

What Is the Church?

by Stephen Kaung

The church is the body of Christ, a living organism that contains the unsearchable riches of Christ and expresses and manifests the head, Christ.

Duration: 1:23:30

Topics: "The Church", "Body Of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the Apostle Paul is attempting to describe the church in God's eternal purpose. He uses parables, metaphors, and figures of speech to convey the complexity and infinite nature of spiritual things. One of the key revelations he shares is that the church is the body of Christ, which he received on the road to Damascus. Paul reflects on his past actions of persecuting Christians and how witnessing the steadfastness of believers, particularly Stephen's martyrdom, touched his conscience and led to his conversion.

Transcript

Will you please turn to the letter to the Ephesians, chapter one, verses twenty-two and twenty-three. Chapter one, verses twenty-two and twenty-three. And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to behead over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Chapter two, we begin with verse eleven. Wherefore remember that ye were nations in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that called circumcision in the flesh, done with the hand. That ye were at that time without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus ye who once were far off are become nigh by the blood of the Christ. For he is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of enclosure, having annulled the enmity in his flesh, the law of commandments in ordinances, that he might form the two in himself unto one new man. Seeking peace, and might reconcile both in one body to God by the cross, having by it slain the enmity, and coming he has preached the glad tidings of peace to you who were afar off, and the glad tidings of peace to those that were nigh.

For through him we have both access by one spirit to the Father. So then, ye are no longer strangers and foreigners, but ye are fellow citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone in whom all the

building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together for habitation of God in the Spirit. Let's have a word of prayer.

Lord, as we gather together here in thy presence, we do sense that we are standing on holy ground. Lord, we want to remove our shoes, stand in the place of your born slave, and listen to you, to what you have to say to us. Dear Lord, we need thy speaking.

We need thy Spirit enlightening us, bringing us into thy truth, that thou mayst be glorified. We commit this time humbly into thy hands, and ask thee to bless it in thy precious name. Amen.

As you already know that my burden, or my responsibility, is to share with your dear brothers and sisters on the church in the eternal purpose of God. But I feel, first of all, I have to say, we do not preach the church. We preach Christ Jesus and him crucified.

I always remember, people say, when you preach the church, you get the cross. But if you preach the cross, you get the church. And I believe it.

So I want to make it very clear that I am not preaching the church. I preach Christ Jesus and him crucified. But I do try to explain the church.

Why? Because the church is so precious to our Lord Jesus, and we are called to be his church. We need to know who we are, what we are, and how should we be better prepared to satisfy the heart of our Lord. I think it is for this reason that we sometimes have to describe the church, in order to know where we are and what we ought to be.

The Apostle Paul, he was writing to the saints and the faithful in Ephesus. In his heart, he has a burden. He has a desire.

He wants to share with the saints in Ephesus what the Lord has revealed to him concerning the church. The reason why he has such a burden to share with them about the church, because he realized that the church is something that is so dear to the Lord Jesus. If you look into the heart of the Lord Jesus, you see the church.

And if the Lord loves the church so much, how we who are the church should know how to answer to his heart. Now, if we do not know what the church is, we will not be able to be what the Lord wants us to be. We will not be able to please him, to make him satisfied.

So Paul has such a burden for the saints, that they may know what the church is in God's eternal purpose. And how should they behave in order to fulfill that purpose. So you find from the very beginning, he began to say, Thanks be unto God, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

What is the church? He said the church is that which is blessed by our Lord Jesus, by our God, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. I think you cannot say more than that. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, God has already blessed us.

We are being chosen, even before the foundation of the world. It is not something that just happened in time. Even before time was, before the foundation of the world, God has already chosen us in Christ Jesus.

And he has chosen us, not just that we may be delivered from hell. He has chosen us that we may stand before him, holy and without blameless in love. Now that is divine election.

I love divine election. Because when God has chosen us, he has chosen us to be holy and blameless before him in love. He has already marked us out for sonship.

Not just that we are saved as babes in Christ. But we may grow up and be pleased as sons. To share with our Lord Jesus everything that the Father has given to him.

And to share also with his responsibility. Now what a choice, divine election that is. And it is all according to his glory.

In Christ Jesus, not only we are redeemed by the precious blood. But we are now being a place in favor with our God. We are the favorable children of God.

Not only that, but he has even made us know the mystery of his will. That it pleases him to make his Son the heir of all things. And he has called us to be joint heirs with Christ.

We have an inheritance in Christ Jesus. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily. And we are complete in him.

He is our inheritance. God has put everything that he has, everything that he is, in his Son. And he gave his Son to us as our inheritance.

And at the same time, he so worked in us by his greatness of his power. That we too may be an inheritance to Christ Jesus. Now brothers and sisters, Paul tried to share with the saints in Ephesus.

And I believe that he is trying to share with us today what great things God has done to us. According to his grace, according to his glory. And yet, suddenly he stopped.

He cannot go on. Why? Because he realized that without revelation, all we hear will be just words. There will be no reality.

So immediately you find the apostle Paul gave himself to prayer. However eloquent Paul may be, he senses it is beyond him. Not only beyond him, but beyond the saints in Ephesus.

To grasp the real meaning of that mystery. So he gave himself to prayer. And he prayed that God will give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

In the full knowledge of God. Dear brothers and sisters, the only way we can enter into the full knowledge of God is by his revelation. No matter how clever you are.

You may be able to understand mentally, but that remains in your mind. It does not affect your life. Unless there is revelation from above, we are not able to enter into the reality of the church in the eternal purpose of God.

So brothers and sisters, as we are fellowshiping together this morning, let us look to the Lord. That he will reveal what the church is to us in a living and real way. In a sense, the church is something that you are not able to define.

Even though we may say the mystery of the Christ is the church. The church is the corporate expression of Christ. And yet, it is something that we just cannot define it.

You know in the Bible, there are very few definitions, if any. Why? Because spiritual things are so infinite that it is hard to confine it to a small area. So here you find the apostle Paul.

Instead of trying to define what the church is in God's eternal purpose, he just tried to describe it. And even when he tried to describe it, he finds that it is difficult to describe it just with plain words. So he has tried to describe it with parables, metaphors, figures of speech.

You remember when our Lord Jesus was on earth? How he talked to the people in parables. Now parables, on the one hand, is the simplest, the easiest way to explain. If you have a heart.

And yet it is the most difficult thing to understand if you do not have a heart. So here you find the apostle Paul. Instead of telling us in straightforward words, he tried to explain what the church is in God's eternal purpose with different parables, metaphors, figures of speech.

And yet when you think of these figures of speech, or parables, you remember one thing. These are only the outward things. The real thing is what these figures of speech are pointing to.

That's the real thing. So at the very outset, you find, he said, what is the church? He said, the church is the body of Christ. Now where does he get this revelation? On the road to Damascus.

You remember that he got the documents from the chief priests to go to Gentile cities to seize upon those people of the way, those believers of Jesus Christ. To bring them to Jerusalem and to condemn them. But while he was on the way to Damascus, he was almost reaching the city.

And it was at noon time. Suddenly there was a light brighter than the sun. It shone upon him and upon those who followed him.

And the light had such power that they were smitten to the ground. And then he heard a voice. Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goods.

Saul said, who are you, Lord? You are Lord. Why? Because you are so mighty. Your light is so powerful.

That it smites me to the ground. Saul is a person. Very strong person.

He is a leader. He gives command to people. And yet, he met his match.

More than his match. He knew that. He didn't know who he was.

But he knew he is the Lord. So he said, Lord, who are you? And the Lord said, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecuted. Dear brothers and sisters, oftentimes we think that we are free.

We are our own masters. We can do anything we want to. And if you are strong, not only you can be your own master, but you can be master of other people.

We do not realize that when God created us, he created us with a definite purpose. We do not realize that he is the master of our life. And he has a purpose in our life.

We are like an ox being attached to a yoke. And the farmer who is guiding the yoke, the plow, he has a purpose to plow the field. He is using that ox to plow the field.

But oftentimes the ox does not know the mind of the master. He does not even realize he has a master. So the ox sometimes will find something that attracts him, and he will turn to the left or to the right.

And at that time you'll find the master, the farmer. You will use the goats, a sharp instrument, just to touch the leg of the ox gently, to remind him that he has a master. But the ox is so stubborn, it kicks back.

And when it kicks back, it hurts. Brothers and sisters, God never wants to hurt us because he has a use for us. But sometimes he has to gently touch us with that goat.

But unfortunately, we kick back and we hurt ourselves. A number of times God has used the goats on Saul. When he went into houses, seized men and women, and brought them to the court.

When he forced people in the synagogues to blaspheme. And when he saw these weak men and women, how they stood firm for the Lord. His conscience must be touched.

He is a gentleman. He is a righteous person. He has a moral sense.

And without doubt, his conscience must have bothered him. A gentle touch. And then when Stephen was stoned, he saw the whole thing.

He saw the face of Stephen like the face of an angel. And he heard Stephen say, I saw the heaven open. The Son of Man was standing there, welcoming him.

And before he died, he said, God forgive them. Don't put that sin upon them. And Saul was there.

His conscience must be pricked. Whether he had done something wrong. But in order to put down his conscience, you know the Bible said, he began to persecute the believers fearfully.

Trying to silence his conscience. God allowed him to go just that far. And no further.

God met him on the road to Damascus. And said, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am your master. I have a purpose for your life.

You are yoked to my yoke. You are to do my work. You need to realize that.

Saul said, Lord, what shall I do? He surrendered himself to the Lord. There on the road to Damascus, he met the Lord. Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord of heaven and earth.

Jesus of Nazareth is the master of all. But more than that. On the road to Damascus, when he asked the Lord, who are you? I don't know you.

And the Lord said, I'm Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecuted. Now remember, Saul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees liked to argue.

And naturally, Saul would say, now, something must be wrong. Because I have never met you before. This is the first time I meet you.

But you are in heaven and I'm on earth. I cannot touch you. He has every reason to say, Lord, I have not persecuted you.

But he didn't reason why there was a revelation given to him at that very moment. On the road to Damascus, he not only saw Jesus, the Lord, the head of all things, the master of all, but at the same time, he saw the body of Christ. Saul didn't touch the head, but he did touch many parts in that body.

He persecuted the believers in Jerusalem, in Judea, even trying to persecute them in Gentile cities. And the head in heaven complained and said, why do you touch me? You know, brothers and sisters, what a revelation that must be. Not only seeing Christ, the head of all things, head unto the church, but also at the same time, see the body of Christ.

We are his body. You know, when the Word became flesh and tabernacle among men, full of grace and truth, in the fullness of time, the Son of God came into this world, took upon himself a human flesh. And in that body he teaches, he does many works, good works.

And with that body he was crucified. He gave up that body to be broken, that we might be united to God. And then we remember, after three days he rose from the dead.

And for forty days it appeared to his disciples. Then he ascended up to heaven. When he went up, the disciples were there, looking him, seeing him going up.

But on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down, upon a hundred and twenty, in one spirit they were baptized into one body. In other words, our Lord Jesus, two thousand years ago, he took upon himself a physical body, a personal body. And in that body he accomplished the work of redemption.

But now in heaven, he took upon himself another body, a mystic body, a corporate body. And in that corporate body, he continues to do and to teach. Now that is the book of Acts.

And the book of Acts has no end, because it continues on to today. So, brothers and sisters, this is the mystery of the Church. The Church is the body of Christ.

It has many members. Look at our body. We all understand our body.

Understand and yet not understand. We know we have a body. And this body has many members.

But even though there are many members in this body, it is one body. And it is one body under the head. One with the head.

That makes it complete. And you know, our body is just a type. The reality is the body of Christ.

You look at your body and find it is very real. You experience it every day, every hour, every moment. And yet, remember, this physical body of ours is temporary.

One day it will pass on. We will, by the grace of God, take up a spiritual body. And that's forever.

So even this physical body is just a symbol. It is just an indication, pointing to something. The reality is the body of Christ.

The body of Christ is more real than your own physical body. Because that's the real thing. But how do we enter into this body? The church is a living organism.

It is not a man-made organization. If it is an organization, an institution, now you can join and be part of that institution. But to be in the body, there's only one way to be born into it.

It is a matter of life. Same life. How do we become members of the body of Christ? Not members of an organization.

The only way you can become members of the body of Christ is to be born into it. To receive the life of our Lord Jesus. And with the life, same life, we belong to the same body.

We are, by the grace of God, the body of Christ. That is the church. It's a living organism.

And so when you come to this matter of the church, the most basic understanding is that it is a matter of life. Not the natural life. But the life of God.

The life of Christ. Christ being our life. That is the foundation of the church.

Do you realize that you are in the body of Christ? We are not talking about whether you belong to a religious or Christian organization. But do you realize you belong to the body of Christ? You are a member of the body of Christ? Do you have that consciousness? Now, how do we become one body? When you receive the Lord Jesus, what happens to you? Several things happen to you. Not just one thing.

When you believe in the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior, you are born again. You are born of the Spirit. He that is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

He that is born of the Holy Spirit is the new human spirit. And because we are born again, we receive a new life. The life of Christ.

So we can cry out to God, Abba, Father. Immediately you'll find there's a bond there. Because you belong to God.

You know, I often say, before we really are born again, if we are brought up in Christian family like I am, we pray all the time. We know how to pray. But unfortunately, when we pray, it's just a formality.

There is no that living relationship with God. Just as one brother said, when you say, our Father who are in heaven, it sounds like our father-in-law who is in heaven. It's not real.

But when you believe in the Lord Jesus, and you receive the life of the Son, immediately you cry out, Abba. You know you belong. But more than that, you not only are born to God, you are born to the family of God.

You do not realize how big a family you have. You know, I came from a very big family. Four generations living under one roof.

But that's too small. We belong to a big family. We belong to one body.

How do you know? After you believe in the Lord Jesus. Not only you find there is a living relationship between you and God, but immediately you will find a bond with those fellow believers. You may not know them before, but whenever you meet a person and find out that he is also a believer, immediately you find there is a bond between you and that person.

And it is even stronger than the natural bonds. Now, where does it come from? Because in one spirit, we were baptized into one body. We belong to the same body.

The body of Christ. Thank God, brothers and sisters, not only you are born again, but you have become a member of the body of Christ. And what is the body of Christ? Or what is your body? The body is the fullness of the head.

All the riches of the head dwells in that body. Now, who can fathom the riches of the head that is our Lord Jesus? All the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. And all that the head is, is found in the body.

That is what the church is. The church is called the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Him who fills all and in all.

In the church, in the body of Christ, you find all the unsearchable riches of Christ. That is what the church is. And not only that, your body is the expression, the manifestation of the head.

Through the body, the head is able to express itself and in its fullness. So that is what the church is. The church is the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all and in all.

We are to contain, as it were, the unsearchable riches of Christ. And we are to express and manifest, demonstrate, magnify what Christ is. That is the body.

Now do we have such body consciousness? Are we so individualistic that it is just the Lord and I? You know, sometimes you hear people say, The Lord and I. I don't care about anybody else. The Lord and I. Very, very spiritual. No.

The Lord and I. But also the Lord. I and my brothers and sisters. You know, I cannot forget when our dear brother Wasmonee went to England.

He visited a dear brother, the writer of Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment, George Cutting. You know, at that time, aside from the Bible, that little pamphlet had the largest circulation. Had many people.

And at that time, George Cutting was in his 90s. And he was in bed. And he was conscious for a time and unconscious for another time.

So when our brother visited him, sitting by his bedside, waiting for him to wake up, and then George Cutting woke up and he turned to our brother and said, I cannot do without him and he cannot do without me. Then he drifted into sleep again. He means I cannot do without the Lord.

But he has such a relationship with the Lord, he also can say, he cannot do without me. Isn't that beautiful? So brother Nee came back and she said, I would like to go a little further. I cannot do without him.

He cannot do without me. Thank God. I cannot do without my brothers and sisters.

And thank God, they cannot do without me. How true that is. We need to be delivered from that individualistic concept.

We will never lose our individuality. And yet, we need to be delivered from that individualism. We depend upon the Lord and we depend upon our brothers and sisters because we are one body.

It is very important, brothers and sisters, for us to have that body consciousness. So we know that we are a member in the body. And being a member in the body, we need to learn how to be a functioning member.

Now that is the first figure of speech. And then the Apostle Paul tried to use another figure of speech to explain, describe to us, what the Church is. Now as a background, in chapter two, you find first of all, he began to remind us of our past.

When you think back to your past history, before you met the Lord, now who are you? What kind of person you are? What kind of life you live? Now he said, and you, being dead, in your offenses and sins, in which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, the Spirit who now works in the sense of disobedience, among them we also all once had our conversation in the lust of our flesh, doing what the flesh and the thoughts will to do, and were children by nature of wrath, even as the rest. That's where we were. We were dead in sins and transgressions.

We just followed the current of the world, because we were dead. Dead fish follow the current. And unknowingly, we were under the authority of the power of darkness in the air.

We thought we are doing what we want to do, according to what we like, not knowing that there is someone there manipulating us. We are children of wrath. That's what we were.

But, God, in His great mercy, how He loves us, He quickens us with Christ Jesus. He raises us up with Christ Jesus. And He has even seated us with Christ Jesus in the heavenlies.

We are saved by grace through faith. And not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. We are God's workmanship, for good works, to do His will.

That's individually speaking. And then Paul tried to put them together. Speaking corporately, we were in the old man.

And in that old man, you find we were all divided. When sin entered into the world, division immediately followed. You know, Adam and Eve were divided.

Before that, they were together. But after sin entered into the world, see what Adam did. Adam said, is that woman that made me do it? Immediately there is division.

So in the old man, there is no oneness, no unity. In the flesh, no two people absolutely agree. The flesh divides.

Sin divides. And in the division that we find in the world, the biggest division is the division between the Gentiles and the Jews. Why? Because there is not only the division of races, the division of culture, there is the distinction of religion.

The Jews, they were the chosen people of God. They had God's promises, covenant, God's word. They looked down upon the nations.

You were Gentiles, outside of the commonwealth of Israel, outside of the covenant of God, without God, without hope. You were far away. We were near.

So you find, in the days of Paul, the Jews and the Gentiles were so divided. No fellowship. The Jews looked down upon the Gentiles, saying, now you are unclean.

And the Gentiles looked down upon the Jews and hated them, even in the temple. The Gentiles can come to the court of the Gentiles, but then, in the court of the women, there are these signs put in everywhere. Thus far, no further.

On penalty of death. And yet, brothers and sisters, the Lord did a wonderful work. By His blood, in His flesh, He has taken away this wall of partition.

He has brought the Jews and the Gentiles into one. Make peace with God and with each other, that we, together, may approach God. One new man.

Formerly, we belonged to the old man, Adam. And in Adam, we died. In Adam, we are divided.

But now, we are in Christ. The new man. We are one.

If anyone be in Christ Jesus, there is a new creation. All things have passed away. All things have become new.

And all things are of God. So, dear brothers and sisters, what is the church? The church is the one new man. New.

Everything is new. By the grace of God, we have put off the old man. And all the things, corrupted things, of the old man.

And by the grace of God, we have put on the new man. Recreated according to Christ. That's what we are.

So, everything old has passed away. Only the new remains. And that's the reason why you find in the Bible we are told.

In Colossians chapter 3, it says, There is neither Jew nor Gentile. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision. Neither barbarians nor skittles.

Neither bondman or freeman. Why? Because Christ, all and equal. So, dear brothers and sisters, what is the church? The church is the one new man.

In the church, you do not have Jews. You have Jews outside the church. But in the church, there is no Jews.

Why? Because before you enter into the church, the cross has crossed out the Jews. In the church, there is no Gentile. The cross has crossed out the Gentile.

In the church, there is no Chinese. In the world, you have Chinese. Lots of Chinese everywhere.

But in the church, no Chinese. If you find any Chinese in the church, that Chinese spoils the church. We should not see each other in the natural old way.

You know, when I first came to this country, I was meeting with brothers and sisters, many Caucasians, Americans. And we were serving together. But oftentimes, when we were serving together, a brother

would say, now this is not our American way.

Ah, American. And you're Chinese. So you know what I said? I said, in the church, no American way, no Chinese way, but God's way.

We should forget our natural distinctions, our cultural distinctions, our religious background, upbringings, our racial distinctions, our social distinctions. It's hard. You know, I remember in Shanghai, when we had the Lord's Table, our dear brother, Wajimuni, he was one who was helping us, and he was sitting at one corner, and his cook, a dear brother, who loved Brother Lee so well.

If Brother Lee said, I like this dish, then every day he would have that dish. But when he entered into the hall, he always looked where Brother Lee sat, and then he would sit far apart from him, because he said, I'm his servant, he is my master, I cannot sit by him. And Brother Lee always, come, sit by me.

No master, no servant, all one in Christ Jesus. Wonderful. One new man.

This is what the church is. Therefore, don't bring the old into the church. Everything is new.

Everything is of God. Then Paul feels that still he hasn't been able to describe the church as his own. So he tried to use triple metaphors, and he began to say, now what is the church? He said, we are not strangers or foreigners.

We are fellow citizens of the saints. Brothers and sisters, we all know, we who are the lords, in this world, we are pilgrims, strangers. Even though you are born in America, after you are saved, you are a pilgrim, a stranger, on an alien land, because the world is under the usurpation of the wicked one.

We do not belong. We are strangers, pilgrims, sojourners. But, thank God, He has given us something better.

In Colossians chapter one, we are told, He has delivered us out of the power, authority of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Now, brothers and sisters, you know, when you believe in the Lord Jesus, there is a transfer. God has transferred you, translated you out of the kingdom of darkness.

You do not belong to this world. You do not belong to the authority of darkness anymore. He has delivered you, and He has put you in the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Your citizenship is in heaven, and we are fellow citizens. We come under the rule of heaven. As pilgrims, as strangers, we respect the law of the land that we sojourn, and yet, we are under a higher rule, under the rule of the heavenly King.

And we are fellow citizens. We need to encourage one another to keep the rule of heaven. But not only that, there is a closer relationship.

We are of the household of God. We belong to one family. You know, the church is a family.

The church is not a court. Now, in the court, you have to argue and reason things out, and see who wins the argument. But in the church, being a family is not a court.

It's a matter of love. That's what the church is. And not only that, the Apostle Paul said, you are not only the household of God, but you are being built to be the house of God.

We are living stones. But not just living stones or precious stones exhibited in museums. We are living stones, precious stones, to be built up together into a habitation of God.

God will be pleased to dwell in our midst. He will feel comfortable. The foundation is the twelve disciples, the twelve stones.

You know, in New Jerusalem, the foundation twelve stones, twelve precious stones representing the twelve apostles. They are all different, but they all speak of Christ, not of themselves. Christ himself is the cornerstone that joins the whole building together.

He is also the topstone. Grace, grace upon it. Brothers and sisters, this is what the church is.

The church is not a brick building in some corner of the street. The church is built with living stones such as we are through the dealing of the Holy Spirit, the discipline of the Holy Spirit. All the trash, all the dirt, impurities are being cleaned, cleared out.

What is left is Christ. Precious stones are being built together. So that is what the church is.

Now, brothers and sisters, do you realize that they are being built together with your brothers and sisters? Or do you think it is much safer if you keep your brothers and sisters at an arm's distance? You know, the longer you become a Christian, the cleverer you are. When you first believe in the Lord Jesus, you plunge yourself into the midst of your brothers and sisters. Oh, you love them, every one of them.

Everyone is precious to you. And then, rubbing, striking against each other, fire. Ah, you learned a lesson.

Keep a distance. At ten o'clock, don't arrive too early. Ten o'clock sharp.

And if five minutes late, there is grace. Sit for an hour, goodbye. Very safe.

No building. No building work going on. But that's not what the church is.

The church is God has gathered the called out ones together under the authority, the name of our Lord Jesus. And what is gathering together? Gathering together is together. Close to one another.

Fellowship with one another. Serve the Lord together. And while we are so close, so intimate, so near, no doubt we will rub against each other.

We all have corners. We are hurt. But don't forget, you hurt others too.

But by these rubbing, our corners are being smooth. And we are able to be fitted together. Now does that happen to you? If it doesn't happen to you, something is tremendously wrong.

You are not living in the church. The church is very real. I often hear people say, in this world there is no peace.

The only peaceful place is the church. Try it. It is in the church you learn what peace really is.

The peace of God garrisons your heart and mind. And then the Apostle Paul feels it is still not enough. People still do not grasp what the church really is.

So he tried to go a giant step forward. And he comes to Ephesians 5. Ah, he said, what is the mystery of the Christ? It is the mystery of the husband and the wife. Christ is the husband.

He is the head of the wife. Also the Saviour of all. He loves the church.

Gave Himself for it. He purifies the church. By the water with the Word, that the church may be purified, may be sanctified, may become blameless, to be presented to Him as His bride, holy without blame.

And the church, as the bride, as the wife, learn to submit to the head in love, in all things. He said the mystery is great. But I speak of Christ and the church.

So what is the church? The church is the bride. God say it is not good for man to be alone. I will make Him a helpmate, His like.

God love His beloved Son so much. He say it is not good for Him to be alone. I want to give Him a helpmate.

But that helpmate has to be His like. Just like Him. Then you can really meet.

And that is the reason why, brothers and sisters, He came to save us. That is the reason why He works in our lives. To bring us to be His like.

And then, one day, He is coming for His bride. What are we waiting for? You look at the world, there is no hope. The world is not getting better.

The world is getting worse. How bad it can be, it cannot be bad, more than today. Where is our blessed hope? Our blessed hope is coming of the bridegroom.

One day, the bridegroom will come. And that is the day we are waiting for. Brothers and sisters, being so, are we as chaste virgins? Like Paul said, I have exposed you to a man, Christ Jesus.

As virgins, do we keep our chastity? Do we live in expectation of being joined to Him forever? Or are we ready, prepared to meet the bridegroom? Why is it that our Lord has delayed? No bridegroom will delay. Usually in a wedding, the bridegroom is always already there. It's the bride that doesn't come.

Now, all that I know, only one person does the opposite. I think it's Hudson Taylor's great-grandfather or grandfather, I forgot. When he was a young man, he was a careless young man and believer.

But on the day of his marriage, in the morning he woke up, I'm going to be married. Wow, that's a big responsibility. So he went to the field to pray.

And he prayed and prayed and prayed and he forgot the time. And after he finished praying, suddenly he remembered, well, that's the day of his marriage. The bride was waiting.

Everybody was waiting. They wondered where the bridegroom was. So he hurriedly ran into the church building and got married.

And in the night, before they go to bed, he told his newly bride, kneel down and pray. And the bride, what? What is it? Something has happened. Brothers and sisters, and thank God, for generations, that family served God.

Now that's the only occasion I know. Why is it that our Lord hasn't come back yet? Because the bride is not ready. And then finally, Paul said, well, that's not enough.

You know, when you think of the church, it's such a big thing. So much in the heart of God. So finally, in chapter 6, he said, what is the church? The church is like a warrior.

There is another dimension. The church has a mission. The church is to stand, to withstand the assaults of the enemy, the opposition of the enemy, and to stand, to bring it to pass, the purpose of God.

That's the mission of the church. Do we know we are involved in the spiritual warfare? If we do not realize there is a warfare going on, we will not be able to explain anything. In the unseen world, there is a fierce battle going on, whether the purpose of God will be fulfilled.

The enemy is trying his best to oppose, to hinder, to delay, to postpone. And it is the responsibility of the church to apply the victory of Christ over every situation and bring the purpose of God into being, to bring back the key and His kingdom. Ah, that's the church.

So may the Lord help us. Shall we pray?

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