

## THE CHURCH: WHAT IS IT?

BY PST KEN MBUGUA - 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016

We were to look into 3 points in this lesson namely:

- 1) The church as the people of God who are for his glory
- 2) The church as the agent of the Kingdom
- 3) The local church as a true church. How do you know you are in a true church?

### The Church as the people of God for his glory

God has ordained to bring to Himself a people for His glory.

We saw that man and woman were created primarily for the glory of God, a people who were to reflect His image. And that a big chunk of the Bible is about a people, Israel. So what is God doing? From Genesis to Revelation he is calling a people to himself for his glory. We saw a lot of that hinted in Exodus when God is delivering the Israelites from Egypt, the phrase “that they may know that I am the Lord” is frequently repeated. So God is glorified through his people and through the salvation of this people. We then see him save them ultimately through a sacrifice during the last plague in Egypt, the Passover.

Exodus 9:16 *“But for this reason I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.”*

But we also read something very amazing from Ephesians 3:14-21, v 21: *‘to him be **glory in the church and in Christ Jesus** throughout all generations, **forever and ever, Amen.**’* Where is the glory of God? In the Church and in Christ Jesus! Isn’t that profound? In my local and your local church and in Jesus?! Yes.

It was amazing to see and discover that God had an eternal plan of a mystery (Eph 3:8-12). It didn’t just come up in the New Testament but he had it in place since the OT times through his prophets. God is building us (the church) up, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 2:19:22 *‘So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord...’*

He is preparing this structure that is later seen in the book of Revelation 21:9b-10 *“‘Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb’...and he showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God...”* That again is the church!

Another incredible thing we noted is in Ephesians 2: 1-7 *‘And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us **alive** together with Christ, and **raised** us up with him and **seated** us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...’*. That we were dead, he made us alive, raised us up and has seated us with Christ Jesus is such a deep, inconceivable thing to know. Today we can see the attributes of God such as kindness, love, mercy, graciousness, etc. through his salvation of the church. All this is made possible through Christ Jesus. He is the only reason for God’s glory in the church. As a matter of fact we cannot separate the church from the cross (Ephesians 5:25). God’s big plan is bringing glory to himself *in the church and in Christ Jesus* in all generations forever and ever.

### The Church as the Agent of the Kingdom

*'And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my **church**, and the **gates of hell** shall not prevail it. I will give you the **keys of the Kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you shall **bind** on earth on earth shall be **bound** in heaven, and whatever you **loose** on earth shall be **loosed** in heaven.'* Matthew 16:18-19

Christ himself is the one calling people (the church) and building them up. We also see here that the church has been given authority by Jesus. He has given the local church the keys of the kingdom to exercise church discipline and define the boundaries of the Kingdom and manifest the kingdom of God. It was interesting for me to note and understand the context of this verse (on binding and loosing). Two chapters later we see it yet again repeated: *'If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone...But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you...If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen **even** to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.'* (Matthew 18:15-20)

In the above verses we see the church as the final authority, may be not some physical keys that Peter was handed, rather these keys were to symbolize authority as we have seen. But again what are they binding and loosing, is it **demons, diseases, problems**? Probably not. This brother has sinned and has refused to listen **even** to the church and so Jesus says he should be expelled, he becomes an outsider (loosed) like the Gentiles and tax collectors were. Paul later gives the same advice in 1 Corinthians 5:3-5. The local church mainly gathers with the authority of our Lord Jesus and is expected to identify the citizens of the Kingdom.

### The local church as a True church

Local church is a local manifestation of the universal Church of all the redeemed from all ages. A local church is where the Word of God is truly proclaimed and the sacraments (which establish who is in recognized as a citizen of the kingdom and maintain the 'font door' and 'back door' of the church) are properly practiced.

#### **Further reading**

- I. Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*, Crossway, 2012
- II. Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*, 9Marks, 2012