

Intro: Church means different things to different people. Vacation with Girls went to Church:
1st Sunday...picnic table...2nd Sunday...Friend's church in Va...3rd 1st Jacksonville, 8-10k

Each one was completely different, But Each One Was Church? So...What is Church to YOU?

Today as we look at the wonderful Gifts God has given to us this Christmas, I want us to think about The Church!

Gift #3: The Church

3 Truths that make the Church One of God's Greatest Gifts!

1 The Church Is God's Chosen Instrument To Work In Our World.

Matt 16:13-19 pg 694

"...I will give you the keys of the kingdom..." vs 1

Kingdom of Heaven has been entrusted to the Church! Jesus is NOT talking about Power/Control! Blessing/Communicate
The church has three things that demonstrate it is God's chosen instrument in our world

- **Authority:** Ability to open the doors of heaven! Binding; Loosing (As we fulfill our ministry...Go)
- **His Blessing:** You are the Christ: Blessed are you! When we speak the Truth of who Jesus is we have his blessing
Joh 12:32 *"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."*
- **His Protection:** Gates of hell will not prevail! When all is said and done...the Church will stand strong! Prevail

Illus: There are a lot of wonderful Christian organizations. I believe in most of them. But here is the reality. Only one thing has the promise of God's authority, God's Blessing and God's Protection! That is the Local Church!

If you want to be on the front line of the work of God...it is in the local church, reaching people for Jesus one at a time!

The ONLY group God has PROMISED to bless in our world today...Is HIS CHURCH! God WORKS THROUGH IT...

2. The Church Holds A Unique Place In The Heart of God!

John 3; Matt 16; Eph 5:25-33 pg 829

God loves people...and God loves the Church! We know both are true...For God so loved the WORLD, Jesus loves Church
I hear something said all the time that I have to tell you is absolutely unbiblical

People Say: I love God...*But I don't love the Church, Don't believe in the Church, Don't support the Church, or Go to Church*

Nothing could be further from the heart of God than NOT loving the Church! His SON loved the Church, Gave His Life for...

We Should Treat the Church the Way JESUS Treats the Church!

- **Love it:** *"Just as Christ loved the Church" (Not the BUILDING, but the PEOPLE!)*
Jesus LOVES the Church! The church is the recipient of unearned and unconditional favor of Jesus (Son In Law)
He loves us when we are lovely...and He loves us when we are not! NEVER a time when Jesus doesn't love the Church
1Cor 13: *Love is Patient, Kind, not rude or self seeking! All those things that Paul describes to us as love*
That is how Jesus treats the Church...and THAT is how we should as WELL!
>If we love him...Then we love what he loves: If OUR heart is like HIS heart..then we love the church!
>If we follow in his footsteps...are his disciples...taught, trained, mentored by Him...we love the Church
>With all of it's flaws, and sins, and problems, and mistakes....We should LOVE the Church!
Listen: Isn't that How HE LOVES US? Accepts us...right where we are!
- **Give Ourselves for it:** Give Lit = *to surrender to; to give up to; to yield to; to intrust to, to give over to another*
Jesus voluntarily gave his life up for the Church Acts 20:28 tells us that he "bought it with his own blood!"
He cared so deeply for the Church that laid his life down...poured out His blood
So then, for us to say, I love you Lord Jesus, but I don't care about what you died for...Foolish!
Of course the church is flawed, of course it isn't perfect, of course it is full of hypocrisy: But aren't we!
Why is it that we can live with all of those things in ourselves...but when it is the church...we can't
I think it is because we love ourselves...but we DON'T love the Church the way we should!

Just like Jesus we need to give our life for that which he gave HIS life

If we claim to be His followers, we can't do less than that! How can we be his followers..

And not love the Church the way He did, and not give ourselves to it like He did?

- **Build it up:** Not only did Jesus say he loves the church, and gave himself for it...He promises to build it!
He says that he is going to move the Church forward. To make it stronger, better, more effective
If we are going to be like Him, We should invest our life in exactly the same thing Jesus invested His life in. CHURCH
Build it up by our gifts: Using them in ministry: Why give your best to something else? (Sports, Career, Boat, House)
Build it with our giving: Why give your resources to something less? This time of the year I am flooded...Give to Church
Build it with our prayers: Why would we NOT pour our prayer life into the Church
Build it with our Support, and attendance, and with our Care and Words and Effort!

Illus: Imagine the impact our church could have if we focused all the time and effort and gifts and money and prayer
That we invest into other, secondary things that will NEVER change the world, never change lives, and if we put
all of that in the church...how the kingdom of God would go forward!

I am not saying we shouldn't do other things...but our first and our best...should go to what Jesus loves!

3. The Church Is Like A Diamond, Multi-Dimensional.

Most of us have a very limited understanding of the Church and see it only from the viewpoint that meets our immediate need. If we are to truly love and build and give ourselves to the Church then we need to fully understand this incredible gift from God.

There are at least 8 Different ways the NT sees the Church and defines it.

- **Bride of Christ:** Purity is the focus here.

2Co 11:2 *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.*

We are to prepare ourselves spiritually for the one who gave himself to us!

It is a travesty that the Church today is hardly different from the world around us.

- **Kingdom of God:** God's rule is the focus here

Col 1:13 *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,*

The Church is supposed to be a piece of Heaven on Earth! We are to live out what it means to be the people of God

With God ruling and reigning in our hearts and lives, as we do that we are in incredible testimony to our world

Appl: Unfortunately, when we DON'T do that we pay the price because our world expects us to do so...turns them off

- **Building or Temple of God:** God's presence is the focus here

Ac 17:24 *"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.*

Eph 2:22 *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

When we gather together as a Church the Spirit and presence of God is with us!

1Co 5:4 *When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,*

- **Vineyard of God:** Spiritual fruit is what is in the spotlight here.

We are to produce something of true spiritual value

Joh 15:1 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful...No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

A church always exists for something OTHER than itself! If all we have is what we do for ourselves...missed the point!

God wants us as His vineyard to be producing spiritual fruit. That is within US and out outside of US as well!

What is Fruit? Righteousness; People coming to Jesus; Impact of Changed lives, Saved marriages, Hearts healed

People coming to know Jesus that never knew Him; Lives saved for Eternity...

- **The Flock of God:** This is about spiritual care for one another!

Joh 10:14 *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.*

We are here not just for what we can get...but also for what we can give! Church is about being spiritually cared for

If you are considering being a part of a church there are two questions:

1. How can the Church care for me? Help me w/purity; Extend the kingdom; experience God's presence

- **Body of Christ** This is about spiritual connectedness and connection.

Where can I find a place to invest my life in the life of others? Make them better, Stronger, More like Jesus

2. Where can I invest in the spiritual care of others in this church? Both church members and those outside the Church

Ro 12:5 *so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

- **Family of God:** This is about relationships.

Truly being spiritually connected in a spiritual family

Ga 4:6 *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

The Church is a family where you are loved and accepted for who you are...someone made in the image of God!

Funeral Yesterday...Two funerals...Yesterday, Wednesday...BOTH see this Church as huge blessing Family

- **Army of God**

This is about purpose! The church is called to a purpose greater than itself! We are called to go to war for God!

2Ti 2:3 *Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs-- he wants to please his commanding officer.*

Eph 6:12: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

Remind you of our Mission: RTBC is committed to loving people by leading them to Jesus...

We want to do that in such a way that our neighborhoods, communities, towns, work places, softball teams Changed!

CONCL: How Do You See CHURCH? Just a place to come, sit, give a few dollars, be encouraged

Or is it God's Chosen Instrument to CHANGE a lost and dying world?

Do you understand that it holds a Unique place in the center of His heart, Loves it passionate, merciful, unending love

Have you found YOUR place in His Church? Place of Purity, Kingdom is pushed forward, Blessed with His Presence

Spiritual fruit is produced, People are connected, spiritually nurtured and cared for, Have a place...and A Purpose!

Never been part of anything like that...Come Join us at RTBC...That's the kind of place we are building!