

Church Illustrated

The church, as an army

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HDBC

Illustrations are important parts of teaching and preaching. An illustration offers a real-life picture of what a verse or passage is teaching. Jesus was the master-illustrator. He told dozens of stories. They were never wasted. Each one had a purpose. He used them to help us understand Heaven, faith, how to be saved and more. Then there are illustrations of the church, offered not only by Jesus but by other N.T. writers. Many of those illustrations are presented in the form of metaphors. We've looked at four of them. Flock. Body. Family. Hospital. This morning we look at the last one in this series; ***the church, as an army***.

Honestly, I was surprised to find so many references to picture the church like an army. It actually begins with Jesus, the first time He mentioned the church. They first one is in Matthew and the last few are in the Revelation. Based on my review of the relevant passages and in an attempt to get an good picture of what this means for the church, I will offer nine statements this morning. But first, I want to address a couple of concerns.

First, in light of world history, and the misconceptions by some, we must be very careful when using this metaphor. The church is like an army, and according to the hymn, we are ***marching off to war***. Not talking about taking up physical weapons or wounding and destroying physical bodies, but rather fighting in a spiritual realm, with a spiritual purpose, using spiritual weapons. **The Crusades** provide a clear example of what this is **not to mean**. The idea of going to war against Muslims to reclaim the Holy Land in the name of Jesus was misguided at best & evil at worst. That history is still a stumbling block that missionaries have to overcome when seeking to lead Muslims to faith in Christ.

Second, in light of what may be a growing movement of Christian nationalism, we want to be careful with this metaphor. There are some evangelicals who have a tendency to tie their faith to certain political parties or positions, in an unhealthy way. The army metaphor should never be used to promote political agendas. Quite frankly, it has nothing to do with patriotism or nationalism.

With those two out of the way, let's consider nine statements.

1. We have a commander-in-chief to obey (Matt 16:18)

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

We learn three important things about the church in that simple statement.

1) The church is built by Jesus

He is the power behind the church, not us. The church is built by His divine will, not by our creative genius. No church is built by an individual or even a group of individuals. Any time you hear that a person has built a church, don't believe it. Only Christ builds the church.

2) The church belongs to Jesus

Note the designation ***my church***. It belongs to Him, not us!

3) The church will experience opposition

He mentions ***the gates of Hades***. Hades refers to the realm of the dead. I don't have time to unpack all that this meant in this message, but I simply want to point out the obvious. The enemies of God, led by Satan will oppose the church and attempt to destroy it or hinder its progress.

4) The church will not be stopped by the opposition

The gates of hades *would not prevail against it*. Notice that a **gate** is defensive rather than offensive. The picture is not of an enemy storming the church, with the church barricaded in and hanging on. The picture is of the church on the move, advancing against an entrenched and determined enemy. But that enemy will not be able to hold back the church.

In the church, as in an army, there is a chain of command. And the most important thing to remember is that at the head of that chain is **JESUS**. We get our orders for Him. We serve Him.

2. We have a noble mission to achieve (Matt 28:18-20)

And what are our orders? Let's keep it simple by looking at big picture. What is our primary orders? Found in the Great Commission of Jesus, given to us just before He ascended into Heaven. It does not include details plans or strategies. Those could be fleshed out in different ways for different contexts.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

So, big picture, our orders are to make disciples. That is what we are called to do. Reminds me of the **order of the day** issued by Eisenhower on the eve of the invasion of Europe.

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS: ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!
You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory! I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

That was indeed, a noble undertaking. How much more noble and important is our undertaking, to make disciples. Notice a few details in the text.

1) It means we must go.

We must go to our family members, neighbors, co-workers, friends. But also we must go to the far reaches of the world to carry out this mission. All nations is the scope. We must not arbitrarily limit our focus.

2) It means we must share.

To make disciples, we must share the gospel. We must tell people about Jesus. Living the gospel is good, but that is not enough.

3) It means we must teach.

We must teach new disciples how to live for Christ. Maturing process.

3. We have an enemy to face (Eph. 6:10-12)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*.

With these words, Paul describes an enemy who is . . .

- 1) Personal – *the devil***
- 2) Strategic – *schemes***
- 3) Organized – *rulers, powers, world forces***
- 4) Spiritual – *not flesh and blood, heavenly places***
- 5) Evil - *wickedness***

Satan has no conscience, no compassion, no remorse, no morals. He feeds on pain and anguish and filth. (Kent Hughes)

4. We have armor to wear (Eph. 6:13-17)

Thankfully, the Lord does not leave us defenseless.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, ¹⁵ and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

I've preached this passage at other times, and there is way too much to go into details. But let me make a few general observations.

1) They are spiritual, not physical

This is critical because we are fighting a spiritual enemy.

2) They must be put on

Note that Paul calls upon us to be proactive in putting them on. I suggest praying through these things and consciously embracing them as truth each morning.

3) They are comprehensive

The armor covers all areas of vulnerability. The weapons are strategic in engaging the enemy and moving forward to accomplish our mission.

5. We have weapons to use (Eph 6:17-20)

And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

I see three weapons that we are to use.

1) The Bible

There is power & life in the words of this book. Use it. Share it. Trust it.

2) Prayer

In prayer, we are tapping into the power available to us from God.

3) Sharing the Gospel

Just telling other people about Jesus. Those are our weapons.

6. We have challenges to overcome (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

- 1) Good soldiers are willing to suffer hardship
- 2) Good soldiers have a focused commitment
- 3) Good soldiers desire to please their commander

7. We have examples to follow (Revelation 12:11)

And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

This is part of John's vision in the Revelation. These are believers who have given their lives as martyrs for Jesus. Note how they were able to overcome.

- 1) The blood of the Lamb – the death of Jesus empowers us to overcome.
- 2) The word of their testimony – they were willing to openly confess Jesus
- 3) Their willingness to die for their faith – they were unflinching

8. We have a victory to anticipate (Revelation 19:11-14)

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. ¹³ He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

One of the last and greatest images found in the N.T. related to the church as an army. Jesus is coming again one day. Note the phrase *the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean were following Him*. Is that the church? Maybe. Sure sounds like it. The point is this. We have a victory to anticipate. The outcome is certain. **We win**, because **Jesus wins**.

Remind you of the words of the ancient hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God, written by Martin Luther. He certainly understood spiritual warfare.

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe does seek to work us woe;

his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

That Word above all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

We are at war. But do not despair.

- 1) No Satanic army is stronger than the church**
- 2) No Satanic assault can penetrate God's armor**
- 3) No Satanic evil can conquer the church**
- 4) No Satanic effort can stop the sovereign plan of God**