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The Seven Arrows of Our Christian Economy SLIDE

Introduction

Thank you for welcoming and embracing Nancy and me. I also want to thank the council for instilling their confidence in me to be the interim pastor. I know I am the third pastor in 3 months, yet, God allows us to function as a church during our transition time. I welcome this challenge. I have preached over 1,000 messages and saved them and before I came I threw them all away. I want to bring a fresh approach and let the messages I preach what God has placed upon my heart. My personal goal for our church is to help create an atmosphere where people know they are loved and where people can experience the love of God. We have to not just be at church, we need to be church. Today, I'm going to begin a 7 part message entitled The 7 Arrows of our Christian Economy.

Visualize with me if you will our church. Visualize it as a healthy church, where everyone participates, where people are welcome and incorporated into the body, a place where God is honored all the time. Visualize also that all the seats are filled because people want to come here. So as I try to build a foundation for all this to happen, let me suggest that our church will be Christ centered and Bible based. By utilizing the 7 arrows I hope to show us what it will take to have a church that we have just visualized in our minds. Why arrows? It is scriptural.

SLIDE Isaiah 49:2,3

He has made My mouth like a sharp sword,
In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me;
And He has also made Me a ^[a]select arrow,
He has hidden Me in His quiver.
³ He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel,
In Whom I will ^[b]show My glory."

. The word Israel here means Jesus and I want the arrows in the quiver to represent 7 aspects of a church of how God desires it to be. This passage is prophetic and the arrows in the quiver that are spoken of here are what Jesus will pronounce as His doctrines for a church that honors God.

Arrow #1 The Value and Necessity of Prayer SLIDE

II Chronicles 7:14 SLIDE

¹⁴ and My people ^[a]who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Here's another verse that helps me understand the value of prayer.

Psalms 55: 1 SLIDE

Give ear to my prayer, O God;
And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.

Prayer is a wonderful privilege. God opens the door of His throne room and invites us in.

Slide Hebrews 4:16

¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need

He has promised to hear our prayer and He has promised to answer our prayers according to His will.

Slide I John 5:14,15

¹⁴ This is the confidence which we have ^[a]before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us ⁵ And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

There is something special about entering God's presence by yourself to talk to Him in secret. Are we doing this often enough? Our passage today is Acts 12:1-16

It reminds us there is power in corporate prayer and there is a special dynamic that comes into play when we come together united in faith and purpose. So let's begin.

Acts 12:1-5a SLIDE

12 Now about that time ^[a]Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. ² And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. ³ When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now ^[b]it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four ^[c]squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

It was a time of problems because there were attacks against the church. James, the brother of Jesus had been put to death by Herod. Peter was imprisoned and on death row. There was a lot of apprehension about the future of the church. There were enemies: Herod, the Jews, but the real enemy was and continues to be Satan. Satan hates the church. He hates it when we preach the Gospel and when we worship God.

SLIDE I Peter 5:8

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The church responded by not quivering and running away. The church took action. The church lifted its collective voice in prayer. I think it's this kind of prayer we should be lifting as a church body. What kind of prayer was it? Today let me give you 4 adjectives to describe this prayer.

#1 It was a fervent prayer. SLIDE

SLIDE Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made **fervently** by the church to God.

In verse 5 it says the church was praying earnestly. I'm always reminded of the verse in James 5:16 where it says the effectual fervent prayer can accomplish much. Effective fervent prayer is energetic and passionate. The people of the church poured out their hearts to God.

Have you ever noticed that macaroni and prayer have a lot in common? I know that probably surprises some of you. How many of you have ever made macaroni? When I make macaroni, I boil water and add the macaroni and wait about 7 minutes. Now how many of you have ever made macaroni and just used cold water? What did you get? A mess. Macaroni and prayer are a lot the same because prayer must be fervent and the bubbling, boiling water that you add macaroni to has to be like this... bubbling, boiling and filled with compassion. When our prayers are like cold water, we must seem distant to God.

#2 It was a faithful prayer. SLIDE

SLIDE Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to **God**.

Theirs was a prayer of faith in God. This seems obvious but at times I think prayers are said because we design our prayers for others to hear. Some in the church will not pray because they don't think they pray well enough but God hears our hearts, not our voices. I truly believe faith is the essential ingredient that makes the difference between answered and unanswered prayer. Remember, our prayers go to God perfectly via the Holy Spirit. When we pray, we are talking to our heavenly father.

Slide Romans 8:26

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words;

#3 It was a focused prayer. SLIDE

SLIDE Acts 12:5

So **Peter** was kept in the prison, but prayer for **him** was being made fervently by the church to God.

What was the church praying for? The release of Peter. This was not a generalized prayer. Oh, that kind of prayer is OK in some circumstances, but their prayers were specific. I personally get a little shudder when I'm asked for an unspoken prayer request. I like to know what I'm praying for. I see nowhere in Scripture where someone prays an unspoken prayer request.

#4 It was a family prayer. SLIDE

SLIDE Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by **the church** to God.

The church gathered to pray for one of their own. To seek God's help for a brother. They joined their hearts and hands. Corporate prayer starts with a basic component. The individual. If you're not a person of prayer, you probably aren't one to pray corporately. Then the individual prayer moves to our family. Within our family, it's just Nancy and I. Many people think they consummate their marriage on their wedding night but I truly believe this. That a man and a woman consummate their marriage when they are able to pray together. Let's read the rest of our passage.

Slide Acts 12:6-16

On ^[a]the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison. ⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his hands. ⁸ And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and ^[b]put on your sandals." And he did so. And he *said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹ And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. ¹¹ When Peter came ^[c]to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all ^[d]that the Jewish people were expecting." ¹² And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. ¹³ When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. ¹⁵ They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." ¹⁶ But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed

The angel awakens Peter. The chains fall off. Then angel tells Peter to put on his cloak and they hurry out of the prison. When Peter arrives at the prayer meeting, Rhoda meets him at the door and goes back to those in

prayer and says that Peter is at the door. Some are in unbelief thinking it might be his ghost. But we know that Peter has been miraculously released from prison and at the prayer meeting there was probably great joy.

What hinders our prayer? Here's a few things.

1. Living a less than righteous lifestyle. SLIDE

God hears the prayer of the righteous

SLIDE Proverbs 15:29

The LORD is far from the wicked,
But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

We need to come to God with a clean heart. I John 1:9 is a valuable Scripture passage in our lives.

Another thing that hinders our prayers:

2. Having an unforgiving heart. SLIDE

SLIDE Matthew 6:14

For if you forgive ^[a]others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you

When we are carrying a grudge and going to prayer, it's a hindrance. Sometimes we are even planning vengeance against someone but God tells us that vengeance is His and not ours. Have you ever seen the bumper sticker "I don't get mad, I get even". Those bumper stickers were printed in Satan's basement.

Something else that hinders our prayers:

3. When God is not #1 in our lives. SLIDE

These may not look on the surface like idols, but I truly believe if there's something more important than our relationship with God, then it blocks access to Him.

SLIDE Ezekiel 14:3

Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all

CONCLUSION

Let's conclude. As we examine the seven arrows of our Christian economy and we utilize them as a means of strengthening our church, I truly believe that prayer is one of the most vital components of a healthy church. Let's pray.