

READING OF GOD'S WORD

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"¹⁵But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

"¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

"¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

INTRODUCTION :

Today, we'll talk about the church.

There was this story of a family who were on their way to church. So while they were in the car, the mom wanted to make sure that her children will behave while in the church. So she reminded her kids that they should be quiet when they are in church. So to reinforce, she asked them, "Why should we be quiet in church?" The youngest raised her hand and said, "I know the answer." So the mom said, "Why should we be quiet in church?" So the girl answered, "It's because people are sleeping."

By God's grace, I have been given the topic : Are we a club or a church?

Before we answer that, let's define what a club is :

Of course, we're not talking about that wooden stick.

Let's see what Oxford Dictionary says :

1. a group of people who meet together regularly, for a particular activity, sports, etc.

E.g. tennis club; glee club; horticulture club; youth club;

2. the building or rooms that a particular club uses

e.g. golf club

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines club as

: an association of persons for some common object usually jointly supported and meeting periodically
also : a group identified by some common characteristic

Do you know that one of the most exclusive club in the world is called The Bohemian Club – it's an elite club where the wealthiest and most elite people in the United States whether in the arts, academia, bankers, politicians belong to.

In the Philippines, the most exclusive club is the Manila Polo Club – even if you have money, you just can't be a member there. Even Manny Pacquiao was denied membership when he applied for membership.

So the question we would like to answer by God's grace is the church like a social club – where we just meet together regularly because we share a common objective? Let's say what we're doing right now. We meet every Sunday, worship the Lord and then we go home. **So does it mean we're like a social club?**

And I believe, this is what plagues the church nowadays. Without noticing it or being conscious about it, even if we do not admit it, church nowadays is almost like a social club.

We gather together for a common spiritual objective. We listen to a sermon like listening to a guest speaker in a club meeting, we sing songs or listen to songs and then we do it all over again next week. Much like a club that meets regularly for a common objective.

Then you might say, Pastor, what then is a church? I can go to the etymology of it and I can give to you the metaphors of what a church is

The Biblical metaphors used to describe the church are :

- Body of Christ (where Jesus is the head and we are all members)
- Bride of Christ (where we await the coming of the Bridegroom)
- Flock of Christ (Jesus being the Shepherd, we are the sheep)
- Building (where we are being built together with Christ as our Cornerstone)
- Family (with God as our Father)

I have also heard lately that the church is "hospital". I agree with that in some extent but it need not end there because once they get well, what usually happens is people leave the "hospital" and they don't come back again until they get sick again.

What am I saying? For example, a person has trouble with a husband or wife. Or they lose a job, or they become literally sick, you will always see them in church but once God answers their prayers, then they disappear.

So again, you might say, "Pastor, what then is a church?"

By God's grace, based on the passage in Matthew 16,

- This is the first time that the word "church" is used in the Bible.
- This is also the time our Lord Jesus Christ described what the church is.

So the church is not a club, based on Matthew 16, WE ARE GOD'S ARMY!

We have to remember, that while we are here, we are involved in Spiritual Warfare and we are God's soldiers!

And that's the problem again with church nowadays, we act as if it's like a club where we will be happy, entertained and comfortable, or it's like a hospital where everyone is babi'ed.

That's why a lot of Christians are soft nowadays, because we don't realize that we are soldiers with a mission.

Example : We get offended by another member in the church, we leave. We complain a lot when it comes to church. We are corrected by the pastor or we hear a sermon we don't like from the pastor, we leave. We get bored in church because we're not entertained.

That's why Charles Spurgeon mentioned.

Quote: "A church should be a camp of soldiers, not an hospital of invalids. But there is exceedingly much difference between what ought be and what is, and consequently many of God's people are in so sad a state that the very fittest prayer for them is for revival." - Charles Spurgeon

As an army, soldiers are tough and they will keep on following Christ because they know they are part of a mission! They will never leave a fellow soldier behind. They will fight with a soldier.

Illustration : The first church, acted like soldiers and they will do everything to accomplish that mission.

So let's look at this in Matthew 16 – THE CHURCH AS AN ARMY

- **THE COMMANDER**
- **THE CORPS**
- **THE COMMISSION**

I. THE COMMANDER

Matthew 16 : ¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

The church was formed by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It was founded by our Lord, not by any government, not by man or a prophet BUT BY THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD!

That's why He said,

¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church,

Now let me emphasize what Peter said as revealed by God.

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

We have to remember that the founder of the church is alive. HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD AND IS NOW AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER – **WHICH MEANS ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO HIM** (WE'LL TALK ABOUT THAT LATER) AND HE STILL IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

Colossians 1 :18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

The head of the church is not a pope, not a bishop, not a priest, not a pastor, not an elder nor any man or a group of men. It is Christ Himself.

Quote : Spurgeon had a sermon he preached called, “Jesus, Our Lord,”

“The church of God in a very special manner calls Jesus our Lord for there is not and there cannot be any head of the church except the Lord Jesus Christ. It is awful blasphemy for any man on earth to call himself Christ’s vicar and the head of the church. It is a usurpation of the crown rights of King Jesus for any king or queen to be called the head of the church, for the true church of Jesus Christ can have no head but Jesus Christ Himself. And I’m thankful there is no head to the church of which I am a member except Jesus Christ, nor dare I be a member of any church which would content to any headship but His.”

Yes, God has established pastors and elders and as elders of this church, we acknowledge that there is only one true head of the church and He is our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now since our Lord, our commander is alive,
Our Lord is present whenever his church gathers

Matthew 18:20 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Quote : It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God. – A.W. Tozer

Illustration :

People read in the newspaper that the President would attend Riverview church. There was a typo mistake in the newspaper which should have read Riverside church. So there was an unusually big crowd that morning in the church and it was standing room only. The service starts at 10:30 a.m. and obviously the President wasn’t there. So the pastor stood up to start the service. While he was about to start, someone from the congregation interrupted and said, “Pastor, what time is the President coming? Shouldn’t we wait for him?” The pastor replied, “I don’t know what you’re talking about but the God of the Universe is here so I’m pretty sure it’s ok for us to begin our worship service.”

IMPORTANT Note : That’s why it is very important to make sure that the reason we go to church is not because it’s a duty to go to church or it’s because we are assigned something or it’s because GOD IS HERE! OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS HERE!

And that’s the reason we invite people to go to church, not because of the entertainment or the food but because we know GOD IS PRESENT WITH US AND WHEN HE IS PRESENT, EXPECT BLESSINGS AND MIRACLES AND CHANGES TO HAPPEN IN OUR LIVES.

Have that expectancy when coming to church.

This is the reason why when we sing worship songs, we sing with all of our hearts. When we serve, we serve with joy. When we talk and encourage people, we do it with joy...WHY? OUR LORD JESUS IS HERE!!!

And that’s also one of the reasons, we listen intently to sermon, why because our COMMANDER HAS SOME PERSONAL INSTRUCTIONS TO YOU OR SOME MOTIVATION FOR YOU THAT YOU WILL NEED FOR THE FIGHT!

II. THE CORPS

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

First time the word church appears in the Bible.

Etymology : church "ekklesia" ekk "out of or away from" kalea "called"
Called out - called out of their daily activities to gather for a special purpose.

It is a formal assembly of people for political or religious context during the time of Jesus.

For the Athenians, the ekklesia are the ones who nominates and appoints judges and officials and making legislations.

Now listen carefully, of the things that this assembly does aside from this is **they are responsible for** declaring war or military strategies.

That's why our Lord Jesus Christ said,

and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

You see this? The church is called to take the offensive. It's not a call to defend. It's a call to ram the gates of Hades and rescue people. It's a rescue mission.

Let me expose this for you by God's grace.

Gates – remember that cities before were surrounded by walls and fortresses and gates usually is the one being rammed so they can enter the city.

Hades – other translations hell but original is hades is the place where the dead lies.

So if we're going to for a dynamic translation, we can translate this as "the power of death" will not overcome it.

How? We'll talk about that later on.

But let me focus first on this...

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church

THE ROCK DEBATE : There has been some debate on what this rock mean.

First school of thought : Peter (petros) which means a stone and rock (petra) cliff or a large rock because he was the one chosen by God to declare it, from him, the church will start and it showed when in Acts 2, when they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and he delivered a sermon and 5000 of them was added to them that day.

Second school of thought : the rock that Jesus is mentioning is the declaration of Peter "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Which means that the foundation of the church is Christ as the Son of the living God.

I go for the second one because of context on what Jesus said and because other Scriptures support it because Jesus was called the "cornerstone".

Ephesians 2: 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

You can also see this in Acts 4 and 1 Peter 2:4-8

Nevertheless, here's where I want you to focus...

Jesus called Simon (a Hebrew name which means, "heard" or to hear ...as Peter! A rock)

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church

And this is what happens to us when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with God's Word and fulfilling His mission.

1 Peter 2: 4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

In short, God's soldiers are like rocks, determined to fulfill their mission even at the cost of their own lives.

Look at how the disciples died.

- Peter was crucified upside down
- Paul was beheaded
- Andrew crucified
- Thomas pierced with spears
- Matthew stabbed to death
- Bartholomew – flayed (skinned) alive and beheaded
- James – stoned and clubbed to death
- Simon (the Zealot) – said to be sawed in half
- Matthias – burned

Only John died a natural death.

Christians in the West never had it so comfortable and that's why we tend to neglect or de-prioritize God and our fellow soldiers.

III. THE COMMISSION

¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

As mentioned earlier, we are on a military offensive.

the gates of Hades will not overcome it

The church should be evangelism-driven and not entertainment driven.

Quote : “The Devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. Providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the Church. The need is biblical doctrine, so understood and felt that it sets men afire.” - Charles Spurgeon

Do we want to know if our church is becoming like a club or the army of God?

Simple : Look at where the budget goes to.

As soldiers of Christ, as part of God's army, this is our mission.

Myth : susi ni San Pedro. The keys were given to the church

Explain : Two images from Jesus' time

REGARDING THE KEYS : Scriptures during that time was hidden in a box and they have to use a key to open it to take out the Scriptures and read in the synagogues.

REGARDING THE BINDING AND LOOSING :

Again, context, context, context...

This can be explained two ways :

- **Scriptures were not in a book format during their time.** Just like these days, the Bible is not only found in book format but in digital format.

So during that time, the form was in scrolls. And it is tied.

In order for you to read it, you need to let it loose. Once you're done, you need to bind it.

In short, whenever we proclaim the Gospel, the truth, we are opening God's Word to others and there's no other way that people will be saved.

Romans 10: 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Illustration : All of us here by God's grace, you know you are saved if you believe that Jesus Christ took the punishment of your sin on the cross and that by believing that He rose again from the dead... **but how did you know that...someone opened the Word of God in your life.**

- **Loosing and binding is a legal phrase among the Jews.**

Illustration : Just like what we have today, we say “the contract is binding...”

This means, you are tied to this contract... for example, you sign a loan with a bank, you need to pay that loan because you signed the contract or else there will be consequences.

Let's say, a rich man went to the bank and paid off all your loans and mortgages, the bank (the law) says, “I'm letting you loose from your obligations to me because someone has already paid for your debts.”

Our Lord has given the church that function by the proclamation of the gospel.

When people hear the Gospel, we telling them that you are being let loose from your debts from God because Jesus Christ has paid it for us already.

Now, it is also to the church which our Lord entrusted the preaching of the truth which is found in Scriptures.

This is the reason why the Bible says

1 Timothy 3:15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

That's why as soldiers, our weapon is spiritual.

2 Corinthians 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Ephesians 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

That's why it's very important that the church is preaching the truth because it is through the Scriptures where people will know what is "lawful" and "righteous" in the eyes of God.

But whatever it is : It's talking about the mission of the church

**Matthew 28 : ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Look at this, our commander is asking us to free people from Hades and while we are doing that...OUR COMMANDER IS WITH US!

And do you know, in the second coming of Jesus Christ, we will be with Him not to save people but to punish Satan and those people who rebelled against Him.

Revelation 19: 11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

Who are these armies?

Revelation 19 : 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

That's you and me and all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

So is the church a club? One hundred percent. NO!

Quote : THE CHURCH IS OUR LORD'S ARMY HERE ON EARTH WITH A MISSION TO RESCUE THOSE WHO ARE HELD CAPTIVE BY THE ENEMY. YOU ARE PART OF GOD'S ARMY. YOU ARE A SOLDIER OF CHRIST.

NOW A WORD OF WARNING BECAUSE GOD LOVES YOU.

Remember, as God's soldier, it means you are on God's side (whoever is not with me is against me) and you have an enemy. What is the enemy doing?

1 Peter 5:8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STORY : How lions hunt. First, they will do a fake attack on the group of wildebeests. Why will they do that? It's because they will try to find out who are weak or who tends to run away from the group. Once they determine that, they will focus on that person.

This is the reason why the Bible says :

Hebrews 10:25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near. (NLT)

S.G.D.