“The Church – the Bride of Christ”

9.30a.m. Sunday 27 August, 2017

Delivered by Senior Pastor Marshall Muller @
the Laidley Baptist Church (Qld).

Reading – The CHURCH - the Bride of Christ

THE CHURCH – THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

She stands positioned in history – one foot in the past and one in the future. A divine destiny.

She is beautifully adorned, spotless and pure. Prepared and sanctified, ready for the arrival of her husband – the Groom.

She brings healing and hope to the multitudes of people who find rest as she welcomes them with open arms. Her hospitality is known among the nations.

She is the example of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness to her neighbours. She oozes gentleness and faithfulness as she speaks of her coming Bridegroom.

She knows the Bridegroom’s voice and is not ashamed of Him. Her desire is to become less so that He will be great. Her desire is not herself, but others. His name is always on her lips.

She makes herself ready for the wedding day. All are invited to the feast – from the highways and the byways she bids them “Come, blessed are those who are invited to
the wedding supper of the Lamb!” Her reward is serving others as they enter the Gates of her home.

She speaks truth and practices justice. Humility is the gait of her walk. With these gifts she defends those who are defenceless. She is a princess warrior for the causes of the poor and the helpless, the widow and the children.

She is an advocate for the suffering and downtrodden. Anyone whoever is thirsty, she invites them to come; and offers the free gift of the water of life. She anoints the sick with the oil of comfort and healing.

She takes time to teach those who thirst for more. Nothing is too difficult for her. Her resources are vaster than anyone else’s kingdom. Her door is always open and she delights in opening doors for others. She has the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and no weapon formed against her will prosper.

She is growing in numbers that will defy man’s doubts. She is strong, a mighty army ready to conquer evil and stand against injustice. She will not be overcome, but is an overcomer. She is persecuted but Her power is in her prayers – earnest urgent prayers for the welfare of others, for the healing of the nations. News of her power and greatness will reach the ears of every king, every President and every ruler of every land. She will not be ignored.

She is a worshipper. With every muscle, word and note she worships the one true God. Through her worship she sets the captive free, re-enables sight and gives mobility to the lame. Her worship of the Groom is only surpassed by her love for Him. She submits to Him and desires to see him glorified.

She gathers her children as a mother hen gathers her chicks, protecting them and covering them. With her tears she wipes away the distress of pain and suffering.

She is an encourager, with nothing negative coming from her lips. With her words, she brings life and energy to all she meets. She is a peacemaker who looks to enhance the lives she is responsible for in her Master’s absence. An ambassador for her King.
She gladly uses the gifts that have been blessed upon her, bringing honour to the name of the Lord. Mercy, peace and love are given to her in abundance.

She has been bought with the precious blood of the Lamb, her name has been written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. She is rich beyond compare – wearing the Crown of Life. Nothing will separate her from her Father’s love. Her kingdom knows no bounds.

She is the Church of the Living God and her Groom – the Master, Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Gracious Heavenly Father, give us a picture of us as your Bride ready for your coming. Awaken us from our slumber. Open our eyes so that we can see your arrival today. Deliver our hearts from evil that we may know your presence again. Give us revelation as your Church to the task you have set for us. We thank you for the salvation we have received through the blood of Jesus Christ. We invite you into our lives and into this place. Have your way here today Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening:

Illustration – going to friends ‘big’ house with pool/tennis courts/games room etc. Once you have encountered more (the next level), you just never want to go back. Once God has shown you the ‘more’, there is no going back. Sadly, at times, (it might be fear of the unknown or the security of comfort) we don’t allow God to take us to the next level … and then the next.

I’ve been to Christian events in the past decade where somewhere between 40 and 50,000 Christians have gathered. These are followers of Jesus who are looking for ‘more, wanting God to take them to the next level’. Seeing a new passion in God’s House through it’s youth and a new heart for the poor through it’s youth. Seeing the older generation (my generation and beyond) now handing the baton on and giving permission for the younger generation to go further. Seeing the Church come alive to justice motivated not by anger (which seems to be the world’s approach), but motivated by love.
I saw a new Church that served and taught 10,000 kids in 10 days. Is that our vision?

Older ones here today - How are you handing the baton of Christ on to the next generation?

I must admit that I like sport and I’ve played quite a few sports in my day. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve returned to Table Tennis. It seems to fit my time of life at the moment. You can basically play till you die. To win trophies you just have to outlast the others in age.

Anyway, I used to be an ordinary Table Tennis player – just a garage player who went along and joined a club. I played for a few years but knew that I could compete at a higher level if I put my mind (and body) to it. So recently I re-evaluated my preparation when playing at a higher level. I used to just get out there and just bash every ball. Try and hit it harder without any strategy.

So, one tournament I sat down before I played and wrote down on a piece of paper several of the ‘basics’. I have learned them and practiced saying them over and over in my head. The result – more victories ... and against much stronger opponents.

I don’t want you to get lost in the whole table tennis thing, but I want to share some of the basics I learned for us as a Church to reach another level. They are transferrable ... just like McDonalds franchises.

**KEY POINT #1 – Watch the ball**

The only way I know how to respond to the next shot is to watch the ball right on to the bat. Watch the spin on the writing on the ball. Most of the time I am watching something else when I’m trying to hit a shot, rather than focussing on what is happening right then and there.

Many of us don’t get past the first shot, because we don’t know how to respond. Instead we choose the wrong shot and end up with bitterness, pain, anger, defeat, loss, misunderstanding etc. But how would our Church look like if we knew how to respond to what is coming at us? If we could read the signs of life’s circumstances?

Church, we have been given a task and are purposed to make a difference. How can we do that if we aren’t on the ball???

Watch the ball – know what to expect & how to respond. That might mean you need to tool up a bit more in the Scriptures, or find & dust off your spiritual armour to put on again.
KEY POINT #2 – Pick the right shot

I miss so many points, because I haven’t chosen the right shot. Poor choices or decision. I will try to be a hero and smash a shot that’s not there and end up instead a loser.

We miss so much in our Christian lives because we haven’t chosen right. Even though God’s Word is so clear and always on hand. We choose unforgiveness instead of freedom through forgiveness. Or maybe negativity which leads to gossip and disunity, rather than words of life that build up & encourage.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is within you!! Most times we forget to choose this!! Most times we forget that we are covered under the blood of Christ. God’s plan is for us to choose His way – to choose right.

Greater is He that is within me than he that is in the world.

KEY POINT #3 – Value the point

My old coach in Tasmania was a Vietnamese lady who was an Australian Champion. When I joined the club in Hobart when we first arrived, I was put in her team. When she first saw me play, she told me “Marshall, you are a good player. You have every shot, but you lose a lot of games because you don’t value the point.”

I want to win every point when I play. I don’t want to lose any. But until I listened to my coach, I wasted so many opportunities. I lost just about every game.

Pick the things in your life (using your spiritual gifts/talents) that will have maximum impact in the Kingdom. Choose carefully where you put your energies. Don’t waste time on frivolous stuff that doesn’t make sense. (I don’t mean go for the up front stuff that make you look important. Better if you choose things that make others look important. Serving others – isn’t that what Jesus did when he came to this earth.) Value God’s ways – Love God & love people.
KEY POINT #4 – MOVE !! Don’t get planted.

One of the most common things that I’m saying to myself under my breath when I play is MOVE!!! It is so easy to just stand in one place. (Talk about how that wrecked my shoulder). But Table Tennis is a reactionary game (fastest ball speed game in the world) so you need to move your feet and go to where things are happening. Your opponent normally won’t hit the ball straight at you. So you need to move.

Are you stuck? Are things passing you by? Do you refuse to move in your life? Are you comfortable? Are you resisting change? Is God trying to tell you to get moving and stop being so downright stubborn? If God wants to move us to another level, then you & I will have to move. There will be changes. The Gospel of Jesus Christ will never change – the birth, death & burial of Christ for our salvation – the cross, the blood sacrifice, the exchange of his life for mine – that will never change. BUT, the container that the Gospel might come in is always changing.

Who would’ve thought in my grandparents’ day, that you would bring your phone along to Church, so that you could look up the Bible and search for things during the sermon. You can even pay your offering using your phone during the sermon, or text your friend 4 rows away. The Gospel never changes but the way it is presented will always be changing with every generation.

You might say “I like it this way. I don’t want to move much – I’m pretty comfortable. Everyone just needs to hit everything to me.” I want it to be all about me!! Is that you?

Have we become stiff-necked, stubborn, demanding. By moving and understanding that God is always doing new things in people’s and Churches lives, we can move to a new level as a Church.

The Son of Man came to serve, not to be served. Greatest/least analogy. Humility. To do that, we may have to move/shift in our thinking & our actions a bit more.

KEY POINT #5 – Get your body behind the ball

It’s a term in table tennis to get your body behind the ball. In other words, don’t be lazy. You can’t hit the right return if you are not aligned. Check your alignment.
How many times this week have you checked your alignment? How many times have you worshipped God, opened His Word and re-aligned yourself? The greatest trick the Devil plays on us is to keep us out of alignment.

You know when you’re not right. Physio/Chiropractor – neck/back out of alignment → everything is so much harder to do. Everything feels like it’s not right. Getting in the car, picking something up off the floor, doing the shopping, walking. Everything is hard, painful and takes so much more effort.

Get yourself behind the ball – when you’re walking in the alignment of God, there is an ability to see/do life differently (not necessarily easier). When you have the power of the Cross at work in your life, life’s purpose takes on a new direction. Things don’t agitate you. You have an inner peace. (I can tell those who have an inner peace). You are serving the Master, It’s a delight to walk in the ways of the Lord. You handle conflict so much easier. It’s not my way or the highway any more. It’s just God’s way.

But to do this, we have to commit to getting everything behind God’s kingdom plans for us. We need to love God with ALL of our heart, soul, mind & strength.

(Seniors Dinner last Thursday – they put everything they had into the meal. They were serving others. What would’ve happen if they had only half-cooked the Shepherd’s pie or only put away 20% of the chairs & tables?).

We need to love God with ALL of our heart, soul, mind & strength. Get all of you behind God’s plans and His future. Re-align with the Creator.

**KEY POINT #6 – Left arm – are you using it?**

I used to only use one arm to play. But I’ve since found out that the spare arm (my left arm) is the one that generates the power and the direction. I didn’t know that, and as a result my head and body would go in every direction because of this one principle.

In my last congregation in Hobart there was a guy called Chris. He lived in the back blocks in the bad suburb right on the edge of town. Pretty scary place at night time.

He was just an ordinary bloke, but he had a big vision. He would organise & run events that would put firewood into several hundred homes (free) every winter time. It would be coordinated with the local sawmills and then guys would show up with trailers and block splitters and we would deliver to the poorer people who couldn’t afford to heat
their houses every winter. They would cry when we showed up. $500 worth of firewood. Chris was a visionary!! He was always talking to me about feeding the city, clothing the city, helping widows, breathing new life. He would run sausage sizzles in the poorest suburbs and the line for a free sausage would snake for a kilometre, because most families had a dozen kids and not enough money to go around. Chris from the Church was always networking with other groups, companies, government organisations – left and right arm working together. The head going in the right direction.

What are you allowing to just ‘hang’ limply? What talents do you have that could give the Church power and direction? Without using them, we are missing out on so much that God has for the Church, we deny blessing, we deprive ourselves and worse, we deprive others for eternity.

Do we have a lazy spirit (it’s too hard / God wouldn’t use me)? Or do we have a spirit of boldness – where nothing is impossible for God.

If God is for us then who can be against us?

**KEY POINT #7 – Know your opponent’s weaknesses?**

This is such a hard thing to do. Before a game starts you are allowed a compulsory 2 minute warm-up. Then the game begins officially. I used to coach juniors and they would just flog the ball aimlessly for those two minutes. So when I started coaching them I told them that before a game begins you should have been able to work out nearly all of your opponent’s weaknesses. You need to try different things to see how your opponent handles it. So when the game begins, you know all of their weaknesses and should be able to defeat them easily.

I have found in my life, and in the life of the people in the Churches I have served, that very few people understand this principle. If you’re doing kingdom stuff and things are pumping, then Satan and his minions ARE going to be more pro-active. You come to expect it. And when that happens, the things that get attacked are our weaknesses. That’s logical. Find the crack in the armour of God and exploit it. That way you can be defeated.
What about your opponent’s weaknesses? Do you know how to handle the attacks of the evil one? His primary purpose is to destroy you – mostly from within!! Mostly, we are generous participants. Don’t allow the entry points into your life. Anger, bitterness, addictions, past hurts, laziness, pride, comfort, self-importance etc.

Satan’s greatest weakness is that he has no weapon of mass destruction any more. The law of sin & death no longer holds the Christian captive. Christ has gone beyond the veil of death & has returned and now goes to prepare a place for you and me. That’s what He is doing right now. When that place is ready, the Father will give the shout for the trumpet to be blown and everything as we know it will be changed.
Satan is defeated. That’s his weakness. Get to know it.
Greater is He that is within me than he that is (going to cop a whipping) in the world.

**KEY POINT #8 – Speed is important**

In playing any significant shots (e.g. a smash) I have been told that hand speed is the most important factor.

I used to want for all the trappings of life – the great job, early retirement, live on the coast in a beachhouse and just fish and play golf & table tennis every day. That was when I was younger and didn’t understand the call of the Kingdom. As I have grown in my faith and God has taken me to another level, I have discovered that you can’t serve two masters. It just doesn’t work. You please one, without the other.

So, I have determined that life and the things of the Lord are more urgent in my life now. There is an urgency that should accompany our work for the Lord. I am believing that ALL can be saved before Jesus returns – a big call. None should perish. If we were to reach everyone on this planet with the news of Christ, could we bring forward the arrival of Jesus the Master. Oh I wish.

What about if we were to reach everyone in and around Laidley would that matter to God? Speed & Urgency to bring others to Jesus is what matters to the Kingdom. We live in an ever diminishing age of grace. Church – we still have urgent business to be about.

Is the salvation of your children/partner/parents/work/friends an emergency to you? Do you speak truth to them? Do they know you are a Christ One?

A number of years ago I spent a week with my son Brett (Sydney) – going through tough times and shared heaps of things. Heaps of tears and prayers etc. We went along to
Church and then to see him worshipping in freedom. Such a contrast. Urgency – all I did was just shared the Good News of Jesus with him again. He broke down and knew that was what he needed. God’s Holy spirit will do the rest. How urgent are we to get to the main point of God in our conversations? How important is God’s plan for people you are with this week?

They won’t know if we don’t go. If we don’t bring the Good News (and just hold on to it ourselves), is it really Good News? It only becomes Good News in other’s lives as it is shared/explained with them.

*Illustration* – Moslem lady (Parisa from Vancouver) who cancelled her marriage to her oppressive (rich) partner and had been depressed and so spoke to one of her workmates (a Christian) who encouraged her. She found out about the Hillsong Leadership Conference 3 days before it started and paid nearly $10,000 to get to Australia. First night heard the Gospel and gave her life to Christ. She couldn’t stop telling everyone the next day – it was freezing cold in the park & she was talking to anyone who would listen about Jesus. We encountered her at the park bench and she was urgently telling anyone who would listen about Jesus and what a difference he had made to her life.

*It started with one Christian in the workplace taking an urgent interest in her friend.*

What is the urgent task of this Church? What do we need to get up to speed on? Are we believing that ALL could be saved?? Hallelujah if you can say yes to that.

**KEY POINT #9 – Never Give up!!**

In recent times I have come back from the brink of defeat in games that others spectating thought I had lost, by just telling myself “NEVER GIVE UP” – fight for every point. Put into practice what you have learned. Go back to the basics. You can be a couple of sets down and have match points against you, but victory is still possible. And when it comes in those circumstances it is so much sweeter.

This is sort of like a wrap up point, that brings all other things together.

Jesus said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Church, with God on our side, who can stand against us!!!
It’s a guarantee. The battle’s been fought, the victory is in the bag. We just have to turn up!!! And never give up!!

Only quitters quit. Winners find ways of ‘turning up’. Victory will come because we know that Jesus never gave up on us. He fought for your soul on the cross. Satan thought it was game, set and match, but Jesus never gave up on you.

I want to ask a personal question. Answer it silently in your head.

What have you given up on this year? Determine from today on that you will never give up on the things of God – that you won’t compromise on the things of God – that you will endure and persevere until victory comes.

I’m praying for victory even when the odds are stacked against me. My God is a big God. He never gave up on me!!

Right now I am praying for a Church building – all the odds are stacked against me. There’s not enough money, people are critical, council regulations. Everything seems like it won’t happen. But they don’t know my God. If you are putting it all on the lone for His Kingdom, then He notices and He will show up. There will be victory. It may not be how you expect it, but God honours the faithfulness and obedience of His saints.

CONCLUSION

Illustration – picture of us on our wedding day. 2 things to notice – how young we are, but how beautiful the bride is!!!

What sort of bride are we? Or probably more pointed, what sort of bride are you?

Is your dress a bit dirty, got some tears/fraying around the edge, make-up smudged? Are we marrying for convenience or do we truly love our Groom from our heart?

Perhaps today you truly want to make things right. You want to be the type of Bride that Jesus is coming back for? You want to be ready, beautiful and spotless.
Can’t do it yourself! Our righteousness is like filthy rags.

But Jesus is our righteousness. Only he can make it right. Can you imagine Jesus stooping down and picking you up out of the dirt, and dusting your wedding dress off. He reaches out and touches your face and wipes away the smudged tears. He holds you and tells you that He loves you.

Have another listen to the statement about the Church – the Bride of Christ. If that’s you, then re-commit in your heart today to be the Church, the Bride, the living stones that His Word describes. As we sing our last song, won’t you allow Jesus to dust you off and tell you that He’s so in love with you. We have a great task yet Church, we need to step up to the next level.

Re-read the Statement – The Bride of Christ.

Closing Song – Man of Sorrows

Let’s Pray.

Gracious Awesome Heavenly Father, help us now to continue worshipping you as we give ourselves to you this week. May your Holy Spirit guide us and remind us that we are your spotless Bride being made ready for your arrival. Help us to speak truth and act justly on your behalf this week. May we bring life not destruction with our tongues. May we desire to be others-centred for the sake of Christ, expressed through kindness, goodness and healing towards those we are with.

Thank you for the blood of the Groom, the Lamb of Heaven, Jesus Christ. Help us Lord to understand the urgency of your blood-bought salvation for our region. That others might be transformed by the love & grace of a merciful God. Awaken us & quicken us for the day of the Lord is coming. May each of our lives be a blessing to this world. Protect and direct us this side of heaven. We await that one day where we will meet our Master Jesus face to face, and will be given the crown of life to wear for all eternity.

In the great & mighty name of Jesus. Amen.