



THE CHURCH OF MY DREAMS

Every one of us enjoys dreaming; building air castles. As a small child if you were a boy you dreamed about a new bicycle, or if you were a girl you dreamed about a new dolly. As we started growing and reached the junior age, we might dream about being a policeman, or a fireman. Or if you were a girl you dreamed about being an airline stewardess or a nurse. And then as you came into the later teenage years you started dreaming about marriage. If you were a boy you dreamed about marrying the most beautiful girl in the world and if you were a girl you dreamed about marrying the most handsome and rich prince in the world. Today, we're adults, and we're Christians. And what are we dreaming about as Christians. I don't know about you, but I've been dreaming about the church.

A story from history

When Oliver Cromwell and his soldiers went to arrest the Members of Parliament they found that all of the Members of Parliament had fled.

Oliver Cromwell gave the order to seize the old Speaker of the House as he was the only one there. And when the soldiers had seized him, Cromwell demanded that the old speaker reveal the whereabouts of the Members of Parliament. The old speaker of parliament would not yield. He looked fearlessly into the eyes of Cromwell and his soldiers and he said, "I have no eyes to see; no ears to hear and no lips to speak except as I'm directed by Parliament."

The church of my dreams is composed of members who have no eyes to see; no ears to hear and no lips to speak except as directed by the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of His church. Now in the early days of the church, after Christ first established the church

through his apostles, He had his way with the church. And so the church was established in all the influential centers of Asia Minor, Greece, and even Rome itself. By the end of the first century it could be said truthfully that Christ had been preached from Babylon to Spain and from Alexandria to Rome.

The First Church was highly Successful

While the New Testament furnishes us no complete numerical summary of the evangelistic successes of the New Testament church, we have these little examples of the success of the church.

In Acts Chapter 2, verse 41, on the very day that the church was established the sacred scriptures say that they that gladly received His word were baptized. And the same day there were added unto them about 3,000 souls. I would say that that was a tremendous beginning for the church, wouldn't you? A few days later, in Acts, 4th Chapter, and the 4th verse, we come to understand that the church had a few more members added. Many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about 5,000. And now the church had increased from about 3,000 members to 5,000 members and that did not even include the women and the children; just the men numbered 5,000.

As we go on reading in the book of Acts, we read about other conversions, and soon the scriptures mention the word "multitudes" were added to the Lord. So successful was the church of Christ in the first century, that by the close of the century some historians tell us that the number of believers had increased to more than one million. The church had tremendous influence upon the world of the first century. The scriptures tell us that actually the church "turned the world upside down" for Jesus Christ.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH TODAY?

Centuries have come and centuries have gone and we are now living in the 20th century. Does the church have greater influence upon the world of the 20th century than it did upon the world of the first century? I don't think that we need to go into the diagnosis any further. Because it is embarrassing when we ask ourselves about the influence of the church upon the world of the 20th century. We ask ourselves, "What is wrong?" I think you will agree with me when I say

that the will of Christ is being done only partially in the 20th century. Operational methods, gorgeous buildings, operatic music, and oratory seem more important to many people in the 20th century than doing the will of God. Consequently, to many churches in the 20th century, Christ is on the outside knocking, trying to get in. Just like the description of the church of Laodicea in Revelation, Chapter 3, Verse 20: "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me." I want to ask you this question, dear friends. Is it possible that Christ has been locked out of his own church here in Hickory Valley and has been standing out in the cold on the outside, knocking and trying to get in? If so, let us make sure that we open the doors widely and let Jesus Christ come in and take his place as the head of this church.

Yes, the Bible presents Christ as the head of the church. This is the clear picture that we have read in our scripture passage that we have chosen as the text for this message this morning - Ephesians, Chapter 5. We are also familiar with 1st Corinthians, Chapter 12, where again Christ is presented as the head of the church and we, the members, as members of his body. And of course the body is His church. We are all familiar with this illustration in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 12 uses to try to picture it in our minds. Because it pictures our human body - our head, the various members of the body, like the shoulders, the arms the hands, the fingers, the legs, the foot, the toes. Each member is important. The members of the body cannot get along without the head, but neither can the head survive without the members. And so Christ, the head of the church is supreme in importance. He is in control but every member of the body must submit themselves to the head. What kind of a body would you have or would I have if my feet would not obey my head? And so, we can carry the illustration over into the church.

I. I want you to know in the first place that the church of my dreams is a faithful church.

I could speak about many things this morning under the heading of faithfulness. I choose to speak only about worship. It is doubtful if Judaism would have survived had it not been for the Sabbath day. After the temple was destroyed in 586 BC, the Israelis were carried

away captive into Babylon. Now the prophets of Israel made the observance of the Sabbath Day primary. Once each week the people stood up to be counted. No matter what Babylon might do, the Jews kept the Sabbath Day. And consequently, the Sabbath kept the Jews. On the night of Jesus' betrayal He might have done many things and He might have said many things. But he chose to take bread and take the cup of grape juice. And he broke the bread and he gave it to his disciples and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them saying, "Drink ye all of it for this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

When Christ established His church on the day of Pentecost, His church remembered Him every first day of the week. Consequently, it is called the "Lord's Day." On the Lord's Day, the Lord's people are to meet the Lord around the Lord's table. We are to partake of the emblems reminding us of the Lord's body and the Lord's blood.

The early church kept this memorial supper every Lord's Day. And it is not without significance that we read of the victories that the first century church enjoyed. Perhaps, again, this is one of the reasons for the fewer victories of the church of the 20th century. Because too many members of the church of the 20th century have not been faithful to the Lord and the Lord's table. I want you to know that the church of my dreams is a church that is faithful. I have come here believing with all of my heart that you, the members of the Hickory Valley Christian Church, want to be members of Christ's church and that you will be faithful members. I don't hesitate to tell you that the Lord expects you around this Lord's Table every Lord's Day and as the minister of this church I expect no less.

You Should be in Church Every Lord's Day

When the famous German chemist, Hauptmann, traveled to Glasgow, Scotland, in 1880, he decided to visit at the home of Sir William Thompson, world famous scientist. He made his visit unexpectedly on the Lord's Day morning. When he knocked at the door a maid answered the door. The famous German chemist inquired, "Is Sir William at home?" The maid replied, "No." Hauptmann said, "Where is he?" And with little tact and great candor, the maid replied, "He's at church, where you ought to be." Dear friends, you ought to be at

church every Lord's Day and I ought to be at church every Lord's Day. And I'm expecting you to be here because that's what Christ expects.

II. In the second place, I want you to know that the church of my dreams is a praying church.

Now when Jesus chose his twelve apostles, His apostles made one request of Jesus. They did not request, Lord teach us how to preach. They did not request, Lord teach us to perform miracles. They did not say, Lord teach us to be wise. They did not say, Lord teach us to speak in tongues. They said, "Lord, teach us to pray." Where do you suppose these early apostles learned the supreme importance of prayer? I believe that they learned it from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As they observed Jesus life, they discovered that Jesus considered prayer more important than sleep. In Luke, 6th Chapter, 12th verse, "And it came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God."

How important is prayer to you? Are you willing to lose some sleep in order to pray to God about some important need in your life or the life of one of your brothers or sisters? Jesus also considered prayer more important than eating food. In Mark, 1st Chapter, 35th verse, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place and there enjoyed a sumptuous breakfast." No, that's not what it says. "And there he prayed." Yes, Jesus considered prayer so important that he got up bright and early in the morning, to pray - not to have breakfast. The disciples prayed and the Holy Spirit came down. Three thousand souls were baptized and the church was established. Noah prayed and God gave him the blueprint for the ark and he and his family were saved from the flood. Moses prayed and God gave him the Ten Commandments written on two tablets of stone. Peter and John prayed and a lame man was healed and the number of church members was increased to 5,000. Peter prayed while he was in prison and his friends, Christian friends, also prayed and God opened the jail doors and Peter came out to preach again.

Christians today often inquire, "What can I do to help the church?" My dear friends the one most important thing that you can do to help

the church is to pray. The church of my dreams is a praying church and the church of my dreams is a faithful church.

III. In the third place, I want to say that the church of my dreams is a giving church.

There is a very beautiful picture of the church in 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 8, verses 1 thru 5: "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: That in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For to their power and beyond their power they were willing of themselves. Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift and take upon us the fellowship of ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." I really like the way the Living Bible reads on that passage. And so I want to read it from the Living Bible. Now I want to tell you what God in His grace has done for the churches in Macedonia. Though they had been going through much trouble and hard times they have mixed their wonderful joy with their deep poverty and the result has been an overflow of giving to others. They gave not only what they could afford but far more. And I can testify that they did it because they wanted to and not because of nagging on my part. They begged us to take the money so that they could share in the joy of helping the Christians in Jerusalem. Best of all, they went beyond our highest hopes for their first action was to dedicate themselves to the Lord and to us for whatever direction God might give to them through us. A paraphrase of verse 5 might read like this: They gave this money because Christ had His way with them.

Jesus had more to say about the giving of money than he did about repentance. And Jesus had more to say about giving than he did about Christian baptism. And He had more to say about giving than he did about the Lord's Supper. And He had more to teach about giving than He did about heaven and hell. Does that give you a clue as to what I might be preaching most about as your minister? If I preach mostly about the teachings of Jesus Christ, then I would be preaching more about giving than any other subject. Because one out of every six verses in the four gospels has to do with giving.

Certainly that is a good subject to preach about during this Christmas season, because Christmas is a time for giving.

Christmas is the time when God gave His only Son. Christmas is the time when we think about Jesus, who came to the world to give His own life.

In Matthew Chapter 22, Verse 21, Jesus without hesitation said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's." And without apology I intend to speak today or at any other time on the subject of giving because Jesus definitely commanded in Matthew 23rd Chapter and 23rd verse not to leave the tithing undone. The Jewish people with no greater commission than that of Judaizing Palestine, which was a tiny little country 140 miles long and 60 miles wide, gave their tithe and offerings to God. Is it conceivable that we Christians with a command to evangelize the entire earth would give less than what a good Jew would give? We have treated the offering plate shabbily and we have been selfish. Dear friends, we must change that and I know that we will change it. Because every one of us surely wants to be the church that Jesus established.

A Christian businessman was asked by one of his friends one day, "What do you do in your spare time?" This very successful businessman responded by saying, "Well, in my spare time this past week, I went to New York City on Monday and preached the gospel on a street corner. Tuesday, I traveled to Mexico and held an evangelistic meeting. On Wednesday, I went and worked in our Christian Hospital in Rhodesia, in Africa. And then on Thursday I did a religious survey in Chicago which is going to result in the establishment of a new congregation. On Friday I was very busy working at our Christian old people's home in St. Louis, Missouri. On Saturday, I journeyed over to Korea where I held another revival meeting. This friend looked at him in amazement and asked, "How do you have time to carry on your successful business and then give all of that time to the church?" The businessman smiled and responded, "Why it's easy. I love to pay my tithes and to give offerings on top of my tithes every Lord's Day. And because I do that and because all of our church members do that we are partners with God in a great program of world evangelism. And through my dollars

I give, it is possible for me to be preaching the gospel all around the world, like while I carry on my own business. And that's why the church of my dreams is a giving church. Because a giving church preaches the gospel all over the world while carrying on the work of Christ at home at the same time.

The church of my dreams is a faithful church. The church of my dreams is a praying church. And the church of my dreams is a giving church.

Iv. And in the fourth place, I want to say that the church of my dreams is a working church. The peace, the prosperity, the happiness of a congregation is in proportion to the activity of the people. It was Van Dyke who wrote, "This is the gospel of labor; ring it ye bells of the Kirk; the Lord of Lords came down from above to live with men who work. This is the rose he planted here in the thorn-cursed soil. Heaven is blessed with perfect rest, but the blessings of earth is toil."

Some people think that when you become a member of the church it's like boarding a great luxury liner like the Love Boat and that you're going to go sailing away into peace forever. But it's not so.

Becoming a member of the church is like boarding a rowboat, and one oar is faith and the other oar is work. And you've got to pull and pull, and work and work, in order to go forward and succeed. In Mark the 13th chapter and the 34th verse, our Lord Jesus Christ said "For the son of man is as a man taking a far journey. He left his house; he gave authority to his servants and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." It is his work that we are to do in the working church.

Measure your love for Jesus by SING's

I want each one of you this morning to measure your love and your loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ and His church by the standards of the old Indian convert, Sing. Sing had been converted to Jesus by an American missionary who encouraged him to be a preacher of the gospel. And Sing responded to this encouragement by beginning immediately to preach the gospel to the citizens of his own village. As you know the vast majority of the people of India are Hindus,

which means they are idol worshippers. They do not take kindly to Christianity. The Hindus of India are quite hostile against Christianity and it is not uncommon in India for Christians to be put to death by the hostile Hindus. And so the citizens of Sing's village threatened him, "Do not preach to us about Jesus or we'll kill you." Now when the American missionaries saw that this was going to happen they took him aside, and they said it is dangerous for you to stay here; these people are going to kill you. Please go somewhere else and forget about what we told you about preaching the gospel because we don't want you to be hurt. But Sing would not pay heed to the missionaries. He returned to his village and once again began to witness for Jesus.

After a short time the village council wrote his death order. They killed a goat, took its skin, and placed Mr. Sing in it. They sewed him up tightly inside it and hung him up in the sun so that death would come in as torturous a way as possible. For three long days he lingered in misery, but during those days he persisted in preaching to those who were responsible for killing him. He told them about the love of God. At last when he became so weak that he could hardly move, he asked for permission to have his right arm released that he might leave a written message while he was still conscious. They allowed him the privilege and this is the message that he wrote: "Dear God, if I had been given ten thousand lives, I would choose to give them just as I have given this life, because your love for me is so great."

The church of my dreams is a faithful church; the church of my dreams is a praying church; the church of my dreams is a giving church; and the church of my dreams is a working church. It is the duty of the church to work, teach people and baptize them and then teach them to observe all of the commandments of the Lord Jesus.

And our work will never be done until we have visited every home in this city, just like they did in the days of the New Testament.

V. Finally, I want to say that the church of my dreams is an empowered church.

We often speak about the lack of power, until sometimes we feel like that father who had the demon-possessed son. You remember that

he came to Jesus and he said, "I took him to see your disciples and they didn't have the power to heal him, and so I brought him to you."

Many times today it seems like we the church are powerless against the forces of evil. We seem to have no power against the liquor forces; we seem to have no power against the pornographic filthy literature forces; we seem to have no power against the immorality that is constantly portrayed before MTV. And we say, "What is wrong?" Well, I think I know what is wrong. We are not relying upon the power that God has made available for us to use - the power of His own Holy Spirit. God has given us His spirit when we accepted His Son and were baptized in His name. It is now up to us to call upon the power of the Holy Spirit. It is up to us to live in the spirit and walk in the spirit and be guided by the spirit daily. And when we use the power that is available the church of the 20th century will have the power to change the world of the 20th century, just like the church of the 1st century changed the world of the first century.

I want you to hear this true story just as it was told to me by my brother-in-law, who is the minister of the First Christian Church at Lamar, Missouri. A young man was getting ready to graduate from high school. It was just two months ahead of graduation time. He went to his father and he said, "Dad, I've got to talk to you about a very important matter. You know that in just two months I'm going to be graduating. And then I'm going to go to college because that's always been your dream. You wanted me to go to college and get a college education. And I'm willing to go to college, Dad, but there's just one thing. I need an automobile if I'm going to go to college, and we just have to seriously talk about it." The father interrupted his son at that point and went over to his bookshelf and got down one of his books. It was entitled, "Opportunity Knocks Just Once." He handed this book to his son and he said, "Son, I want you to read this book.

There are some very important things in this book that you need to understand, and certainly a very valuable lesson in this book that you need to learn. Now, I want to talk to you about this automobile that you want to talk about, but first you read this book and then we'll talk about the automobile." Well, you know that didn't suit the boy at all.

He was angry and he went storming out of the room and he slammed the door. And he didn't even speak to his father about the matter for another whole month. Then he came back and he said, "Dad, you know I've got to talk to you. It's just one month until

graduation and we never have yet talked about my automobile so I can go to college." The father looked at him and said, "Son, did you read that book that I asked you to read?" And he said, "Dad it's a difficult book to read and it's not very interesting. It's all about working and taking advantage of your opportunities and things like that, but what I need right now is an automobile; not to read that book." His father said, "Son, I really do want you to read that book and just as soon as you've completed it we will talk about the automobile." Oh my, that boy was angry. He went stomping out of the room and slammed the door. Then he came back and it was just two weeks before graduation and he said, "Well, Dad, I've struggled through two-thirds of that awful old book that you gave me." He said, "you know even the bookbinders didn't fix it right because the pages are all stuck together at the top. It's so difficult for me to read it and I've got to take a knife and slit every page so I can turn to the next page. It's just terrible. I'm never going to make it by graduation time. Now we've got to talk about my car." The father said, "Son, I want you to read that book; and there's time. You have two weeks - you read the book and then we'll talk about the car." Finally, it was just two days until graduation and the boy came in and he was really angry. He slammed the book down on his father's desk and said, "There, take your old book. I'm not going to finish it; and furthermore, I'm not going to go to college, because you won't talk about my automobile." The father very calmly picked up the book and he turned to the last page and took his knife and slit the last few pages open and there he removed a check, all made out in his son's name for the full amount of a brand new automobile. The boy of course was dumbfounded. Then the father took that check and ripped it into. He said, "You see, son, just like the title of the book says, 'Opportunity Knocks Just Once.'

Shall we bow our heads in prayer?

Our Father in Heaven, how we thank you for loving us, even though we're sinners, and for sending your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins upon the cross. We thank You for the Bible; we thank You for the church, and Father, we thank You for the privilege of being members of the church. We pray that you will help each one of us to cooperate together, to unite together under the banner of Christ so that we may

go forward in this 20th century like the church went forward in the first century. And now as we come to this time of invitation, we pray for those in this audience who have never accepted Jesus. We pray that they will accept Him and obey Him. We pray for those who are members of a church somewhere else, but have never placed their membership here. We pray that they will desire to place their membership here that we might all work together for Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray.

Wm. Miller