

Why the Church Must Pray and Be the Light

Note: This is the second of a two-part series. For part one, [click here](#).

Peter and the early church understood that Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the Good News that God's reign and dominion were upon them. The whole of the preaching of Jesus and His apostles concerned the kingdom of God. All that they taught was in the context of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew's Gospel, nearly 52 times either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is used.

Yet Jesus only mentions the word "church" twice in all the Gospels. Except for these two cases, He always talked about the kingdom of God.

The first occurrence is in Matthew 16:18: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

The second occurrence is in Matthew 18:17 and references a sinning brother: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

In both cases, the Greek word used for church is *ecclesia* which means "a calling out, a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both)." Some of the first uses of the word were in Greek culture for citizens who were "called out" to serve in the senate. They were to help rule and legislate the affairs of the nation.

Therefore, the church, as God's called-out ones, are not only to preach the gospel and make disciples in all the nations,

but we are to help “legislate” heaven’s affairs on earth. For example, Jesus demonstrated the superiority of God’s kingdom by healing the sick and working miracles. He was bringing the domain of God’s kingdom and rule to earth by driving out sickness, disease and demons.

The kingdom of God and the church are inseparably linked. The church is not the fullness of God’s kingdom, but it is an important representation.

The church is the spiritual body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to relate and function as united to Jesus and to each other. God’s kingdom manifests through our lives individually and corporately and is best understood through our involvement with a local church.

The church is not an afterthought with God; the church isn’t His “Plan B.” Rather, the church, as Christ’s body, represents God’s nature, authority and family here on earth. We experience “heaven on earth” through family. This may seem the opposite of your natural family or prior church family experience, but this is God’s intent.

Peter would write some 30 years after Jesus’ resurrection and Pentecost in 1 Pet. 2:4-10 that we are “living stones,” being built up together in Christ, who is our chief cornerstone. In verse 9 he writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may declare the goodness of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

The English word chosen is from the Greek *eklektos*, which shares a similar root word with *ecclesia*, and means “to pick one out from among the larger group for special service or privileges.” It denotes believers as recipients of God’s favor and called to service. Once again, the church, and individual believers, are called-out ones to be part of God’s family representatives of His kingdom to bring heaven’s domain (rule)

here in our earthly realm.

The New Testament teaches that genuine Christianity involves two things: 1) being in union with the person of Christ and 2) being in fellowship with the body of Christ, the church. (See Ephesians, which could be aptly titled "Christ and the church.")

Dale Moody stated, "Christianity is a community of faith centered around the person of Christ." Jesus stated clearly that He would build this community, and the powers of darkness would retreat as His church advances in the authority of His name and Word.

The early church understood the value and necessity of staying united and in community with each other.

When persecution arose against them, they prevailed in faith and prayer until heaven broke through. In Acts 12:1-19, we read of Herod's persecution against the church. He had James executed and observing the pleasure of the Jews, Herod imprisoned Peter, planning to also execute him. But verse 5 states, "So Peter was kept in prison. But the church prayed to God without ceasing for him."

As a result, the Lord sent an angel to deliver Peter from the prison and led him out through the gates of the city. What a miraculous deliverance for Peter and the early church! The angel told Peter to "Rise up, quickly" (Acts 19:7) and as he did, the chains fell off his hands.

Church in America, it is time to rise up quickly; the chains will fall off! We must join in united, earnest and constant prayer right now for our nation.

As I said last week, whether you are a Democrat, Republican, or Independent, our civil and religious liberties are at stake. We must always contend for truth, and we must pray for God's mercy on our nation.

God has empowered us for this purpose. We are called to be His light in a dark world. He is refining His people, His chosen generation, to live righteously in our generation. We can make a difference, so pray like your prayers make a difference.

If you do not have my book, *Our Eyes are On You: Principles to Prevail in Faith and Prayer*, I encourage you to get a copy. It is a very timely book. We need to pray with confidence and deep faith in this season.

In Mark 9:23, "Jesus said, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.'" Believe in His authority in your life and in His church, not to lord over others but to stand against the schemes of the evil one for our families, His church and all of humanity.

Rise up quickly, church in America! {eoas}

Bob Sawvelle is the founding and senior leader of *Passion Church in Tucson, Arizona*. *Passion Church* is a vibrant, kingdom-minded church in the heart of Tucson that values God's love and presence. He is a doctor of ministry doctoral mentor for the Randy Clark Scholars cohort at *United Theological Seminary*, an adjunct professor teaching master's-level classes in evangelism, discipleship and church planting with the *Global Awakening Theological Seminary* and an online course facilitator for *Global Awakening's Christian Healing Certification Program* and *Christian Prophetic Certification Program*.