

Isaiah 20:20-25 Mt. 16: 13-20(sermon) (Esp. 18-19)
The Power of the Kingdom of God

Introduction:

C. S. Lewis once complained that writing *The Screwtape Letters* brought him no pleasure. "I never wrote with less enjoyment," he said. "The strain produced a spiritual cramp." That's because Screwtape is a devil, and his letters are pieces of fiendish instruction sent to Wormwood, an apprentice demon who is trying to tempt a soul into Hell. "The world in which I had to project myself while I spoke through Screwtape was all dust, grit, thirst, and itch," said Lewis. "Every trace of beauty, freshness, and geniality had to be excluded."

And yet *The Screwtape Letters*, published in 1942, is one of Lewis's most read books, bringing to Christian's especially untold lessons in defense of the wily temptations of the devil. Indeed, after reading *The Screwtape Letters*, "the devil made me do it," takes on a whole new meaning!

One piece of advice that Screwtape offers to the young devil, Wormwood, is as follows:

"My dear Wormwood,
You mentioned casually in your last letter that the patient (Young Christian being tempted) has continued to attend one church, and one only, since he was converted, and that he is not wholly pleased with it. May I ask what you are about? Why have I no report on the causes of his fidelity to the parish church? Do you not realize that unless it is due to indifference it is a very bad thing? *Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of church going, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighborhood looking for the church that 'suits' him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches.*

Your affectionate uncle, SCREWTAPE

In another place, Screwtape explains to Wormwood:

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans.

Screwtape, a senior devil, instructing a junior devil on how to tempt and trap humans. C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

Today, we will discover how Screwtape's counsel to the young devil is theologically "right on"—e.g. it is perfectly consistent with the statement by Christ,

I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it!

And to be clear, Christ was not talking about the invisible church, but that church "on earth" wherein there what is happening in heaven is happening visibly on earth, even that which is described in our passage as the visible kingdom of God!

But what makes the church so very powerful? As part 2 of a sermon series within our vision campaign, and having established in part 1 last week that our first prayer and greatest passion ought to be "thy kingdom Come, on earth as it is in heaven"—then the driving question today is to consider the nature and location of the power of the kingdom of God!

Exposition:

Review: (2 part mid year Vision series)

1) The Kingdom of God as our First prayer and greatest passion in life...

Mt 6

The overwhelming main theme of the Gospels—is that in the coming of Christ is the coming of the kingdom of God...

Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the **kingdom** of heaven has come near.”

Matt. 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the **kingdom** and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

- The Kingdom is the powerful activity of the King Messiah- Jesus Christ...
- The kingdom is not something humanity can accomplish by its own learning, work, etc.
- Notwithstanding the common grace importance of human activity in the areas of the arts, sciences, humanities, etc... the new heaven and earth, the great society, that humanity all longs for is a special grace and activity of God that can only be accomplished in the coming of the kingdom of God as related to the special activity of Christ!! It is a redemptive activity, not just a preserving activity...

WE must not think of the kingdom of God in relation to the common grace of God that is acting in/with/through civil governments, educational institutions, etc—as good as this work is as an arm of God’s common grace, even as is arguable important in so far as it restrains evil and carves out even the space in the world for the coming of the kingdom of God—but it is not synonymous with the kingdom of God, only redemption in Christ is related to the kingdom of God...

Therefore, for every Christian especially, the first prayer and greatest passion would necessarily be for the coming of the kingdom of God...

- It is how we are taught to pray “*thy kingdom come*”
- It is what we are to *seek/strive after FIRST the kingdom of God*” even recognizing that “all these other things” will be provided in due time and amounts...

2) The church is the epicenter of the Kingdom of God

The language of “kingdom in the Lord’s prayer is related to “on earth as it is in heaven”—

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!!!

Compare then This language as it shows up again only as it is related directly to the work of the church... in Mt 16... and as specifically identified as synonymous to the church.

9 *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*”

That is to say, the church IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD on earth, even as whatever power is related to the kingdom of God is related to the power that is executed in and through the church!!! And as screwtape counseled wormwood—not some invisible ideological church, but that church that is visualized, externalized, concretized in the visible, parish, community of assembled believers upon the foundation that was given through the apostles—this is exactly what our passage says—notice therefore...

I. That the church is the epicenter and “fortress” even of the Kingdom of God is made clear

Vs. 18: *I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.*

a) *The gates of Hell will not prevail against it*

Picture of a conflict: The gates of hell (as in fortified city) are subjected to the attacks from the church whose mission it is to save souls from sin and death. Point: The gates will not resist the church

Note: it is the church that is on the offense!

The point is that however “strong” are the defenses and attack of Satan, the ‘CHURCH’ is greater, more powerful and will overcome it!!!

This is taught elsewhere both in the OT and New

ekklesia "the church" = called out into an assembly

Dif. "a public assembly of citizens joined together under a common government"

Hebrew counterpart often used to describe Israel as an assembly of God's people.

Deut 4:10, 9:10, Lev. 23:31 Chron.13:1-2, 2 Chron. 1:2-33, etc.

Therefore, in Hebrews 12:23, the new assembly (ekklesia) is compared to the old assembly (ekklesisia)

And this OT "assembly" was related to the tabernacle, even as the earths epic-center of the heavenly activity and power of God as King!!!

Examples:

Ps 46:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. 6 The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. 7 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. 9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. 10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. 11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Tabernacle/temple—often the place of "refuge" and "protection" against evil and danger

Psalms 22:

19 But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. 20 Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. 21 Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns. 22 I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the assembly(church- ecclesia) will I praise thee. 23 Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. 24 For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. 25 My praise shall be of thee in the great assamble (ecclesia/church) : I will pay my vows before them that fear him. 26 The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. 27 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. 28 For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations.

Prophecy Concerning coming Kingdom: Is. 9:6-7, All previous government will be fulfilled by the Messiah "and the government shall rest on His sholders"he will be called wonderful counselor, prince of peace..."

No surprise then, in the NT, that the "church" is described as the "pillar and bulwark"

1Tim. 3:15 (Paul, writing his apostolic insruction as the "foundations" for the church) in order that "you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the **pillar** and bulwark of the truth.

Why? Why is the church so powerful? And What exactly does it do that is so powerful.

2 qustions-

- Why so powerful, as to the sourcs of the power...
- how so powerful.. as to the nature of the power

1) Why is the church so Powerful?

Because it is God's activity!!!

"I will build my (for, by me, of me)"

Christ assumes the initiative and responsibility for the construction of a new society for himself! This makes the church not a human organization but a divine organization.

Grk: "I will build "of me" the church

Gen of ?

Possession: my church

Purpose: for me the church

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, 12 training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. 14 He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Col. 1:18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

James Bannerman: (*The Church of Christ*, Vol. 1, 1869)

"The church is a Divine institution, owing its origin not to man, but to Christ, and associated together not in consequence of human arrangement, but by Christ's appointment." (p.18)

We turn not to history, to human ingenuity, to the arts, and sciences and activities of governments and colleges to discover the church's origins, we turn to the inbreaking activity of God, most especially in the supernatural comings of Christ now via the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that is not in, with and through the mediating activity of the visible church in word, sacrament and communal activity and government wherein Christ comes...

Note then, the church is NOT a human organization fundamentally—unlike every other organization that we have on earth even!!! It is a heavenly organization on earth!!

kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Application: We are outside of God's fortress, outside of God's power, outside of God's protection, outside of the very means of grace that enable us to persevere, grow, flourish, when we are outside of the church!!!!

Testimonies abound—when we are no longer assembling together, no longer involved in the real time life and activity of the church in her ministries of word, sacraments and communalism—we are OUTSIDE of the where the power of the kingdom is located—we are in danger, we are most vulnerable—and we just CAN'T survive in healthy faith and life without it!!! We are subject to Wormwoods devilish temptations and snares—often being unaware that we are even being tempted, so devilish, so disguised, so even attractive and so rationalized are the devils temptations!!!

2. HOW, is the church so powerful--

9 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

i. Keys = power to open and close something!!!

The Biblical context

Was often used to describe the priestly role of those who guarded the temple!!!

1 Chron. 9:17-27 describes the “gatekeepers” (pvlai) of the Temple have the duty of employing keys(*tw'n kleidw'n*) to open it every morning

****Neh. 7:1ff (LXX, 17.1ff)**

Neh. 7:1 Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers (oiJ pulwroi), the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, 2 I gave my brother Hanani charge over Jerusalem, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel-- for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. 3 And I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem (pvlai lerousalm) are not to be opened until the sun is hot; while the gatekeepers are still standing guard, let them shut (kleievsqwsan) and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their watch posts, and others before their own houses."

Isa.22:20-22

20 On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah, 21 and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open.

i.e. In the exercise of the “keys” of the kingdom, the gatekeepers (church-officers) will open and shut the doors of the visible kingdom of heaven. This will keep the people safe from the kingdom of darkness.

Prophecy Concerning coming Kingdom:

Is. 9:6-7, All previous government will be fulfilled by the Messiah

"and the government shall rest on His sholders"he will be called wonderful counselor, prince of peace..."

ii. The power of keys is to “bind and loose” as related to opening and shutting!!

To Bind—to bring someone under authority and protection of the government of God’s kingdom... (e.g. both positive sense of binding someone into the governments protection, care... negative sense of binding someone under governments censure/discipline!

To Loose- to set someone outside the care/governance/protection/discipline of the kingdom ..

E.g. Binding and Loosing

devomai

Literal: wrap something up, to “bind it” as in a wound perhaps, or as in shackles even...

Matt. 12:29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered.

Matt. 13:30 Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Figurative: Almost always used to in describing the excercise of government bringing someone under justice or a sentence of some sort. To be legally restrained.

Matt. 14:3 For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife,

Matt. 27:2 They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

John 18:12 So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him.

John 18:24 Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name."

Meaning: Legally restrained!, Someone being under sentence so as not to be free to do something!
But also, someone under protection, as to not be left to themselves.

Basically—to "bind" is to "enter a person into the "gates" of the kingdom of God!!!

luvw: Be be loosed, or set apart from (opposite of wrap, unwrap if you will...

Opposite of "binding" that is, to be let loose

Can be related to "pardoning someone" as to no longer be under discipline...

Can be related to unwrapping, or excommunicating if you will, as to let someone go....

Isa. 40: 2 iJerei", lalhvsate eij" th;n kardivan lerousalhm, parakalevsate aujthvn: oti ejplhvsqh hJ tapeivnwsj" aujth", levlutai aujth" hJ aJmartiva: oti ejdevxato ejk ceiro;" kurivou dipla' ta; aJmarthmata aujth"..

ET: Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her *penalty is paid* (AV, "iniquity is pardoned"), and that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Sir. 28:2, a[fe" ajdivkhma tw'/ plhsivon sou, kai; tovte dehqvnto" sou aiJ aJmartivai sou luqhvsontai..

ET: Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be *pardoned* when you pray.

NOTICE then how this same language is just a couple of chapters later used by Christ, this time to speak to the issue of recovering a wayward Christian~!!

Mat. 18.15-18,

"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; (e.g. get the church, the pillar and bulwark, involved!!!)

and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. E.g. "loose him—excommunicate him..."

18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Think of the power here.. it is the power of bringing someone under salvation, protection, care—or not!!!

John 20:23 *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. KJV*

John 20:23 *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." NRSV*

In what sense exactly does this church "bind and loose"

Declaratively only—e.g. Christ ordinarily "speaks" through the church his judgments as an act of binding and loosing (albeit acknowledging that the church is fallible)

Instrumentally only—the church by its activity and ministry of word and sacrament and communal

activity/pastoral care—are only instruments in the hands of the agent of power..

Take for instance the activity of Christian baptism—in the action of baptism, the gates of Heaven are opened upon the a person- they are brought, through baptism, into the community of God, that community that will “bind” and “loose” in his/her life as through the exercise of the teachings/preaching of the church, the exercise of sacraments, the activities of communalism in taking care of one another, praying for one another, etc.

The sum total of being baptized is to “Bind” someone into the church—to wrap them up as to protect them and to care for them and to fight for them against Satan’s wily temptations and trails!!!

Indeed, one can see why Screwtape would counsel his nephew wormwood—whatever you do, don’t let a person get seriously involved in the church!!!

Calvin:

Therefore, that no one may stubbornly despise the judgment of the church, or think it immaterial that he has been condemned by the vote of the believers, the Lord testifies that such judgment by believers is nothing but the proclamation of his own sentence, and that whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven. For they have the word of God which to condemn the perverse; they have the Word with which to receive the repentant into grace.

And again:

They therefore are insane who, neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit; and the proud who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church.

Application: Don’t do it alone!! And don’t do it in the church casually

- 1) **There is no “seeking first the kingdom of God” without then service and giving to the church!!!**

Let me say it plainly—

Seek first the kingdom of God

When you pray, pray for the kingdom of God..

And if we understand rightly the kingdom of god, we know that it is most essentially located in/with and through the activity of the visible, local, parish, assembling people we call “the church” that is founded upon the apostolic foundation with Christ as the cornerstone!!

Every dime you give to the church, every minute of time, ever prayer you offer for her, every service and gift you bring to her benefit--- could there be a more important, more powerful, more well spent use of yourself?? Really???

What greater legacy would you offer, if your legacy is that you participated in “thy kingdom Come” even as this is most essentially focused on the buiding and activity of the church of Jesus Christ!!!

For many of you here—be encouraged—and know that your work is not in vain..

For perhaps some others of you—be concerned—God forbid you one day awaken to the reality that while you wer quite busy in this life, even doing some very good things—that your business and life was not at every stage participating in the very first thing as located in the activity and building of the kingdom of God in/with and through the activity of the church!!

Its and issue of stewardship—yeh, more even and issue of wise investment with the greatest possibility of return—in spiritual terms, in heavenly terms—you could make no greater investment with the hope of greater returns than to invest in the church...

- 2) There is no safety, not fortress, no citadel against the wiles of the devil, except that which is organized in the manifestation of the visible church...

Are you benefiting fully from the church? Or is the church “invisible” to you in a real sense..

Illus—I can’t tell you how many times, as I meet with people, that their story of personal struggle and failing in to grievous sins is accompanied by the story that they are not REALLY participating in the church—e.g. that for whatever reason, the church was invisible to them...

Let me repeat the counsel of Screwtape, even as we consider the ways we can negate this power in our lives...

Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of church going, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighborhood looking for the church that 'suits' him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches.

1) Ways that the devil will keep us from church

a) Ways the Devil can keep us from church (members or not even)

- a. Things that really are not of Necessity- that keep us from attending church
- b. A society that doesn’t recognize the church as essential, such that we will possibly have to suffer “persecution” via being marginalized and excluded even from some of the perks/privileges.blessing of society in order for us to attend church
- c. Unwillingness to inconvenience ourselves, e;g. to take the time to find a church while traveling, even if to schedule our trip in order to pass through a place where we have located a church, or to use the bulletins and sermon on line to participate in worship vicariously if for some reason we are home bound, etc.

Again, we fool ourselves if we think we can have the power of God’s kingdom without this!!!

b) Ways that the devil will keep us from authentic participation in the church...

- a. Indifference (nominalism)—as to go, but to not really go in that we humor the sermons, we thoughtlessly participate in the sacraments, and we don’t really let anyone know us as to be held accountable by the government of Christ that is excercised in the church -0- this is an especially dangerous temptation in the context of “Christendom” whereas there ARE social pressures and reasons to go to church—e. for the sake of business, civic respect, etc...
- b. Aloofness—e.g. non-comittal, non accountable—why we stress here the issue of membership—membership is the only way to really fully participate in the power of the kingdom of God in the church—it is the mechanism whereby we are “named” among the rolls of the church and therefore on the rolls of oversight and accountability, one anothering, mercy giving, etc.. to not be a member is to in effect say_- I don’t want to be called by an elder and prayed for specifically as a matter of moral and congregational duty—it is to say—I have not yet given you permission to call on me—to ask me about my wolk with God—in short, to be outside of the pastoral care in a full sense, of the church...

Look at how many passages would be non-sensical If not for membership:

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, *for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.* Let them do this with joy and not with sighing-- for that would be harmful to you.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves *and over all the flock*, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. 29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

1 Peter 5:1-3, I exhort the elders among you *to shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge*, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it...

How could the church officers (i.e. Elders and Pastor) practically be faithful to the above commands unless there is some definable "flock... under your charge?" In other words, how can a conscientious shepherd watch over a flock that he couldn't define in terms of membership? And how can officers know whether or not a person or family desires to be the recipients of this pastoral oversight unless they give some verbal profession to that effect. Call it what you will, membership, verbal commitment, etc., without it, there would be no way to keep the above commands-- thus making God's word nonsensical and absurd.

This point is also affirmed as from looking at shepherding from the other perspective of those who are shepherded. E.g. The responsibilities of the flock to the church-shepherds:

Heb. 13:17 *Obey your leaders* and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing-- for that would be harmful to you.

1Tim. 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching;

It is through this ministry of the church that we are "bound" or protected under the government of Christ, or loosed if not.. as to be outside the government of the church...

Note: e-mail me if hyou want a paper on membership!

Conclusion: The power of the kingdom of God nowhere to be found except in the power of the Holy spirit working in and through the church, even that visible organization on earth given the power to "bind and loose" as to save us from the "gates of Hell"

Do you want to test God on this? Do you want to rely on your own power to stay God's favor and blessings? Then try it, take the advice of Screwtape, as he said, keep the church "invisible" as some powerless "Idea" only, define the church as some innocuous "wherever believers are" kind of definition, rather than the definition of scripture that locates the church upon the foundation of the apostles, which we know to be the foundation of a concrete definition of word, sacrament and government... go ahead, listen again to the explanation of Screwtape who warned to the junior devil..

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans.

Keep in church invisible—in our practice or in our ideology—and the church as such is no threat to the devil.. but make it visible, make it real, participate in it fully...
And the gate of hell will not prevail against YOU!