



1 Peter 2:4-10

DALE WINTON
DAIL WINTON & LOTTERY
DALE WINTON IN IT TO WIN IT

In it to win it? One of the mottoes of the National Lottery. I'm not saying this to encourage you to try to win the Lottery – there still is more chance than being struck by lightning – twice – than winning the jackpot on the lottery. However to win it you have to be in it.

But this morning I want to focus on a much bigger jackpot that the National Lottery or Euro-millions offers you at a price – and you can lay your hands on it for free! Of course you know what I'm talking about – it's becoming a child of God, because in trusting Jesus and following Him, God makes us inheritors of His riches.

SLIDE Ephesians 1:3-6

3 Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! For in our union with Christ he has blessed us by giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. 4 Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his through our union with Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him.

SLIDE

Because of his love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his sons and daughters — this was his pleasure and purpose. Let us praise God for his glorious grace, for the free gift he gave us in his dear Son! For by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven. How great is the grace of God, which he gave to us in such large measure!

But – you've got to be in it to win it! You've got to have trusted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord personally to have the benefit of receiving everything God wants to give you.

And one of the benefits that God has given us is that He's made us part of a special people – His assembly – His church. He's made us part of something collective. Being part of the church is a fundamental part of what God makes us in Christ. As we saw in previous weeks, God makes all who trust in Jesus as Saviour and Lord part of the church. It's not an optional extra, it comes as standard. As we shall see this morning, it is something special – it's part of the jackpot prize God gives us.

OK did you hear that. To God, the church is special and part and parcel of the blessing God wants to give us in Christ. We sometimes try to play church down don't we. We say "let's focus on Jesus, let's build His kingdom. We're not here to promote church". Yes we are. This is how Peter addressed his readers – not as individuals – he was writing to churches: *you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light.* That's special. We so often look at these words and apply them to us individually and forget that they work corporately too. As a church we need to think and act like a chosen race, the King's priests and a holy nation. Church wouldn't get such a bad name if we were that.

In fact, the Bible describes the collective people of God, the church in a number of ways and the sheet I gave you this morning is a list – not an exhaustive one either – which reminds us of some of the pictures the Bible uses for the church. This is a piece of homework for you to take away, read the passages and meditate on how they apply to each of us individually, but to also think of how they apply as a church. I'll give you a brief introduction to each and suggest how God may be challenging us.

So if we look at the sheet we find that there are twelve biblical pictures on it. Why so many different ones? Because each picture tells us something different about the relationships between the church and God and each picture explores different aspects. So let's have a look.

HOUSEHOLD – or Family. We are the family of God. Therefore we have family responsibilities. Families vary

a lot in how those in them relate to one another, but a well adjusted family is one where family members are loved unconditionally, where people feel secure, where each part of the family gets helped unconditionally, where there is unswerving loyalty, and where there is an honouring to those who are heads of the family. OK I know that human families get to be dysfunctional but we all know what the ideal is and most of us strive to be good parents or faithful children despite these.

But the church of God sometimes gets dysfunctional too. That's not because the Father is having any personal problems – He's God so He doesn't – but we as God's people do. We need to recognise those areas where our relationships are dysfunctional and deal with them. The Bible is very clear on the nature of Christian relationships at whatever level. Why is it our behaviour so often differs?

KINGDOM – I've spoken a lot about Jesus as King already this morning. The church isn't just a big family, it's also described as a holy nation. God has made us citizens of heaven. In a few weeks time many of you will be cheering England and hoping the team does well in the World Cup. We'll see lots of England flags and other symbols as people express their national pride and support. I know of many from other lands who have made this country their home who will also wave the England flag, but may also wave the flag of their old country too. We are citizens of heaven, we wave flags for our own people on Earth, but God wants us to recognise our heavenly citizenship. The thing about that is as you look across the rows is that citizenship isn't about flag-waving, but about authority and obedience. If we are a citizen of a land, we abide by its laws. Likewise being in God's kingdom gives us the privileges I read about earlier, but it also gives us responsibilities of obedience towards our God. When it comes to the law of the land, we can't pick and choose what we'll obey – the same is true with the things of God.

PRIESTHOOD – I've also spoken about this before. What does a priest do? He serves God and represents the needs of others before God. Service is a fundamental part of being church and that service leads us to representing God to others. We are a kingdom of priests. Priesthood is not for the likes of me, it's for all of us.

TEMPLE BUILDING – we read about this in Peter's letter this morning but it's actually a more common picture. The church is not the building – the people are. We are the building – do people find the presence of God here? I know of many people who have come to Jesus because they went to church and were not convinced by the nice words from the people at the front, but sensed God's presence. Sometimes we confuse things people do with the presence of God. We say "that was boring" or "that wasn't my sort of thing". What were we looking for. To be entertained? To have what we want? Or were we looking for God? Intent is important. I've found God in rousing hymns. I've found God in loud lively active worship. I've found God speaking to me through a challenging sermon. I've found God in the silent bits. It's not what we do together as God's people, but it's the intent with which we do it. God's voice speaks when our ears are open and our lives ready to receive, not be what we're doing.

BODY – I spoke about this last time so let's go on.

THE CHURCH OF GOD (OF CHRIST) – I've also spoken about this recently – whose church is Maidstone Road Baptists Church – ours, the "Baptists" (who ever they are)? No we are God's Church – a body in which Christ is head.

CHRISTIANS – the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. It's a word that reflects that we belong to Christ. Church is made up of Christians people who belong to Christ.

DISCIPLES – the church is made up of disciples. What do disciples do? They learn. Our lives should be a lifetime of learning about Jesus. Our church should be a place of learning about Jesus.

SERVANTS – we've already had this in another context. We are the servants of God – we serve God, we serve one another.

FLOCK – this is quite a different picture. We often think of what we should be doing. This picture of us as sheep and Jesus as the shepherd portrays that – we should follow Him, but there is also the picture that the shepherd keeps us safe.

ARMY – this is another well known picture of the church of God. In scripture, the picture of spiritual warfare is never one where we try to stand alone. We often apply Ephesians 6 in this way, but in reality, wars are never

fought alone – they are always fought with one another. We help and protect one another in the battles of life.

WIFE & BRIDE – the final picture is the one we use in marriage ceremonies. Jesus is the bridegroom and we the church are His bride. The marriage relationship is perhaps the most intimate of human relationships which is why we are given it. What does it tell us? We know that God desires an intimate relationship with us? We see that from being the children of God. But God wants to have that close relationship through the church too. He is the one who loved us and gave Himself for us – He is the one to whom we are loyal and devoted, desiring to please Him.

So there are the pictures. What should our church be like according to these?

Church should be a body with

- ***an intimate relationship with God***
- ***an unswerving obedience to God***
- ***a complete dependence on God***

These three things seem to belong together. Church is all about our relationship to God. Do we enjoy spending time in His presence. If we don't find church a profound experience, is it our own personal attitude that's wrong, or is there something wrong with our relationships in the way we seek God corporately?

- ***a selfless commitment to God and one another***
- ***a sense of responsibility to God and others***
- ***a passion for holiness***

These three things also belong together. We are a church and therefore we have a commitment and a responsibility to one another. The strength and integrity of the church depends on the commitment of the people as a whole. One of the phrases I most dislike hearing is "the church is bad in this way and that way" or "what is the church doing about this"? The church is not a club or organisation where people pay a fee and receive services as a result. We all contribute to the whole. The weakest churches are ones where power and organisations are in the hands of the few and the rest of the congregation are happy to be passive.

So if you find any aspect of the church boring or unsatisfactory, then you're contributing to making it that way. And if the church isn't doing this and that which should be done, then it's because people aren't playing their part and responding to God's call. What can we do about it? Show our sense of responsibility. Pray about it. Discuss it with the leaders, not just to moan and complain, but to share the constructive ideas God gives you.

In my experience, strong growing churches are ones where responsibility is spread through a large number of people, where people just desire to please God, to strive after holiness, do His will, seek God's will together in prayer and selflessly serve one another and their community.

It's quite a challenge isn't it. I want to see a growing lively church here, through which people find life and draw close to God together. The issue is how much of that is our desire as a church – and are we going to take the responsibility that each of us is charged with by Jesus to play a part in a way that brings all of us closer to God.

Challenge and Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 16/5/10
© Mark Reid 2010*

Biblical Pictures of the Church

Verses	Collective	Individual	Jesus	God	Meaning
1 Tim 3:15	Household	Children Brothers	First-born Eldest Son	Father	Family: love and care
Col1:13 Phil 3:20	Kingdom	Citizens	King/Judge	King	Authority: privileges & obligations
1 Pet 2:9 Heb2:17	Priesthood	Priests	High Priest	God	Service
Eph 2:19-22 1 Cor 3:11	Temple Building	Stones	Foundation	Architect	1. God's presence 2. Support and dependency
1 Cor 12:12-27 Rom 12:4,5 Col 1:18	Body	Members	Head	-	Support and dependency
Rom 16:16 Titus 2:14 Acts 20:28	The Church -of God -of Christ	Saints, Aliens, The Redeemed	Saviour Purchaser Redeemer	-	1. Christ's possession 2. Holiness
Acts 11:26 1 Pet 4:16	Christians	Christian	Christ	-	Christ's possession and household
Luke 14:27 Acts 11:26 Mat 28:18	Disciples	Disciple	Teacher	-	Student of Jesus
Luke 17:7-10	Servants	Servant	Lord	-	Selfless obedience
1 Pet 5:2-4 1 Pet 2:25	Flock	Sheep	Shepherd	-	Protection of and caring for by Jesus
2 Tim 2:3-4 Eph 6:10-17	Army	Soldier	Commander	-	Fight spiritual battles for Jesus
Eph 5:22-32 Rev 21	Wife Bride	-	Husband Groom	-	Intimate spiritual relationship

Source: <http://www.bible.ca/ntx-what-is-the-church.htm>