and the new as the cornerstone between testaments and temples. How? Jesus is the formative stone. Where we should have been rejected, he was rejected. Where we should have been judged, Jesus was tossed aside, crushed by judgment for sin. But as Peter reminds us, three days later Jesus also became the "living stone," the foundation of a vital new temple. He magnetically resurrects other stones from spiritual death to form a whole new worshipping community, the church. This day, Sunday, the third day is the day the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad in it! Every Sunday commemorates Christ, the stone the builders rejected become the chief cornerstone of a whole new temple. Because of Christ we have returned from exile, and together constitute God's new temple, the place where his glory dwells, the Church. So with a sense of privilege make it your *habit* to gather, rebel, worship the risen Christ: "[Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near](#)" (Heb. 10:24-25).

### 2. We appoint three new elders to lead our church today.

What is an elder? Elders are men who can say, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” They are to be “above reproach” (1 Tim 3:2) What does that mean? One Church Father said of this phrase, “Every virtue is implied.” Qualified elders are examples of **godliness**. The men we commend to you today fit the bill. You should imitate them, ask their for counsel, and regularly thank God for them. However, they are *not* perfect. They are godly *men*. They require forgiveness and the gift of **repentance** like the rest of us. They should be quick to admit fault, repent, and return to Christ. In other words, they are to be lead repenters, and in leading out in repentance they are also a model for us. Imitate them in strength and in weakness. Show them grace. But many could fit this so what sets these men apart. What do elders do? They respond to God’s call (**Peter**). When the early church was spreading, elders were appointed in every city. As it grew, the apostles said, “**It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.**” As a result, they selected deacons to assume the practical needs of the church. This created an elder-deacon leadership dynamic. Then, the apostolic elders said, “**But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**” Elders are to devote themselves to the **ministry of the Word and prayer**. We often have other expectations of our leaders. They should do more social justice; they should do more practical service, serve in Kids Life, create this or that. But what they owe you supremely is what they owe Christ: **the ministry of the Word and prayer**. (**Matt**) Now, the ministry of the Word takes many forms: leading CG discussions, counseling, teaching, evangelizing, preaching, leading the direction of the church. All of it should be shaped by the Word. The reason for this is that a) this is *God’s church* not ours so God’s people need God’s Word not mere opinion. b) the *power* for personal and city renewal comes through God’s Word not ours. c) If we are in the Word regularly, we can *hear God’s voice* and discern direction for the church. When you hear from God in his Word, it’s like peering **over a fence** of the visible world to see the day drawing near, the kingdom of God at hand. Those glimpses are absolutely essential for godly, humble, and wise leadership. Men, peer over the fence regularly. Hold us to it. Pray for us to see where God is leading and to boldly lead you there. We face opposition. Satan is described as a prowling lion seeking to devour the flock. Elders are the shepherds who **stand between you and the lion**. Because of this they get injured. Pray for them and their families, that they don’t get cynical or discouraged. (**John**) We meet every other Tuesday for 2-3 hours where we pray for people by name, counsel those who struggle, and discuss the direction and needs of the church. Please put us down in your prayer book for Tuesdays. MTWTF. All of our elders will preach this summer. Pray for their ministry of the Word, for us to see over the fence, and preach faithfully. Pray for unity. Without further ado our new elders:

- *Do you commit to care for this church, protect it, and guide it as though Christ’s very own Bride?*
- *In so doing, do you commit to protect and promote the gospel of Jesus for the sake of the church and the world?*

### **3. This is a significant day because it’s my last day in City Life for three months.**

After ten years of gospel ministry in Austin, you have graciously given me the gift of a sabbatical leave for three months. A sabbatical is “a carefully planned period of time in which the Pastor is granted leave away from his normal responsibilities in order to spend

an extended period of time in rest, renewal and refreshment.” It is investment in a pastor’s **renewal**. It has been an immense privilege to plant this church with my wife and a small group of people and watch it grow. I’ve seen dead stones become alive, discarded stones get welcomed in, and watched the temple expand. The view here is amazing. It is also tiring. Some people joke that I’m in the sin business. I prefer to think of it as the redemption business, but to witness redemption you have to get close to the unredeeming qualities of humanity. That does wear on you, and I’m looking forward to not being needed, to being renewed by the Redeemer. Taking long prayer walks in Ireland, a retreat in New Hampshire, writing in July, and worshipping anonymously in congregations where I am not required to give. Time in the temple without sacrifice. I’m asking God to give me more, more of him and less of sinful me, more direction for the future and for you, more of “grace, grace, God’s grace, grace that pardons and heals within.” **Renewal. Report.** I’m also looking forward to hearing the report of how you grow without me. I am not the Cornerstone; Christ is. All pastors are replaceable, but the Chief Shepherd is not. And he is more than you need. Christ is what holds you together, not a limited, finite, struggling man. In my absence many gifts will be expressed. Celebrate those—new preachers, leaders, saints and sinners. Welcome them with open arms. Be hospitable and loving to new faces. Show them the love God has shown you. **Rest.** God is calling me to rest, physically, but also spiritually. When I think about the last ten years, I sometimes think about what I didn’t do, what I could have done, and I feel guilty. I need to let go of that guilt and rest. This week we were reading a devotional on Philippians 3, “[But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus](#)” (3:13–14). As I confessed to my family that I need to let go of not being a better pastor and father, I lost it. My six year old walked up to me and gave me a big hug and held on. I need to experience that, and other things, from my heavenly Father. That will require time and rest, boredom where the Spirit is free to move. John Dewey said, “[We do not learn from experience; we learn from reflecting on experience.](#)” So as I close up, I want to encourage you to make this summer a time of renewal and rest, to seek first the kingdom of God and allow him to meet your every need. To consider, What do you need to leave behind? What do you need to release to God? To make more room for Christ. This will be my prayer for you.