

Who is the Church?

1 Corinthians 1:2-9

Preface

Greek legend has it that Sisyphus (*sĩs'ə-fəs*) was a king of Corinth. For defying the gods he was sentenced to the eternal drudgery of pushing a huge stone up a hill. When he would reach the summit, the stone would roll back to the bottom and force him to begin the task all over again. Camus, a 20th-century philosopher, compared this legend of the Corinthian king to modern man's condition as the purposeless absurdity of life.

If Camus had read the two biblical letters sent to the Corinthians, he would have gotten a different picture, one with a message of purpose and hope for misdirected people. The letters to the Corinthians provide insight into the purpose and calling of the church.

Churches are not perfect as they are made up of imperfect people. We make mistakes as individuals and we make mistakes as a cooperative group. Be we are the church and God promises the church will be triumphant.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:2-9

²To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: ³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— ⁶because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. ⁷Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. 1 Corinthians 1:2-9 NIV

Introduction

If the Saints win the Super Bowl today, it will change the course of our nation. Finally, people will be forced do things and they never imagined they would have to do. Think of all the times people have said, "I will do this or that when the Saints win the Super Bowl."

Tonight is the big game. We will all sit around our televisions and watch the New Orleans Saints play the Indianapolis Colts. Most everyone looks forward to the final game of the football season. The game draws a sale-out crowd and a huge television audience as it is the most watch program of the year.

What if we all sat down for the big game tonight with our finger foot in hand only to watch the two teams stay in a huddle? What if for 2.5 hours 11 players from each team just stood around in their huddle talking? We would be wildly disappointed wouldn't we? A football team isn't supposed to just stay huddled up. The huddle is just a brief moment where they plan for the real action.

The same is true of the church. The job of the church is not to impact the church. We are not here to just stay huddled up in our own little group for the purpose of encouraging one another and visiting talking to one another. The real action comes when the huddle breaks and we get busy serving God and doing His work.

In order for use to understand our work, we must also understand who we are as a church. The text we read a few moments ago gives us great insight into who we are.

Content

1. We are set apart by God's grace

The church belongs to God, not man. If we will remain ever mindful of this we will have far less strife and difficulties in our churches.

Some people get what I call "ownership mentality" when it comes to church. They think just because they were raised in a certain church or because they were involved in the construction of the building that they have authority and domain over the church. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Illus: A Pastor friend recently told me about a man in his church who came to him rather angry about some scuff marks on the wall in the halls of the church. The church purchased some strollers that hold 6 children and the nursery workers sometimes roll the children down the halls during the service. On occasion they bump the wall causing a scuff mark. The man was rather angry about this fact and wanted the strollers banned from the building.

They had to call a special Deacon's meeting to allow the man to speak his mind on the matter. The Deacons unanimously determined that touching up the scuff marks was a small price to pay for the blessing

of having so many young families in the church hearing the gospel and studying God's word. They decided to keep the strollers.

The church is not the buildings or facilities. The church is comprised of God's people called by God. We are saints; that is people set apart by God for His purpose and service.

We live in a day when a false brand of Christianity is preached and taught. It basically goes like this, "Add Jesus to your already busy life and you will have it made."

Our churches have too many people who consider themselves Christians but live completely free from any Christian responsibilities. They seek out churches where they are entertained and inspired but never become personally obligated or responsible for anything. The last thing they are willing to do is carry the burdens or problems of others.

It is as if Christians today want to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ but we don't want to get any of His blood stains on them. That isn't the church. The church is people marked with the blood of Christ and changed by the experience.

¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:12-13 NIV

¹ So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 1 Corinthians 4:1 NIV

In the church, there is no room for self-exaltation. *We are a part of the family of God because of God's grace and His grace alone.*

The church is alive; it breathes, it walks, it works, it ministers and it speaks of the things of God. The church is alive because the church is God's church.

2. We are enriched by Christ Jesus

The church at Corinth was plagued with several problems including false teachers. Had Paul's only resources been his own, the prospects of reforming the church would have been slim. But God was at work and Paul knew the resources of God were far greater than his own.

Paul knew there was hope and power in the church at Corinth. He knew that Christ was alive in the people's hearts and through Christ

the people had great potential. It is because of Christ that we are enriched with gifts from God.

Illus: We've all seen the Beverly Hillbillies show and the introduction which tells how the family got to Beverly Hills, California. The family was living in the hills of Tennessee where Jet could barely keep his family fed. *"The one day he was shootin for some food and up from the ground come bubbling crude - oil that is, black gold."*

I sometimes feel we as a church are like Jed. *We are sitting on so many gifts and blessings and we just don't know it.* I often look at the potential we have as a church and ponder how wonderful it would be if we could just get a vision of what we could be. We have a church full of people with many talents and gifts. In addition we have many gifts and talents that have not even been discovered.

I look at the men of our church and dream of what we could do if our men were on fire for the Lord. What if our men were faithful and were willing to stand-up for the Lord? I dream of having a weekly men's gathering where we get together and discuss our faith, what God is doing in our lives and have prayer together.

I think about our young couples and all of the potential we have. We have the ability to have 20 to 25 young couples here for Bible study and worship service if we could just get them all here at one time. I know they need the Lord's guidance in their lives and marriages but just getting them to see the potential is the challenge. I am praying that God will call out someone to help build this area of our ministry.

I look at our church financial report and ponder just what great things we could do if our people were only faithful in their giving. What great outreach could we do if we could meet our budget and have the funds to invite a preacher for a revival or a singing group for a concert. You might say well have it but take up a love offering. We have never had a love offering here that it didn't desperately hurt our regular giving that month and put us further behind in the budget.

God is eager to bless our church and He has enriched us in every way if we will only get a glimpse of the vision of what He desires to do in our midst. Our text tells we do not lack in spiritual gifts for God has provided the resources.

3. We are called to be strong and faithful

Illus: Suppose you were working on a big project and realized you needed some things to complete the work. So you loan someone the

keys to your car and give them the money to go to town to pick up the items needed. You would expect them to use the resources you provided to perform the task. You would expect them to be faithful and reliable.

In the same way, God sets us apart to do His work. He enriches and equips us with the talents, gifts and resources to do the things He plans for us. But, we must be willing, be strong and be faithful.

God doesn't call us and equip us only to leave us on our own. God is here to give us the strength and faith to do the things He calls us to do. We must be willing.

I realize that no sermon from me is going to motivate you to discover your talents and get busy doing the work of the church. Any motivation I might conjure up in you will dissipate by the time you sit down to lunch.

But what should motivate us is verse 9 of our text: *"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."*

Fellowship with Jesus Christ, walking with Him and knowing Him should cause us to be eager to be His servants. Knowing Christ is what gets us out of complacency and out of our comfort zone and into the understanding of what God calls us to do.

Illus: Yesterday I married Mark & Jennifer Castamore. Just before the ceremony began as Mark and I were standing at the door waiting to enter I had a chance to talk with him. I said to him, "Your bride is ugly." No I did not say that and in fact his bride was beautiful. Now no one would ever do that because no matter what we thought, to the groom that bride is wonderful, she's radiant and beautiful. Jesus would say to you today, "Every time you criticize my church you're telling me, that my bride is ugly." When anyone speaks poorly of the church, they are criticizing the bride of Christ.

The point of this message is; you are the Bride of Christ. The Bible repeatedly refers to the church as the Bride of Christ. We are His joy and glory.

That understanding should cause us to be more committed, stronger and more faithful than ever.

Church, we have great work to do. God will send us people to do His kingdoms work. We must be willing, faithful and strong. We must understand who we are; His bride.

Conclusion

Jim Cymbala pastors a church in the slums of New York. He tells the following story: It was Easter Sunday and I was so tired at the end of the day that I just went to the edge of the platform, pulled down my tie and sat down and draped my feet over the edge. It was a wonderful service with many people coming forward. The counselors were talking with these people.

As I was sitting there I looked up the middle aisle, and there in about the third row was a man who looked about fifty, disheveled, filthy. He looked up at me rather sheepishly, as if saying, "Could I talk to you?" We have homeless people coming in all the time, asking for money or whatever. So as I sat there, I said to myself, though I am ashamed of it, "What a way to end a Sunday. I've had such a good time, preaching and ministering, and here's a fellow probably wanting some money for more wine." He walked up. When he got within about five feet of me, I smelled a horrible smell like I'd never smelled in my life. It was so awful that when he got close, I would inhale by looking away, and then I'd talk to him, and then look away to inhale, because I couldn't inhale facing him. I asked him, "What's your name?" "David." "How long have you been on the street?" "Six years." "How old are you?" "Thirty-two." He looked fifty- hair matted; front teeth missing; wino; eyes slightly glazed. "Where did you sleep last night, David?" "Abandoned truck." I keep in my back pocket a money clip that also holds some credit cards. I fumbled to pick one out thinking; I'll give him some money. I won't even get a volunteer. They are all busy talking with others. Usually we don't give money to people. We take them to get something to eat.

I took the money out. David pushed his finger in front of me. He said, "I don't want your money. I want this Jesus, the One you were talking about, because I'm not going to make it. I'm going to die on the street." I completely forgot about David, and I started to weep for myself. I was going to give a couple of dollars to someone God had sent to me. See how easy it is? I could make the excuse I was tired. There is no excuse. I was not seeing him the way God sees him. I was not feeling what God feels. But oh, did that change! David just stood there. He didn't know what was happening. I pleaded with God, "God, forgive me! Forgive me! Please forgive me. I am so sorry to represent You this way. I'm so sorry. Here I am with my message and my points, and You send somebody and I am not ready for it. Oh, God!" Something came over me.

Suddenly I started to weep deeper, and David began to weep. He fell against my chest as I was sitting there. He fell against my white shirt

and tie, and I put my arms around him, and there we wept on each other. The smell of His person became a beautiful aroma. Here is what I thought the Lord made real to me: If you don't love this smell, I can't use you, because this is why I called you where you are. This is what you are about. You are about this smell. Christ changed David's life. He started memorizing portions of Scripture that were incredible. We got him a place to live. We hired him in the church to do maintenance, and we got his teeth fixed. He was a handsome man when he came out of the hospital. They detoxed him in 6 days. He spent that Thanksgiving at my house. He also spent Christmas at my house. When we were exchanging presents, he pulled out a little thing and he said, "This is for you." It was a little white hanky. It was the only thing he could afford. A year later David got up and talked about his conversion to Christ. The minute he took the mic and began to speak, I said, "The man is a preacher." This past Easter we ordained David. He is an associate minister of a church over in New Jersey. And I was so close to saying, "Here, take this; I'm a busy preacher."

We are the church of God.

We are set apart by God to do His work.

We are enriched and equipped to do His Work.

We are called to be strong and faithful in His Work.

Are you part of the church of God? Have you discovered your talents and gifts? Are you using them for His great work?