

## The Church Joined Up

I have a word I feel the Lord put in my heart to share this morning and I decided the best way to communicate that was to share it as part of this sermon series. We've talked about the church grown up, prayed up, linked up, fired up, caught up, and opened up. This morning we are discussing the church joined up.

Events have occurred at various times in our nation's history that prompted a military response. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 is an example. The 9-11 attack on the twin towers and the Pentagon is another. Immediately after these attacks, American men and women rushed to join the military out of love for their country and a desire to serve and protect. We say they enlisted, or some would say they joined up, and after they joined up, they were trained, equipped, given orders and sent on a mission.

These men and women joined up and their identity changed. In a very real sense they became property of the United States government. They weren't civilians anymore, they were soldiers. They dressed differently, they talked differently, they were trained to think and act differently. They were part of something larger and greater than themselves. They lived their life under orders! They were given a mission, an assignment to carry out. People were counting on them to carry out their orders and the lives of others depended upon their success.

We are the church. When we repented of our sins and surrendered our lives to Jesus Christ, making him the Savior and Lord of our lives, at least for the sake of this sermon, we could say we joined up. We enlisted in the army of the Lord. We became part of something larger and greater than ourselves. Our identity changed. In a very real sense we became the property of the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom. We aren't civilians anymore, we are citizens of the kingdom of God and soldiers of the King of Kings. We dress differently, talk and act differently. We're trained, equipped, and given orders. We are given a mission, an assignment to do what the Lord calls us to do. We live our life under orders and people, whether they know it or not, are counting on us, the church, to carry out our orders!

I'm going to remind you of some things you already know today. **You are living under orders of the king!** We have been called to live lives of obedience to Jesus and his word. That's who we are as followers of Christ. Jesus said, **"If you love me, you will obey what I command."** **John 14:15** It's just that simple. We are to obey him and his commands. How do I know his commands? They are written in His book! Read and obey!

We live under orders. We are under his command and - **We have been given a mission.** Jesus said in John 20, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” John 20:21**

I believe we are to go in the same power and anointing of the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission Jesus has given to us. Jesus explained part of that mission at the beginning of his ministry. In Luke 4 Jesus explains he was sent to preach the gospel, the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and the prisoners, to proclaim the recovery of sight to those who have been blinded, to set free those who are beaten down and oppressed, to announce the Lord’s favor, his victory, his triumph. As the Father sent Jesus with that mission, Jesus says “Now I am sending you.”

Jesus has given us a mission to carry out. In Mark 16 he tells us part of our mission is to go into all the world and preach the good news to everyone. We are to cast out demons, to break demonic influence and strongholds anywhere we encounter them. We are to lay hands on the sick and expect them to recover.

In the orders given to us in Matthew 28, we are commanded to go and not just preach the gospel but make disciples – and not just locally, but make disciples of all nations, in all nations. We are to baptize new believers and then train them and invest our lives in preparing the next generation to continue to carry out the orders of the King of Kings! We are to teach them to obey everything he has commanded us and we are to remind them that he will be with us. We aren’t doing this alone or on our own.

Understand, this mission he is sending us on, **This isn’t a training mission – this is the real deal!** This is real fire. This is actual combat. He is sending us behind enemy lines. There is a real enemy. Satan is a real enemy who is intent on destroying the life and hope of every child of God. Jesus said the devil has come to kill, steal and destroy. Peter said the devil was like a roaring lion, roaming about and looking for opportunity to devour us. The bible warns us the devil uses deception. He can even pose as an angel of light. He engages in guerilla warfare, in terrorism. He doesn’t fight fair. If he doesn’t openly oppose you and try to defeat you, he will look for ways to deceive you, to tempt you and lure you away from faith and obedience to Christ so you will have to constantly be on your guard.

I know that sounds like we are always on the defense, and that’s true. We stand guard, guarding our minds and hearts, guarding our affection so the devil can’t deceive us. But there is an offensive strategy for the church as well.

You see, that mission I described, going into all the world and preaching the gospel, laying hands on the sick, proclaiming sight to the blind and all of that...did I mention that most of that was behind enemy lines? You see, the devil has captured a whole lot of people and he holds them in bondage, trapped by sin and addiction, bound by shame and hopelessness. But our Commander in Chief, the Lord Jesus himself has given us orders. He intends his church to be on the offense. He intends us to storm the gates of hell and bring those captives out of the darkness and into His eternal light!

That sounds serious doesn't it? Storming the gates of hell. But we've got a promise. Jesus said, **"I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."**

**Matthew 16:18** I'm thankful for the promise, and that preaches good in a sermon, but I have to tell you, I'm not too confident about charging the gates of hell. I don't know if I'm up to that.

The Old Testament tells about the Israelites coming to the Jordan River after wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. Moses their leader has died along with his entire generation. Joshua is preparing to lead the next generation across the Jordan and into the land of promise, but it happens to be a land full of people that aren't planning to surrender to the Israeli's nor leave quietly. The Lord tells Joshua, **"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.'** So Joshua ordered the officers of the people, **'Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.'**" **Joshua 1:6-10**

These people Joshua is about to lead into the promised land have never fought a battle. They are the sons and daughters and grandchildren of slaves. Their parents knew how to make bricks for the Egyptians. These people grew up in the wilderness. They had no experience as warriors or soldiers. And yet God is with them and he tells Joshua he is going to give them

victory over their enemies because they are the people of God. They are the army of the Lord. Get ready. Prepare yourselves because in 3 days, we are going in to take the land!

Can we storm the gates of hell and liberate the captives? Not on our own, but the Lord has promised to go with us. He has equipped us with the power of his Holy Spirit, present with us and within us. So the bible says, **“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”** **1 John 4:4** His Spirit abides with us. And he has armed and equipped us, with his living word.

The bible says, **“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”** **2 Corinthians 10:3-4** We are equipped with spiritual weapons that can demolish the strongholds of the enemy. They are divinely powerful!

Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 we have a uniform and weapons. We have a suit of spiritual armor. **“Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...”** **Ephesians 6:13.** He describes that suit of armor: a belt of truth around our waist, a breastplate of righteousness to guard and protect our heart, shoes on our feet representing the gospel of peace, a shield of faith so we can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the enemy, a helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

He has given us armor. He has given us a sword, the word of God. It is a living word, a two edged sword. He has given us spiritual authority so he says we can tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy. He has given us a renewed mind, a redeemed perspective, a measure of faith and a new identity.

One of the workers on the church shared with me part of his testimony. He said I had to start seeing myself differently. I saw myself as a thug, a gang member, that’s who I had always been, but I had to learn to see myself as a Christian. I’m not the same person anymore!

I said the soldier had a new identity. We aren’t civilians anymore, we are citizens of heaven. We are the army of the Lord. Can we storm the gates of hell? Can we prevail against the enemy forces? Can we overcome? Can we carry out our mission, our assignment? “I’m not able. We are just... We aren’t strong enough... We can’t...”

I’ll admit, I feel overwhelmed looking at moving back into the sanctuary, all the changes. “Lord, I don’t know how to do all this.” But then I remember what the bible says about who we are as God’s people, God’s church.

We are the army of the Lord the prophet Joel speaks of when he says we break through the enemy's defenses and we rush on the city and we run on the walls. We are the people of God. More than conquerors, he says we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. We are the army whose Commander in Chief always leads in triumph. He has never lost a battle. We are the army that stands clean, justified by His atoning blood. We are the army that declares in the face of every enemy, "if God be for us, who can stand against us?" We are the army that overwhelmingly conquers through the power and might of the Son of God who loves us and gave himself for us. We are the army that is being renewed day by day by his mercy and grace. We are the church, the army of the Lord. We serve in the army of the one who declared "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too difficult for me?" We serve in the army of the one of whom the angel said, "With man it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."

We are the army of the Lord, the one who declares his word goes forth and accomplishes what he desires, the one who says no weapon formed against us shall prosper because this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. We are the army of God, called to go forth and do exploits, to go forth in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit and to take down the gates of hell and liberate the captives. We the army of the Lord, on a mission from God. We won't fail!

I don't know what lies ahead. Thinking of Joshua again, I'm always troubled by how many times the Lord tells him "Don't be terrified, don't be discouraged. Be strong and courageous." I'm prone to being terrified and discouraged. But I know who I am in the Lord. I know whom I belong to and I know who the Commander in Chief is. Jesus is going to build his church and he is willing to use us if we are willing to join up! He is going to lead us into battle and regardless of the odds, He always leads us in triumph. There is victory ahead!

We are in this together. We joined up when we made Jesus Savior and Lord and together we are going to win this battle. We can go to the end of the book and see the victory. **"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." Revelation 12:11**

Don't be discouraged. Don't give up. We've joined the army of the Lord and we will be victorious!!!