Matthew 15:18b; “And upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

What are the challenges that the church faces? From the first century, while in its infancy, to this day, the church has been bombarded with fierce persecutions. It faced emperors like Nero, with all of his atrocities, who for the sake of sport hung Christians on stakes, covered them with oil, and burned them like torches as he rode his horse in the midst of them. But, the church did not die. It faced men like Vespasian, Nero’s general who marched into Palestine in 67 A.D. to stamp out a revolt but had to return to Rome because Nero killed himself. He, sending his son, (Vespasian that is), and in August of A.D. 70, with an army of no less than eighty thousand trained soldiers burned the temple in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish theocracy and the cradle of the Christian Church. But God forewarned the Christians who forsook the doomed city in time and fled to Decapolis beyond Jordan. The church did not die.

In the fourth century, the Emperor Dicletian came to power, an able and judicious leader, who kept the Roman Empire from sinking into dissolution. For twenty years he tolerated the church and the Christian faith. But he had a son-in-law by the name of Galerius, a cruel and fanatical heathen. He prevailed upon his father-in-law in his old age to persecute the church and bring them back under paganism. Churches were destroyed, bibles were burned, Christians were deprived of public office, and their civil rights. But above all, they were to sacrifice to the pagan gods or face death. But Galerius found out “you cannot destroy the church”, and before he died he asked that the church pray for him and the welfare of the empire. I could go on and on, but time will not permit. There is something unique about the church - It grew out of persecution. Every time they tried to stamp it out over here, it popped up over there. It is indestructible, and it’s hell proof. Jesus said, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

So when folk think they can hurt it through persecution, they’re fighting a loosing battle. It only gives the church more vigor. I heard Isaiah say, “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him”.

In order for a man/woman to be effective as a Christian, he must never minimize the power of the church. For the church is the body of Christ, it is the vehicle of the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost is the “executive arm of the Trinity”. When God commands it, the Holy Ghost moves and causes it to be.
The church is not a social club, where we include who we want and exclude who we don’t want. For I heard Isaiah say, “Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1). Then I heard Jesus say, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). I heard Him say in the book of John, “If you come I will in no wise cast you out”.

The church is unlike any other institution, it’s profoundly deep. Furman University is concerned with and focuses on knowledge, but the church focuses on wisdom. Yes, we get knowledge from books and universities, but wisdom comes from God.

Greenville Memorial is concerned about the body, but the church is concerned about the soul.

Psychiatrists practice depth psychology, but the church practices deep faith. Because of our faith, we call those things that are not as though they were. For we walk by faith and not by sight.

The optometrist checks the eyes, but the church checks the heart.

Science sticks with facts, but the church sticks with faith. Science will tell you, in order to move a mountain, it will take earth moving and blasting equipment, but I heard Jesus say, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matthew 17:20).

In the formative years of our country, the church was the only institution that gave our people a sense of dignity and pride. In the rural south or as we call it, in the country, it was the only institution that allowed a man to walk behind a mule all week and serve as pastor on Sunday morning. It was the only place where you could work in the fields all week long and be chairman of the deacon board on Sunday morning. Where you can be a domestic worker or housekeeper during the week and serve as President of the Mission when you get to church. Before we knew about a degree, other than the degree of the sun, the church gave us pride. It’s never been concerned about your social status, but if you’ve got clean hands and a pure heart you can make it in the Lord.
It’s been said that wherever God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel near by. The enemy no longer fights the church from without, but he’s gotten on the inside fighting from within the church. He’s gotten in the saints, sowing seeds of envy, strife, and divisions. There is too much quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, too many factions or what we call clicks in the church, too much gossip, arrogance, and disorder. Those things that are an abomination to the Lord have crept into the church. A proud look, or haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood (in the church they don’t literally kill you, but they kill your character). A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that run to mischief, sowing discord among the brethren. These things doth the Lord hate.

But the church is to be a saving station, an oasis in the wilderness. In the church we ought to do as Jesus commanded saying, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven”. If we lift up Jesus, I can hear God saying, “Behold I will do a new thing: now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43:19).

I don’t know about you, but the church is my spiritual gymnasium. It is where my soul takes its spiritual exercise. For I head the psalmist say “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad”.

It is my spiritual cafeteria, it is where David declared, “He prepareth a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, he anointeth my head with oil” and yes, when I enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise, He will make my cup run over.

I know that in God’s house, in the church, I can find safety that ADT can’t provide, for I heard Jesus say, “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”.

The church is the only institution that Jesus is coming back for. He won’t be back for Bank of America. He’s not coming back for U.S.C. or Notre Dame, University of Georgia, or Florida State. No, He’s not coming back for Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho, nor Kappa Alpha Psi. But He’s coming for His bride, the church, adorned for her husband. He’ll be looking for that church without a spot or wrinkle.

You can be a member of many organizations without Jesus, but to be a member of the Church that Jesus is talking about you’ve got to have Jesus as Lord of your life.

You can go to heaven without health, you can make it without wealth, you can go without fame, or even a great name; you can make it without learning or great earnings, without culture, beauty, or friends, but without Jesus you just can’t make it.
I wonder do you know Him? Let me tell you about Him:

He’s the First and Last, the beginning and the End!

He’s unmoved, unchanged, undefeated, and never undone!

He was bruised and brought healing!

Pierced and eased pain!

Persecuted and brought freedom!

Died and brought life!

He’s risen and brings power!

The world can’t understand Him, armies can’t defeat Him, schools can’t explain Him, leaders can’t ignore Him. Herod couldn’t kill Him, the Pharisees couldn’t confuse Him, Nero couldn't crush Him, Hitler couldn't silence Him, and the New Age can't replace Him.

Let me tell you what He means to me. He’s my way out of no way, my help in the time of trouble, my friend when I’m lonely, my bread when I’m hungry, water when I am thirsty.

The reason why Jesus could declare, “Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”, is because the Church that Jesus is talking about is not built with brick and mortar, wood, or stone, but it is built with His shed blood. Therefore, the church is sealed by the blood of Jesus, and the devil can not penetrate the blood. There’s power in the blood. Stay in the church!