

Week Four - Spiritual Blessings

With the arrival of Advent this coming Sunday, the church takes a unique annual opportunity to move from background noise to the front burner for society. Thank God this happens every Christmas season...because the Church holds the potential to be the greatest adversary to the ever-oppressive Kingdom of Evil.

Through the years, I have become aware of the misconceptions that people have about what the church really is and how it should function. Simply put; the Church is a living organism – a growing community. It is not a building or even a philosophy. It is a group of people saved by the blood of Christ and dependent upon Him for their salvation from sin and promised future hope. The church was purchased by the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross and waits for His return as a bride waits to see her groom. The church is powerful and strengthens as she works together and lets Christ work through her.

A few years back, I read a letter asking for churches to get involved with helping out a sister church. This church needing assistance went through a catastrophe where dangerous weather had leveled the church building. As I read the letter, I noticed that throughout the correspondence, the writer kept asking for help for the church and proceeded to inform the reader how the church had been destroyed.

More precisely, the church had not been destroyed. Only the meeting place where that church gathered was destroyed.

Understanding this truth leads us to another fact. The church exists without time or space.

Geographically, the church is wherever that local group of people chooses to gather. Each local group is spiritually connected with every other group around the world who gathers to worship Jesus. Furthermore, chronologically, the church is without time. Each local gathering is connected with every other local group who ever gathered in Jesus' name. In other words, the church is connected – not only through space – but also throughout time. Our local church is connected to brothers and sisters in the past who have been martyred for their faith. We are of the same family with the heroes of the Reformation. We gather to stand on the shoulders of the hidden followers of Jesus gathered in secluded places to meet throughout the New Testament. Time and space draw no boundaries for Christ's Church.

One would think that the power available in the church today, built upon the strength of countless thousands around the world and unhindered by time, would be overwhelming. But in many local church bodies, "power" would not

be an adequate term to describe their perceived potential. Instead, they live a mundane existence, never achieving their potential through the blood of Christ, and sadly, once in a while, accomplish little. Sometimes, there are church bodies that exist without even being a threat to the Kingdom of Evil.

C.S. Lewis wrote an interesting fictional book called the Screwtape Letters. The book is a collection of letters from a senior devil to his junior devil recruit telling him all about how the Kingdom of Evil perceives threats from the Kingdom of God, and more specifically, from His church. In the book, the senior devil gives the junior devil instructions on how to tempt and trap humans. He writes:

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans.

Sadly, even Lewis' fiction may be true. Some local church bodies may exist without ever realizing their potential. They may even seem "invisible."

Perhaps the Church has yet to realize the potential that they possess in 2023. Perhaps the church has yet to fully grasp the power of God that waits to flow through them as they work together on a unified front. Perhaps the church has yet to comprehend the potential being unlimited by time and space.

I wonder how a local church gathering would look and function if they truly believed that they were a **formidable force** poised together – without the barriers of time and space – against the kingdom of this world? I wonder how that would change the way we prayed, sang, read Scripture, fellowshiped, and reached into this world with the Truth of the Gospel? I wonder if the timid church would stand tall or the silenced voices would sing? I wonder if the light would be brighter, the love would be greater, or the movement would be irresistible?

Local churches need to understand that they hold the highest potential to combat the Kingdom of Evil. God works through His Church! This was His plan all along. Every church leader should remind every church member that the gates of hell don't stand a chance against an advancing, bold church!

We are the church. And, from a movement that began over 2000 years ago, we are still going strong for the One who leads us all; Jesus Christ.

"...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

- Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:18

PRAYER

Each day this week, choose one of the following topics and make it central to your prayer time with God

1. Thank God for three special things that you have experienced through your family relationships this year.
2. Pray that God would use you in your family as a point of encouragement this week. Ask Him for special opportunities and watch for them.
3. Express gratitude for your family and the blessings you share.
4. Thank God for the unique qualities and contributions of each family member.
5. Pray for unity and harmony within your family. Ask for the grace to resolve conflicts and strengthen your relationships. Pray that love and understanding prevail in your family interactions.
6. Request spiritual growth and guidance for your family. Pray that each family member may deepen their faith, find purpose, and experience spiritual fulfillment.
7. Ask for God's wisdom and guidance for your family members in their daily decisions, whether related to work, education, or relationships. Pray that they make choices that align with God's plan for their lives.