

Emmaus Baptist Church — State of the Church Address Sunday, November 30, 2025

1. Preparing to Turn 40

What comes to mind when you think of a 40th birthday?

“40?! That’s so old!” Or, “40...those were the good ole’ days!” Maybe, “I’m 40! I’m a man!” (Too soon, Cowboy fans?) We usually think of black balloons, the train going over the hill, a creaky back, or a midlife crisis.

On December 6, 2026 – 53 weeks from today – Emmaus will celebrate its 40th birthday. (The official date for our birthday is December 7th, but we’ll celebrate on Sunday the 6th.)

1.3 HISTORY

Emmaus Baptist Mission began June 5, 1983. The original Church Constitution was adopted on November 19, 1986. The Church’s Charter Day was December 7, 1986.

40 is a significant number in Scripture. 40 is about testing, preparation, and reminders of God’s faithfulness. 40 might seem “old,” but as a local church, we’re just getting started! (Plus, we’re extremely young compared to many churches across our state and around the world.) For however long God might allow Emmaus to exist, and for however long Jesus might wait to return to establish the New Creation, we want to be His people in this place for His glory!

During my time at Emmaus, I’ve presented a State of the Church Address near the end of each year.¹ Today – a few weeks into my 10th year at Emmaus – we’re going to continue the strategy of looking back at God’s faithfulness and looking ahead to what is next.

But, this isn’t just a speech or report. What we talk about today – especially the study of Matthew 18 and Jeremiah 37-39 – should impact you personally, whether you’re part of this church, just visiting, looking for a church to join, or maybe trying to figure out what you believe about Jesus.

Here’s the game plan for this year’s State of the Church Address.

- First, we’ll take a quick look back at 2025.
- Next, I’ll preview a few things coming for 2026.
- Most of our time this morning will be spent studying John 18:33-40. What is Truth? How do we live in this world as part of Jesus’ Kingdom?
- In Part 2 tonight at 5pm, we’re going to look at Jeremiah 37-39 to continue the discussion of God’s Kingdom and focus specifically on how being a Baptist church impacts our understanding of how to live faithfully in the world today.

¹ These addresses are available online at www.emmausokc.org/state-of-the-church.

2. Look Back at Year 38

In church, talking about numbers can be awkward. And I get this! An obsession with numbers quickly deteriorates into treating church as a competition or business. Jesus was focused on making disciples, not simply drawing crowds. At the same time, the early pages of the Book of Acts show thousands of people turning from sin and putting their faith in Jesus. The old adage is true: numbers represent people – people created and loved by God, people for whom Jesus died, and people who need to grow as disciples of Jesus.

2.1 Baptisms

1. So far this year, we've had **14 baptisms** at Emmaus! This is down from last year, and I pray – amid growing attendance – that advancing the Gospel and seeing people baptized will always remain our key focus. We don't force or manipulate baptisms; but we do pray, share the Gospel, and take seriously that Jesus listed baptism as the first step for making disciples.
2. Baptisms at Emmaus are distinguished by two elements:
 - a. A friend or family member reads the testimony of the person being baptized.
 - b. The person being baptized confesses with millions throughout history, "Jesus is Lord."
3. One Sunday in the Summer, we had multiple ladies baptized, and each shared a testimony of going through painful life challenges. God's faithfulness and grace sustained them and ultimately turned their hearts back to Him. Whether it's a kid talking with their parents at home or an adult who spent years analyzing the claims of Christ, God is powerful to save, and He has given baptism as the public profession of repentance and faith.
4. If you've never been baptized – or have questions about salvation (maybe even confusion about an experience earlier in your life) – please reach out to someone or contact me directly (owen@emmausokc.org; 580-658-0652). I'd love to talk with you about this step of faith.

2.2 New Church Members

1. This year, we have added **68 new members** at Emmaus.
2. *How does someone become a member?
 - a. ***On the 2nd Sunday of each month, we offer a New Member Info Meeting in the main lobby.*** (Shameless plug - the next meeting is Sun, Dec 14th @ 9:15am)
 - i. This is a chance for guests to ask questions, and I share expectations for membership.
 - ii. Following this class, we meet with prospective members to hear their testimony, then new members are presented to the church at various points during the year.
3. *Why does membership matter? Can't I just attend the church?
 - a. Over the years at Emmaus (long before my family arrived), God has used this church family to be a place of rest and recovery for people coming out of hard church experiences. We don't want to lose that! There are seasons of life when we need to step back, rest, and heal. In these times, we're simply focused on Hebrews 10:24 – not getting out of the habit of gathering with God's people.

- b. However, we must be careful not to become complacent or passive. The Holy Spirit will ultimately lead us to carry out the purpose of the church listed in the next verse in Hebrews – “encourage one another towards love and good deeds” (10:25).
- c. Membership is a crucial balance of receiving (pastoral oversight, accountability, encouragement) and giving (serving, financial generosity, making disciples).

2.3 Attendance (and Awakening?)

1. For the year, our average attendance at 10:45am on **Sunday mornings is 688** (608 in the worship service). This is up 73 from last year and over 100 from 2023.
2. **Sunday school attendance is averaging 464**, up 33 from last year.
3. This year’s weekly average is encouraging, but we don’t want to miss what has happened in the second half of the year. The Sunday morning average has been over 700 since June, and 723 since August.
4. What happened? I honestly don’t know, but I can tell you that it’s not confined to our church family. Something broader is happening with church attendance, and it deserves our attention.
5. As we think about 2025 attendance, let’s keep a couple of points in mind:
 - a. *“Not so fast sparky”* - Getting excited about increased attendance is NOT a bad thing! At the same time, these things go through cycles. We praise God for more people coming, but we don’t want to pat ourselves on the back or overreact.
 - b. *“Do you want to go away as well?”* (John 6:67) - Often when large crowds began following Jesus, He would say something difficult, and many would leave. In modern church life, increased attendance can quickly shift if something hard arises (or, equally possible, the pastor says or does something dumb).
 - c. *“Revival, Outpouring, or Awakening?”* - As we consider increased attendance and spiritual openness in our church and around the world, we need to distinguish a few terms. I’ve heard people refer to the current spiritual climate as “revival,” but – at the risk of sounding like the vocabulary police – I think that label is premature.
 - i. Revival is generally characterized by longer term effects and is usually only identified by looking back. Think about a full “pattern” change in a culture.
 - ii. Outpouring is a “storm” (whereas revival is a larger pattern-change). In an outpouring, the Holy Spirit shows up with overwhelming power for a period of time. Outpourings often come quickly and unexpectedly. Outpourings can happen within awakenings, and sometimes serve as a precursor to awakenings and revivals.
 - iii. Awakening is, I think, the right word for our current situation. (I’m not saying the 2020s will be on the same level as the First and Second Great Awakenings in our country, but there are parallels.) With an awakening, you have a “seasonal” change that sometimes leads to revival. In an awakening, there is a hunger for the Word of God, for prayer, for repentance and salvation. Spiritual openness is a key feature of awakenings, and we pray the awakening is focused on Jesus, not simply a change in culture, politics, or social trends. Let’s not miss this opportunity to invite people to church and have Gospel conversations.

3. Looking Ahead to Year 39

Besides another “impossible” year number (2026?!), another Thunder NBA Championship, and a gubernatorial election in Oklahoma, what’s coming up next year?

3.1 40th Anniversary Advisory Team and Plans

Fair warning: you’ll likely get tired of the number 40 over the next year. Specifically, we have a team working to plan various events to celebrate our 40th anniversary (you’ve probably noticed that I’m using both anniversary and birthday – pick your favorite; I’m going to keep using both!).

What can you expect for 2026?

- 40 Day Prayer and Devotion Guide, beginning Oct 25, 2026
- Mission and Service Projects
- “Vintage” Worship Services
- 40th Anniversary offering goal focused on Missions and Future Building accounts
- 40th Anniversary celebration on Dec. 6, 2026

3.2 Next Steps Advisory Team and Plans

The Next Steps Advisory Team had its first meeting on Nov 16th, and you will hear more from this team in the months ahead. The short story is that we are reassessing our church’s master plan to make sure it’s the right fit for upcoming building and development projects. Along with excitement about growth, we need to be wise financially. A project that might’ve cost \$8 million five years ago is going to be much more expensive today (and likely even more expensive a few years from now).

The Next Steps team is exploring multiple options, and we will update the church and likely solicit some feedback during the year. Key priorities include moving the Preschool entrance closer to Building A, improving the check-in and security for Children and Preschool Families, unifying the buildings to promote fellowship and wayfinding, and maintaining space for adult groups. Without making a promise I can’t keep, the goal is to present an updated plan to the church in late 2026 (maybe as part of next year’s State of the Church address).

If you’d like to see some initial ideas and thoughts about future buildings, I’ve included those in an Appendix. **Please don’t read any of these as actual plans. We need spiritual wisdom to decide on the best ways to utilize the resources, land, and facilities the Lord has provided. Plus, we can’t allow building plans to detract from the core mission of making disciples and advancing the Gospel.

3.3. From Strength to Strength

A couple of years ago, we put together a series of four, 3-year “frames” to provide an overview of what might be possible leading up to our church’s 50th anniversary. The plan is extremely broad, but it’s nice to have a big picture idea of what’s coming up, and we’ll be ready to adjust the plans at any point as God leads us. In the short-term, 2026 is the final year of our first *Strength* frame. We want to come out of 2026 with theological, missional, financial, and relational strength so we can give full attention to the future.

2024 - 2026 : Frame #1 = “Strengthen”

2026 – *40th Anniversary of Emmaus is Monday, Dec 7, 2026 [to be celebrated on Dec 6th]

2027 - 2029 : Frame #2 = “Transition”

2030 – *Celebrate 2000 Years of Christ’s Public Ministry

2030 - 2032 : Frame #3 = “Live like Jesus”

2033 – *Celebrate 2000 Years of the Resurrection and the Church

2033 - 2035 : Frame #4 = “Be the Church”

2036 – *50th Anniversary of Emmaus is Sunday, Dec 7, 2036

As I think about each area of the Strength frame (theology, missions, finances, relationships), Arthur Brooks’s book *From Strength to Strength* has been helpful. Writing to those assessing retirement or a second career, Brooks encourages people to assess how God has made them and how their personal strengths will translate to the second half of life. That’s exactly what we’re doing as a church turning 40. What have we been good at in the past? How can we carry this forward?

- *Theological Strength*
 - Bible-based groups, across ages and life stages
 - Expository sermons, including an extension of our John series into 1 John in 2026, a focus on the Psalms in the Summer, then a study of Philippians as we prepare for the 40th Anniversary (see Appendix A for an overview of previous sermons)²
- *To Strength*
 - Focus on disciple-making in groups smaller than a Sunday School class
 - Theological training and resources, especially for small group disciple-making
- *Missional Strength*
 - Local AND global missions
 - Meet needs AND Share the Gospel
- *To Strength*
 - Continue to assess cooperative partnerships and plan for future projects (especially church planting and strategic opportunities). We can’t do everything. We need to be wise with time and resources.
 - Encourage and equip members to advance the Gospel wherever God has placed them, through personal evangelism and serving in the name of Jesus.

² By the end of 2025, I will have preached at Emmaus on 46 Sunday mornings this year. That has been a pretty consistent number (44-47) in my time here, and I’ll continue to work with the other pastors to determine the best plan for future years.

- *Financial Strength*
 - Healthy, wise budget within an environment of financial integrity and trust
 - Generosity and Missional Giving (some mission projects are funded by the whole church family; some mission projects are funded by Sunday School classes; plus, many families and individuals have additional missionaries and organizations they support)
- *To Strength*
 - Developing long-term, generational gifts and investments
 - Leading young adults and families towards financial health, generosity, and sacrifice
- *Relational Strength*
 - People talking before and after the service, including interaction and prayer in the hallways and groups
 - A church known for warm hospitality, friendliness, and humble, loving relationships!
- *To Strength*
 - Small groups and friendships throughout the week (*this year has included many families getting together for dinner and encouragement during the week)
 - Connecting members with one another so new believers can grow spiritually and those who are hurting can find help and spiritual care.

3.4 Proclaim and Display Jesus' Kingdom, not ours

As we think about the future, we must resist the temptation to build our own little kingdom at the corner of Western & 160th. We don't want to build hundreds of individual kingdoms; and we definitely don't want little sub-kingdoms growing up within the church that constantly battle with one another. We have a greater calling – we exist to Proclaim and Display Jesus. We want to talk about and focus on Jesus more than we focus on ourselves. Let's look at John 18 to help us live this out.

4. John 18:33-40 – My Kingdom is Not of This World

John 18:33 So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" 35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." 37 Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

38 Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him. 39 But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" 40 They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

4.1 Working through John 18

Jesus' life and ministry were defined by battles about kings and kingdoms.

- Jesus was born into a world where a king (Herod) wanted him dead from the start.
- Jesus began his ministry by preaching about God's Kingdom: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15)
- Jesus' most famous preaching – the Sermon on the Mount – provides the most powerful presentation in history of what God's Kingdom is all about.
- Then, at the very end of his life, Jesus stood before a Roman puppet ruler who feared the effects of having a king in Judea.

Earlier in John 18, after Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus was taken in front of the Jewish authorities (the former High Priest, Annas, and the current High Priest, Caiaphas). They wanted Jesus dead, but they knew his death would require involvement from Pilate, the governor of Judea, under the ultimate rule of Rome.

Pilate didn't want to get involved; he was only concerned if Jesus was causing the kind of trouble that would bring attention from Rome. Pilate wouldn't allow a rival king. "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Pilate seemed confused why Jesus was in front of him. "What did you do to make these Jewish leaders so mad that they would ask me to get involved?" Jesus knew what was going on and refused to be manipulated. He didn't answer the question about his role as king, but he did begin talking about his kingdom. Jesus made clear that it wasn't his goal to overthrow Pilate's current role. Jesus was up to something more; his kingdom was different from those of this world. Jesus used Pilate's uncertainty as a chance to share his main purpose – to bear witness to the truth.

This led to Pilate's famous question: "What is truth?" – Who can you trust in a world of revolts and puppet rulers? Who can truly claim to have truth, to speak for God? How can there be such a thing as truth? Isn't everything simply social competition? Power? Opinion? The 1st century is now the 21st.

Pilate recognized Jesus was up to something different and refused to condemn Jesus, but Pilate also didn't want trouble with the Jewish leaders. So, Pilate appealed to the custom of releasing a prisoner around the time of the festival (presumably thinking the Jews would let Jesus go). Instead, the Jewish leaders ask for Barabbas's release.

Jesus – who was not threatening the Jewish nation but wanted to see God's promises for His People brought to fulfillment – was chosen for death. Barabbas – who conspired against the nation and was guilty of politically motivated violence – was released. It's hard to imagine a more ironic situation! It's also hard to imagine a more theologically important situation!!

- The death of an innocent man would bring freedom and life to a guilty man.
- The condemnation of Jesus would unleash salvation to the world.
- A lie – "This man claims to be king of the Jews" – would result in the spread of Truth.
- The Truth would turn out to be even greater than expected – this was the King of the Universe.

4.2 Kingdom of God or kingdoms of this world?

What is the Kingdom of God? To work on this question, let's use two of our favorite strategies for Bible study: defining terms and comparisons/contrasts.

First, we need to define what we mean by the Kingdom of God. A good starting point is the definition from Graeme Goldsworthy and Vaughan Roberts:

- **“God’s Kingdom is God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.”³**

The main weakness of this definition is that it puts a little too much emphasis on “place” – as if the Kingdom of God is a concrete thing, separate from God. To be in God’s “place” isn’t limited to a particular city or nation. The Kingdom of God exists whenever and wherever His reign is evidenced in His creation. As R.T. France explains in his helpful definition, **the Kingdom is “God in control.”⁴**

Jesus came to fulfill the Kingdom of God, by bringing God’s rule and blessings to God’s redeemed people, who are called out of the world (the realm in rebellion against God) and yet still live in the world (God’s creation). We don’t escape this world so we can one day go to God’s Kingdom in Heaven. Instead, “Thy Kingdom come.” In Genesis 1 and 2, Heaven and Earth were perfectly unified – God’s Kingdom was perfectly at work on earth. Revelation 21 and 22 promise us that one day Heaven and Earth will be brought back together. We live between Genesis 3 and Revelation 20. How do we experience His Kingdom now?

When you hear the word “kingdom” today, I hope you’ll think of the word **“rule” or “reign.”** Kingdom brings to mind medieval castles, knights on horses, and maidens in distress (Frozen; Brave; the old Robin Hood cartoon!). However, the term kingdom in Scripture – and in the New Testament Gospels – is mainly about reign. To put it simply, **“Who’s in charge? Who sets the rules and goals? Who has the power to enforce these rules and accomplish the goals?”**

How does God’s Kingdom compare and contrast with the kingdoms of this world?

- **Different Origin**
 - Jesus’ reign comes from God, not humans (or rebellious spiritual powers).
 - *Worldly Kingdom Origins:* From below; based on achievement and striving; begins with a lie and built on human ideas.
 - *God’s Kingdom Origins:* From above; based on mercy and grace, received by faith; begins with God’s Word, not human opinion.
 - Jesus’ Kingdom is not based on which person or group of people can garner the most force or support. Jesus’ Kingdom exists because He is from God, and wherever Jesus is at work, the Kingdom of God is present and advancing.

³ Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (a great overview of the Bible)

⁴ R. T. France, *Divine Government: God’s Kingship in the Gospel of Mark*

- **Different Purpose**

- Jesus' goal isn't to be delivered from the authorities (personal security) or to gain temporary, local power (political safety).
- *Worldly Kingdom Goals*: crowds; accolades; domination; wealth.
- *God's Kingdom Goals*: disciples; service; transformation; generosity.
- Jesus' purpose is "political" in the sense that His rule will impact how people live together in the world; but it isn't political in the sense of grasping at security or status.

- **Different Strategies**

- Jesus' approach isn't based on fighting against flesh and blood or manipulating others.
- *Worldly Kingdom Strategies and Values*: violence; being served; fighting over scarcity; promoting those on the inside and resisting outsiders or those who are different; fear.
- *God's Kingdom Strategies*: prayer; love; sharing from God's abundance; valuing and including outsiders, the hurting, and the powerless; hope.
- Jesus brought God's Kingdom by taking on the evil, spiritual powers in opposition to God – first by driving out demons, calming storms, and healing diseases, and ultimately by defeating sin and the devil on a Roman cross.

Why does this matter?

- **Like Pilate, we want to know, "What is truth?"**

- Is there anything we can trust, anything we can base our lives on? Is there a truth and story greater than us, or are we all just building our kingdoms, trying to avoid other people ruling over us too much while we try to make the most of this one, short life?
- Or, is there Truth? Maybe even One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life?

- **Like both Pilate and the Jewish authorities, we are bothered when the rule of God threatens our kingdoms.**

- If we get rid of Jesus, if we reject him, maybe we can just go on with our lives.
- The pesky problem with this strategy is that we are still ruled by spiritual powers beyond ourselves. These spiritual powers just end up being evil, dark, and self-seeking, instead of sacrificial, loving, and good.

- **Like Barabbas, we are sinners facing death. We are rebels against true authority.**

- Our only hope is the death of the One True King who is ultimately innocent.
- "I find no guilt in him," Pilate said.
- Yet, "He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; he bore the sin of man, and makes intercession for the transgressors."
- His death is our life. His death is not the end of the story.

How does this idea of the "Kingdom of God" impact our lives today?

4.3 Build Your Kingdom Here

Scholars consistently (and rightly) point out that the Kingdom of God is not the same as the Church. The Kingdom of God is the reign of God, whenever and wherever that reign is expressed. In a sense, the Kingdom of God is the all-encompassing reality of the universe. God is God whether He is acknowledged as such, or not. However, Scripture shows that God allows rebellious people to live under other rulers and as part of (temporary) rival kingdoms.

Following the effects of sin in Genesis 3, we see how God made a way for rebellious people to live under His Kingdom again. He chose a people – the Jews who would come from Abraham, and *priests* and leaders within this group of people – to live under His reign and spread the light of His Kingdom to the nations. God then provided earthly *kings* to serve as His intermediaries in leading the people and also provided *prophets* to call the people back to God’s rule over their lives.

These plans didn’t fulfill God’s Kingdom in the short term, but the stage was set for One who *would* fulfill the Kingdom. The Son of God, the Messiah – the Prophet, Priest, and King – brought God’s Kingdom perfectly to earth. Jesus Christ embodied and lived out God’s reign. And through Christ’s death and resurrection, the Kingdom of God was unleashed into the world through the Holy Spirit!

4.3.1 The Kingdom of God and Individual Hearts

The Holy Spirit brings the rule of God into individual lives, transforming our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. When we turn in faith to Jesus – confessing Him as Lord and believing in the power of the Resurrection – we receive a new heart and experience the reign of God over our lives. The Christian motto is: “Not my will, but Yours be done!” (“In your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord” – 1 Peter 3:15)

The Kingdom of God changes us from the inside out. We speak and act differently because God is ruling our lives. We stop fighting to build our individual kingdoms. The imagery for kids is to ask them to think of a king’s throne inside their life (their heart). Now, ask yourself, “Who is on that throne?” We don’t simply join God’s Kingdom and continue living however we want. The Christian life is a process of learning how to live as part of God’s Kingdom through His Word, Spirit, and Church.

***Who rules over my life? How is God’s Kingdom transforming my life?*

4.3.2 The Kingdom of God and the Church

As mentioned earlier, the Kingdom of God is more than the Church. *But, this doesn’t take away from the fact that the Church is God’s chosen signpost and expression of the Kingdom in the world today.* In this world, the Kingdom of God is expressed most powerfully and visibly through a diverse group of Jesus’ disciples loving one another in unity, gathering for worship, and making disciples of all nations.

When our kids were little and wanted to play in the church building, they’d say, “We can do this; dad’s in charge of the church!” That’s a great thing to say as a little kid; it turns out to be really bad theology. *The local church is a billboard to the world stating, “Jesus is Lord. Jesus is in charge here.”* When things are working well, the local church is able to proclaim and display Jesus’ Kingdom to the world.

We must ensure our church operates according to Kingdom values and strategies. We don't exist to build our own little kingdoms or promote the kingdoms of this world. As the Church, we "practice" and embody the Kingdom of God, and we carry God's Kingdom values and strategies everywhere we go.

***Is Jesus in charge of our church? Are we a local picture of what it looks like when God reigns?*

4.3.3 The Kingdom of God and Interpersonal Relationships

As part of God's created order, He has provided the institutions of family and government. The Church is primary – as the true Family of God and the true City of God – but the Kingdom of God isn't isolated to our relationships or activities with other Christians. Plus, the Kingdom of God isn't isolated to individuals. God's Kingdom impacts how we live in the world! The Kingdom of God should show up in how we treat our family members (marriage, parenting, siblings) and friends, should extend into our workplaces and neighborhoods, and should include how we relate to our enemies.

Those ruled by God's Kingdom won't try to rule others. We will live with love, forgiveness, care, and patience. We will pray for others, do good to them, and not seek personal vengeance. We will seek to live in peace with one another through humility and sacrifice.

***How does the Kingdom of God impact the way I interact with others?*

4.3.4 The Kingdom of God and Human Cultures

People who are ruled by God – both individuals and churches – will live differently in the world. Because of this, not just relationships but also the wider culture will be impacted. The ultimate focus is Revelation 11:15 - "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." One day, everything opposed to God's Kingdom will be removed in judgment, and God's rule will be fully established in the New Creation.

The tension for our lives today has to do with God's rule being expressed in the cultures and nations of this world (this "present evil age"), before the return of Christ for salvation, judgment, and the New Creation. *The impact of God's Kingdom on this world is a profound, beautiful reality, but it's also the source of theological tension and some major battles happening within Christianity today.* Here's the rub – when Christians are ruled by Jesus and carry their transformed lives into the world, these Christians may find themselves (we hope they find themselves!) in places of political, civic, and business leadership. When Christians are in these roles, the result should be good for the culture and the world. But, the opportunity to "influence" culture comes with temptations.

One temptation is to use worldly means to pursue the goals of God's Kingdom. For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus was being betrayed and arrested, Peter took out his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. Peter wanted to protect Jesus and promote Jesus' work, but the sword was not the way, because the sword would stand in the way of the cross. Jesus' response to Peter ("Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?") shows he is clearly not happy with Peter's approach. This truth remains today.

A second temptation is to use otherwise godly means to pursue worldly goals. For example, the mother of James and John imagined that her sons' involvement with Jesus would result in special assignments in Jesus' Kingdom. ("Say that my two sons may sit, one at Your right side and one at Your left side, when You are King.") She spoke to Jesus; that's good. She heard *king* and immediately thought of status; that's bad. Jesus said, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" Jesus came as King to serve, not be served. This truth remains today.

How is the Kingdom of God established? The Cross and Resurrection. Changed lives; changed churches; changed relationships; changed cultures – in that order. But this change must be empowered by God's Spirit and happen in the name of Jesus, in accordance with God's Word.

Why does this matter for our church? We will face difficult questions about the degree to which we should align with certain groups (especially political parties) in order to promote the values and purposes of God's Kingdom. It's not a bad thing to promote good and resist evil in the culture around us! The danger comes when doing this "requires" us to align completely with a particular party, culture, or nation. The Kingdom of God is greater than – and stands above, over, and against – every kingdom of this world.

When I think about the possibility of pastoring this church family in the coming years, I want you to know how excited I am about the prospect of studying the Bible and sharing with you what the Lord can teach us from His Word. I get excited about encouraging us to love one another and grow in faith through the Holy Spirit. I get excited about seeing people turn to Jesus when they hear the Gospel. I get excited about us being a source of light and salt – grace and truth – for the world around us.

But to do this, we must embody the values and goals of God's Kingdom. We will be a diverse group unified around the name and Gospel of Jesus. We will remain a place where people of differing convictions and backgrounds can gather to worship the Lord, serve together, and challenge one another to be transformed by the renewing of our minds as we are conformed to the image of Christ.

And so we pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

4.4 The Kingdom of God and Emmaus

As we wrap up this morning, here are simple ways we can focus on the Kingdom of God at Emmaus.

4.4.1 Advent Prayer Guide and Devotion

This week, Nov 30 - Dec 6, is the **Week of Prayer for Global Missions**. Kennedy has put together a personalized Emmaus prayer guide that you can pick up on your way out. Plus, there is a prayer walk in the lobby, and you can come up this afternoon from 3pm - 5pm to pray. The Week of Prayer coincides with the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Our church gives a portion of our yearly offering to Lottie Moon, and if you'd like to make an additional gift, you can do that online at any point.⁵

⁵ You can designate your gift at Emmaus, or give directly to the Lottie Moon Offering at www.imb.org.

As part of the prayer guide, we've included **a devotion about the Kingdom of God** that will take you through Advent to Christmas Eve. I'll send this devotion through email, plus you can access it through the printed prayer guides in the lobby. Watch for the sign-up email in your inbox this afternoon.

**As a church, we have a perfect opportunity to experience God's Kingdom at the end of 2025. We will pray for the spread of the Gospel around the world! And, we will search the Scriptures asking God to help us understand more about His reign over our lives through Christ. We will learn that God's Kingdom is about repentance and forgiveness; generosity and good works; humility and peace.*

Over the next few weeks, how will God guide you to seek His Kingdom in everything you do? How does a business owner operate for God's Kingdom? How does a student learn and live for God's Kingdom? How does a mom advance God's Kingdom in her home? How does an older adult live every moment under God's reign?

4.4.2 Salvation and Baptism

Salvation – repenting of sin and confessing Jesus as Lord – is the ultimate Kingdom act. In fact, Colossians 1:13-14 says, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

If you have never trusted in Jesus for salvation, reach out to someone today! Plus, if you've never been baptized or are confused about your baptism, let's discuss this. Baptism is your public profession of faith and a declaration to the world that you are living for a different Kingdom.

4.4.3 King of Kings

We are going to wrap up this morning with the song “King of Kings.” It's tempting for people to want the blessings of God's kingdom – peace, order, relationships, godly culture – but resist the King.

There is no kingdom without the King! For all of eternity, God the Father has poured out his life and love to His Son. For all of eternity, the Son has received and returned the Father's love. This love that is shared between Father and Son is not confined just to two persons. The love of the Father and Son is shared in the fellowship and joy of the Spirit, and God's love goes out through the Spirit. The very nature of God is to share His love, and this love gives life.

The love and life from God – Father, Son, Spirit – brought creation into existence, including humans made in His image, to bring glory to Him and live under His rule and reign. But this is not the rule of a slave master; this is the family blessing of freedom, of the eternal good life. All because of Jesus.

*Praise the Father, praise the Son,
Praise the Spirit, three in one,
God of glory, Majesty,
Praise forever to the King of Kings!*

5. Jeremiah 37-39: Political Chaos and Prophetic Perseverance

Jeremiah 37:1 Zedekiah the son of Josiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah, reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim. 2 But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the LORD that he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet.

5.1 Political Chaos

Zedekiah was the final king before the Jews were ultimately taken into Babylonian captivity. He was hopeful that Egyptian power would keep the Babylonians out of his backyard, and he appealed to the prophet Jeremiah to pray for God's protection. The Lord made clear to Jeremiah that no such protection was coming.

Throughout Israel's history, we find multiple kings who were tempted to look for political alliances to defend the nation against attacking enemies. The Israelites – first the Northern Kingdom, then the Southern Kingdom – were relatively weak from a military and political perspective. (It's worth noting, they did have the Creator of Heaven and Earth on their side, if they would trust Him!) Because of their perceived weakness and the threat of invasion, the kings would make alliances, even if these alliances went against God's Word.

The Book of Jeremiah deals with the final days of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. But the end of Israel, the Northern Kingdom of ten tribes, also ended with an Israelite king torn between two worldly kingdoms:

In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. 2 And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him. 3 Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria. And Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. 4 But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea, for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. 5 Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. (2 Kings 17:1-6)

*When circumstances seem chaotic, especially on a national scale, it is tempting to look for quick solutions. We scan the horizon to see who has the current upper hand and then use that cultural analysis to calculate the right strategy. We should always be careful when transferring situations from ancient Israel/Judah to contemporary nations. Certainly, we want our nation to learn from the wisdom of God's Word! However, our interpretation of this passage tonight should be less about the national government and more about how our church can respond to Jeremiah's message and example.

As God's people living amid political uncertainty (and sometimes chaos), what can we learn from Jeremiah about being part of God's Kingdom?

5.2 Prophetic Perseverance

5.2.1 Humbly, but Confidently, Trust God's Word - Jeremiah warned Zedekiah repeatedly with prophecies from God about the Babylonian judgment that was coming. Zedekiah pridefully refused to listen to God's Word. Jeremiah, though, refused to change the message to please the king. Jeremiah continued to speak God's Word and call out sin, even when he knew the result would be disastrous.

5.2.2 Prayer without Obedience to God's Word doesn't Guarantee Blessing - Zedekiah wanted Jeremiah to pray for the people and the city, that God's judgment wouldn't come. However, Zedekiah's prayer was about a quick and easy result, not about his heart being turned to the Lord. Throughout Jeremiah's prophecies, he refused to preach Peace when there was no true peace to be found. It's good that political leaders (or leaders of any kind) want to pray; but prayer must be according to God's will, not our own.

5.2.3 Opposition will Come...Stay Faithful to the Lord - Jeremiah is called the 'weeping prophet' for a reason. Ultimately, officials of the king, with King Zedekiah's permission, threw Jeremiah in a deep cistern, where he sank into the mud (literally and metaphorically). Even when Jeremiah was rescued from the cistern, his message didn't change. Remember what Jesus said: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

5.2.4 God will use Unexpected People to continue His Work - After being left for dead in the cistern by the royal officials, Jeremiah's story could've easily ended, no fault of his own. Instead, Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian eunuch in the king's house, courageously put together a plan to rescue Jeremiah. (It's hard not to think of the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized by Philip in Acts 8.) Compared to the royal, Jewish officials, Ebed-melech would've been an outsider and inferior in almost every way. But his faith helped Jeremiah persevere. When those on the "inside" are causing chaos and living unfaithfully, God always has a remnant, usually unexpected people from unexpected places, who will trust and serve Him.

5.2.5 We should be cautious about looking to worldly kingdoms for solutions. - In the Book of Jeremiah, we see in Chapter 29 how he encouraged the exiles to seek the good of the city where they were forced to live. Jeremiah didn't advocate passivity, but even as the people faced exile and defeat, he called them to remain faithful to the Lord. When trouble is on the horizon or persecution arises, it is tempting for Christians to seek worldly solutions. We desire political stability so we can live peacefully (1 Timothy 2:1-4), but political power is not required for the Church of Jesus Christ to remain faithful and effective.

As Christians, the presence of political chaos shouldn't change our perseverance in faith or obedience to God's Word. Instead, we want to live faithfully in this world, so people will see a picture of God's Kingdom and might be drawn to the Lord's grace and salvation. In some unique ways, Baptist history and theology provide wisdom and resources for endurance amid political chaos. We're going to wrap up tonight by looking at a few of these Baptist distinctives.

6. The Benefits of Being Baptist

Possibly because our church name is unusual and hard to pronounce – or maybe for other reasons – Emmaus is a Southern Baptist church with people from many different denominational backgrounds. Connected to what I said this morning, I count this as a major positive for our church family!

It does bring up a couple of questions – What does it even mean to be Baptist? Does it matter that we're Baptist?

In light of the political realities of both the 6th century BC and the 21st century AD, we can gain some encouragement and guidance from a few Baptist distinctives.

6.1. Baptist and Southern Baptist

Keep in mind that “baptist” (probably better stated with the adjective ‘baptistic’) is a broader term than Southern Baptist. Several streams of baptist groups exist throughout church history. Many historical surveys trace baptist life to 1609 with the ministry of John Smyth, an English Separatist living in Amsterdam. (The Separatists were 16th and 17th century Christians who broke from the Church of England, rejecting state control. They wanted independent congregations where they could shape their liturgy and practices.) Some of those Smyth baptized returned to England; then by the 1630s, a group led by Roger Williams made its way to America, ultimately forming a church in Rhode Island. Over the next two centuries, baptist churches continued forming, ultimately leading to cooperative missions work in the early 1800s that led to the Southern Baptist Convention.

At the risk of coming up with a cheesy memory device, I've been helped in remembering the early baptist distinctives as ABC: **(A) - Autonomy** (independence of local churches and separation of church and state), **(B) - Believer's Baptism** (not the baptism of babies), and **(C) - Cooperation** (independent churches with common beliefs choosing to work together for missions).

6.2 Southern Baptist Distinctives

Following the Triennial Convention in 1814 (the first national Baptist convention to coordinate foreign missions), Baptists ultimately divided over whether to appoint missionaries who owned slaves.

Much as we would want a political party or nation to do, we as Southern Baptists should be able to critique ourselves without dismissing the many good things the Lord has done through our churches over the years. We cannot overlook the role of slavery in the formation of the convention. Struggles have continued with sexual abuse carried out by pastors, in-fighting among factions, questionable financial decisions in ministry groups, and declining baptism and membership numbers. On top of these realities, Southern Baptists have a general reputation of being legalistic, anti-intellectual, and adverse to change (and we're probably guilty-in-part on all three charges).

Even still, I think Southern Baptist churches have many strengths, including some distinctives that seem perfectly designed to help Christians persevere and thrive amid political chaos.

6.2.1 Convention of churches, not a Denomination - A convention involves the voluntary cooperative fellowship of independent churches. This is different from a denomination that generally has a more hierarchical structure and at least some measure of control over the local churches. As a convention, Southern Baptists can provide a picture of local freedom along with purposeful cooperation. This cooperation must have wide enough parameters to allow for diverse churches to participate but must maintain shared beliefs and practices that allow for trust and ministry. This is unity through diversity.

6.2.2 Believer's Baptism - A person's standing with God is not based on the family into which they were born, the country in which they were born, or any merit they might've gained through financial contributions or religious observance. The Church is voluntary and regenerate. Only those who have repented of sin and trusted Christ are members. Baptism is the picture of what God has done in a person's life, washing away sin through the death of Jesus and providing new and eternal life through the resurrection. This salvation, though, isn't private or solitary. The baptized believer is made part of the Church (the Body of Christ) and expresses his or her faith through involvement in a local church.

6.2.3 Missional Cooperation - When we're at our best, Southern Baptists are cooperating to fund and send missionaries. Amid the craziness of the annual meetings, my favorite part is the commissioning of those that are being sent by the International Mission Board to go and share the Gospel in hard places. Not every missionary needs to go with a Southern Baptist group (the Kingdom of God is *much* bigger than the SBC). However, Southern Baptists should continue to lead the way in cooperating together to advance the Gospel around the world. When we focus on missions, we're less likely to become overwhelmed and distracted by lesser matters.

6.2.4 The Bible - Southern Baptists are people of the Book. We value Sunday School and Discipleship Training, understanding that these groups might meet in a variety of ways. At Emmaus, we're a Sunday School church that utilizes a variety of other groups to extend the task of making disciples. We have a commitment to biblical theology, and this love for God's Word is a source of stability and guidance in changing times. Supporting documents, such as historical statements of faith and the more recent Baptist Faith and Message, provide theological categories and explanations for understanding Scripture. At the end of the day, though, our allegiance is always to the Bible as God's Word and to Christ alone as the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 5:39-40; John 14:6).

6.2.5 Religious Liberty - The government does not determine the members of a church, regulate the beliefs of a church, nor establish a national religion. From the very beginning, this has been a hallmark of Baptist life, and the distinction seems particularly important during times when some people might want the national government to become more involved in religion. Section 17 of the Baptist Faith and Message speaks directly to this issue and is worth a read, if you've never done so.

We will proclaim and display Jesus, seeking to build up the Church and advance the Gospel, knowing that lives are ultimately transformed through God's Word and God's Spirit. The way of Christ is love, peace, hope, and endurance. Instead of political chaos, we will choose prophetic perseverance.

7. Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done

As we wrap up a long day of thinking about the Kingdom of God, I'm reminded of what Jesus taught his disciples in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. (Significantly, this model prayer from Jesus is strategically placed at the center of the Sermon on the Mount, almost as if he was saying, "If you want to live as part of God's Kingdom, here's the core.")

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, Amen."

7.1 Thy Kingdom Come

During 2026, I pray God will reign over our lives and church. Through prayer, we acknowledge God's love and grace as our Father. Through prayer, we acknowledge His holiness and power – set apart, hallowed – and we want God's name to be known among all people. Through prayer, we want His Kingdom to be present on earth as it is experienced now in Heaven! Kingdom people will always be a praying people. As we prepare for 2026, I hope you'll use this week's prayer guide for missions and grow in your understanding of the Kingdom of God through the daily Advent devotions.

7.2 Thy Will be Done

Prayer leads to transformed hearts and lives. As we submit ourselves to the Lord, we are asking for His power – for His Holy Spirit – to guide us.

- This year, may we trust Him daily for what we need, and be ready to share this bread with others.
- This year, may we seek His forgiveness, and be ready to forgive those who are in our debt, who sin against us.
- This year, may our hearts so desire God's Kingdom that we desperately pray for His protection against sin, seeking to hear God's Word, be honest with one another in confession, and fill our lives with passion for what truly matters.
- This year, we will have trouble and face evil. But our loving Father provides protection and deliverance, and we have hope and peace because Jesus has overcome the world.

I love you Emmaus, and I can't wait to see how the Lord will work in the days ahead. Let's end our time together today by saying the Lord's Prayer, then I'll offer a final prayer for us.



Dr. Owen Nease
owen@emmausokc.org

Appendix A - Sermon Overview

(**Bold = Sunday AM sermon series**; *Italics = Sunday PM or Wednesday PM services*)

Books of the Bible

- *Leviticus (2018-2019)*
- *Numbers (2023-2024)*
- **Joshua (chs 1-7 2017; chs 8-24 2018)**
- *Judges (2018)*
- **Ruth (2018)**
- **Ezra (2021)**
- **Nehemiah (2021)**
- **Esther (2021)**
- **Psalms (various)**
- **Proverbs (2016)**
- *Jeremiah (2025-2026)*
- **Daniel (2021)**
- **Minor Prophets (2024)**
- **Matthew (2018-2020)**
- **Mark (2022-2023)**
- **John (2025-2026)**
- **1 Corinthians 12-16 (2018)**
- **Galatians (2020)**
- **Philippians (2026)**
- **Colossians (2017)**
- **1 Thessalonians (2016)**
- *2 Thessalonians (2016)*
- *1 Timothy (2017)*
- *2 Timothy (2017)*
- **Titus (2017)**
- **Philemon (2017)**
- **Hebrews (2023-2024)**
- *1 Peter (2022)*
- *2 Peter (2023)*
- **1 John (2026)**
- *Jude (2023)*
- **Revelation 1-3 (2016)**

Themes/Theology

- **3 Circles Evangelism / Acts 17 (2016)**
- *World Religions (2016)*
- **Music “weTunes” (2017)**
- **Holiness / Sanctification “Holey, Wholly, Holy” (2018)**
- **Sports (2018)**
- *Ten Commandments (2019)*
- **Who is God? (2020)**
- **UnLIMITed: The Gift of Limits (2020)**
- **Fruit of the Spirit (2021)**
- **Fresh Start (2021)**
- *Twelve Apostles (2021)*
- **Women of Christmas (2021)**
- **“I Doubt It” (2022)**
- **“Foundations, not Fences” (2022)**
- **Rest (2023)**
- **Generations (2024)**
- **“May the Words of My Mouth...” (2025)**

Appendix 2 - Next Step Considerations

Priorities: What are we actually trying to address?

1. Children and Preschool

- a. Move Preschool Entrance closer to Worship Center, or at least make it more direct/easier for preschool guests to access the Preschool check-in
- b. Enhance and Simplify Security (Single Entrance) in Preschool / Kids areas
- c. Upgrade and improve their spaces and rooms for future ministry

2. Unification of the Buildings/Property

- a. Our buildings can be tough to navigate.
- b. Value of fellowship space and helping guests know where to begin/where to go.

3. Adult Groups Space

- a. We've almost maxed out the number of groups for our available rooms

4. Other Ministry Considerations for the Future

- a. Need flexible spaces that allow for missions and ministry opportunities

Building Options: What are the ideas on the table?

1. Save, Wait, and Focus on Ministry/Missions while Updating the Current Buildings

- a. For what it's worth, I'm not against this plan. I think it embodies both faith and wisdom.

2. Move ahead with the Current Master Plan

- a. Demolish the north two-thirds of Building B
- b. Connect an Atrium and New Preschool/Children's Building to south side of Building A
- c. Pros:
 - i. Matches the current master plan established in 2021
 - ii. Would be the ideal plan if we were building the whole campus new
- d. Cons:
 - i. Construction period would be chaotic during the demolition and rebuild
 - ii. Demolition of currently available square footage; cost concerns

3. Hybrid Plan #1

- a. Building A - new climate-controlled atrium on south side of A
 - i. Connection corridor for buildings; space for guests, events, hospitality, fellowship
- b. Building B - relocate and/or improve Preschool check-in, security, and classrooms
- c. Building C - Reconfigure the gym as the new children's building
 - i. Only access point would be the current north-facing, interior Gym doors
 - ii. Build out this area with multiple classrooms and a large group space
- d. Gym and Youth Space
 - i. Build a gym, youth meeting space, and youth classrooms on west side of Bldg A

4. Hybrid Plan #2

- a. Add atrium to south side of A; build new Preschool/Children's space on west side of A

5. Some combo of the above options, or an idea we're not even thinking of right now

- a. **The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. - Prov 16:9*