

Celebrating a Consecrated Church, Part 1

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

2018

This morning we are going to depart from our study in Matthew, as I said, and I want to share with you along the lines of our theme of celebration. The Lord has led our elders and pastors here through prayer, through wise counsel and planning to the building of a new facility, an educational facility, a four-story building that you can already see beginning to go up — and it's hard to imagine two more stories yet, isn't it — to be used for the teaching of God's Word, to be used for the training of little children, the discipling of young people, adults, senior citizens, to be used for training missionaries and pastors, educating leaders. In fact, everybody from the littlest babies to the oldest saints will experience the blessing and the benefit of that facility.

And today, particularly, we've come to worship God and to celebrate the church that He has built here by a special offering, or a special gift, to go to provide for that new building. So, it's a very special day for us. And we have so much to celebrate. There's no way that we can put in words, there's no way that we can collect in any of our minds all the things that God has done in our fellowship. Some of us, perhaps, have a better perspective than others, but no one can know the full range of the things that God has done. Some of us can look back to a time when a Bible study was held in a living room and it all started. I can look back to a little chapel over there with linoleum floor and metal chairs and shuffleboard lines on the floor and the offices were the church kitchen and it was just a small beginning. And maybe you've just come in the last few months and it's always been this way to you.

But I can remember being in the chapel and preaching and having so many people there regularly that the young people had to sit all over the platform all around my feet while I taught. And I can remember in the back there was a bathroom back there, right at the back of the chapel, and I could hear every flush, sometimes at totally inappropriate points in the sermon. God has done marvelous things in the past in this church and all of us can see the things He's doing now. And I know some of us can look ahead and see what lies in the future of God's promise. We're looking to greater days even than we've seen yet.

I read some time ago that Reinhold Niebuhr, the liberal European theologian, said, "The church is a lot like Noah's ark. If it weren't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the stink inside." And I thought to myself, "He never went to Grace Community Church or he wouldn't have said that."

And he never went to another church either and that's the church at Thessalonica or he wouldn't have said that. Turn in your Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and I see in that marvelous chapter tremendous parallels to this church. You know, Paul couldn't celebrate all the churches that he had pastored. He couldn't celebrate all the churches to whom he wrote. Some of them needed rebuke. But there was one church above all of them that he really celebrated, for which he praised and thanked and glorified God. There was one of them that was especially on his heart when it came to

thanksgiving. And it was this Thessalonian church.

And likewise, not all churches today are churches to celebrate. Many of them don't know the power of God. They don't know the blessing of God. They aren't places where the Word of God is proclaimed. They don't see growth. They aren't glorifying the Lord as they ought. They're weak, or filled with dissent, struggles, and problems. And my heart goes out to those kinds of churches. And there needs to be remedy applied.

But we can honestly say at this church, not by our own design but by the marvelous sovereign grace of God, we have a church for which to celebrate. We have a church for which to be thankful and not to do so would be to deny the very work of God in our midst. And we don't say that proudly, we say that thankfully and humbly, knowing that it isn't us, it's Him.

And so, today I feel like Paul. If I were to write a letter to you, it would sound a lot like 1 Thessalonians. It would be a letter of thanks. It would be a letter of celebration. It would be a letter of affirmation of what God has marvelously, wondrously done in and through you. This is a church to celebrate.

Let's look at the first chapter. And in this chapter, Paul really offers His thanks. He really celebrates the Thessalonian church. He begins with a greeting:

"Paul and Silvanus, or Silas, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace be unto you and peace from God our Father. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For, our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the Word in much tribulation, with joy of the Holy Spirit. So that you were an example to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia, for from you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God is spread abroad so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves showed us what manner of entering in we had unto you and how ye turned from God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come."

Now, in those marvelous words, Paul is really celebrating the Thessalonian church. It is a church worthy of thanks and praise to God. And as I was reading over that chapter and it came to my heart because 14 years ago, nearly, when I came to Grace Church, I preached on that chapter. Because this was the church that I wanted to see God build here. And I can say nearly 14 years later that God has answered that prayer. And all that Paul has said in that first chapter to them, I can say to you because you are equally a church to celebrate, a church to be thankful for. And today I'm especially thankful as I thought about this chapter and the nearly 14 years ago when I preached the message hoping and praying deep in my heart that God would make us a church like this church, and now to stand here and say in testimony to God's wonderful grace, He has done what I asked. And I thank Him for that.

And so, I want to bring that chapter back in my own thinking and to us and look at it completely

different. I didn't even look at my old notes. But to see it in the light of what I understand about this church now. This chapter was always a model for me and I praise God that this church has fallen into the pattern of this model.

Let me give you a little background. The parallels between our church and this one, our situation and this situation, are amazing. The city was a commercial center, Thessalonica, the largest, most populous city in Asia Minor, commercially thriving, economically flourishing, a trade center. It was located at the very center point of the Thermaic Gulf which gave it a strategic port. It had running right through the middle of it the main highway east and west, known as the Egnatian Highway, which was the trade route. So it was a crossroads. It had multi-languages, multi-groups of people populating it though Greek was the dominant language. It was founded in about 316 A.D., which puts it about 350 years before Paul came there. And it was founded by Cassander, who at the time was the king of Macedonia. And it was named after his wife, who was the half-sister of Alexander the Great.

Now, at the time, Claudius was the Roman Emperor, and Claudius was, they said, crazy, to put it mildly. They said he was a slobbering, stuttering crazy man. But in his favor, in spite of those problems, he had taken the throne because Gaius had been murdered and so he was not really the most fit, but in spite of that he was able to accommodate the Roman world with a peaceful period of time and it was during that peaceful period of time that the ministry could occur to Thessalonica.

Now, crime was rampant in the city of Thessalonica. And archaeology has told us that in many of the homes built in that city there were no windows. And the indication is the crime was so rampant that the people built their houses without windows because they were so fearful. We also know from studying history that the city was a mixture of wealthy people, a very small middle class of farmers and craftsmen and shopkeepers, and then a large majority of slaves. So there was tension and turmoil in the city. Immorality was rampant. Prostitution was highly organized. Obscene pictures, they tell us, were painted all over the walls of the buildings and outside of the houses all over the city. They didn't know how to abort babies in those days but they wanted to get rid of them so babies were abandoned all over the city, particularly girl babies because they couldn't work as hard as boys. And murder was commonplace and divorce was frequent.

Sound familiar? Sounds like the morning look at the L.A. Times. Very much like our city. And in the sea of paganism was this little island to the glory of God, the Thessalonian church. Paul had come there with Silas and Timothy on his second missionary journey. Silas had been there with him for a long time in his travels. He picked up Timothy on the way and they came into that Thessalonian church in about 48 or 49 A.D. and after they had left a year later, wrote back this letter to them.

At the time he writes he's in Corinth and he's been through persecution and hostility and pains and struggles that came along with his ministry. And he sits down and it must have been a refreshing time because all of the reports that were coming about Thessalonica were positive. And so, as he sits down in the midst of the tremendous trials of his life, he has at least this about which he can celebrate, the Thessalonian church, that little island of purity in the sea of paganism. And so, he celebrates their consecration to Christ. And in so doing, I believe, reveals in this first chapter the ingredients in a church that is to be celebrated, the ingredients in a church for which you can really praise God. And there are basically two, just two. A church that is worthy to be celebrated is a church where the role of the pastors is right and where the response of the people is right. And I see both in this chapter.

Today I want to talk about the role of the pastor and next week about the response of the people. But these two are critical. For a church to be what God wants it to be, there has to be a blending of those two in perfect accord with the Word of God. Let's look then at chapter 1 and notice that Paul begins with a gracious benediction.

"Paul and Silas and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," and that is a statement of their genuineness. They were a church not only in name, but they were a church in reality. They were in God the Father and they were in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then the benediction: "Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father." The better manuscripts leave out that last little phrase, though it's true. But he gives them this rather familiar benediction: Grace and peace; grace, meaning the divine favor; peace, meaning divine acceptance. And that really is a celebration to start with. He's pronouncing a blessing on them, if you will. Bless you, people, he says. Grace and peace to you, people. His heart is encouraged. There's no rebuke here at all. There's no reproof. There's no correction. It's just keep on the way you're going, you're cause for joy.

And as you read the chapter, you get some insight into why they were the church they were. And the first thing we want to see in our study this morning is because the role of the pastors was right. And that's so important. This is clearly implied as we look at particularly Paul's ministry to this church. He gives insights into the essential qualities that must be found in one who would pastor or be an elder or a leader in a church that's worth praising God for. And these essential factors, I think, are going to be very obvious to us. There are three of them and they just ooze out between the lines. One is prayer, two is proclamation, and three is pattern; prayer, proclamation, and pattern. These are the real pastoral priorities. And when they are as they ought to be in a church, you have the first half of the necessities for a church that is worthy of praise and thanksgiving.

Let's look at prayer. The role of the pastor begins with prayer. In Acts 6:4, the apostles said, "You get some men to handle the business and we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word." First came prayer. Now prayer puts the pastor in the role of a priest who takes the people to God, who lifts...lifts the people to the presence of God, who bears them with all their needs to the throne, prayer. And we see it, don't we, immediately in verse 2, look at it. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers."

He was always praying for them, he says. He was always committed to remembering them in his prayers. This was the pattern for Paul. If you go back to Romans chapter 1 verse 9, "God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers," he says to the Romans. In Colossians he writes to the people at Colosse and says in verse 3 of chapter 1, "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." And here in terms of the Thessalonians it's the same thing again and his prayer is filled with thanks. But he prayed for them. He prayed for them.

Notice, would you please, that it wasn't just Paul. "We give thanks" and the verse ends, "our prayers." I really believe that the first priority that we see in the role of the pastor in a church that's worth celebrating is a team of men committed to pray for the people. It's pretty obvious, isn't it? It is essential for a church that will be blessed, a team of pastors intimately concerned about the spiritual well-being of their congregation so that regularly, personally, individually they carry them to God as priests, bearing up their needs and their burdens. Paul prayed for his people.

And what was the basis of his prayer? Or what was the heart of his prayer? Or for what did he pray? Well, it was not the physical, it was the spiritual. And can I just kind of boil it down to a basic idea? He basically prayed for their spiritual strength, their spiritual mastery. I like that word. He prayed that they would be master over the things of the world and the devil and sin and the flesh and that they would know the strength of victory. He prayed for their spiritual strength. He prayed that they would match up their life with their calling. He prayed that their practice would be like their position in Christ. He prayed that they would tap all the divine resource available to them. He prayed that they would know the fullness of potential.

Adam Clark once said, "God acts up to the dignity of His perfections but we don't." But we sure pray for God's people that they will. The prayer of the pastor for his people is a prayer that they would have spiritual mastery, that they would cease to be victims of the world, the flesh, and the devil and that they would become victors over that.

Henry Martyn, great missionary to India, finished a brilliant academic career at Cambridge University, and he was impressed in his heart deeply that God had called him to the mission field. Several lucrative vocations were offered to him. They were attractive on a worldly basis. He turned them all down and he wrote this: "Here I am, Lord. Send me to the ends of the earth, send me to the rough, the savage pagans of the wilderness. Send me to all...from all that is called comfort on earth. Send me even to death itself if it but be in Thy service and in Thy kingdom."

That's a great prayer, isn't it? He was master over the attractions of the world. He was master over the comforts of the flesh. He was master over the allurements of society. He was master over his own fears. Send me, Lord.

Well, like a lot of young men, he fell in love. And he fell deeply in love with a young lady named Lydia. And he told her of his call from God to go to the mission field. And he told her that he believed that God wanted him to live the rest of his life and minister in the name of Jesus Christ in India. And he said, "Will you go with me?" And he pleaded with her. And she said to him, "If you stay in England, I'll marry you. If you go to India, I won't."

In heartbreak he went away to think. And he said it was like a drum beating in his heart, Lydia or India, Lydia or India, Lydia or India. Listen, heaven will be populated with unnumbered thousands of people who will bless God throughout eternity that it was India not Lydia. Pain-drenched and yet triumphant in his spirit, he wrote: "My dear Lydia and my duty call me different ways, yet God has not forsaken me. I am born for God alone." Now that's mastery over the normal desire of the heart, over the allurements of life. And he went and he spent himself. And listen, beloved, for that we pray. For that Paul prays for his people that they should see themselves born for God alone. That's the pastor's heart.

People say, "You know, well, your church is so big and all this, how... How did it get that way?" And they don't understand. They think there's all kinds of clever things that you think of and, you know, we just sit back and say, If we are faithful to pray that God's people will be what He wants them to be, God answers prayer. And that's what is really going on here. It isn't any trick. It's God's work.

Now what do you pray when you want to pray for someone's strength and mastery? Well, let's find

out. Look at 1 Thessalonians 3:10. Well, what do you think Paul prayed? Well, look at verse 9. First of all, "For what thanks can we render to God again for you?" In other words, he says you're so marvelous to start with that words fail me. I could just thank you and thank you and thank God for you. "For all the joy with which we joy for your sakes before our God." You're a church that causes joy. You're a church to celebrate.

How did they get that way? Well, for one thing he prayed for them. Verse 10 says, "Night and day, praying exceedingly that we might see your face and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." As good as you are you haven't become perfect yet. And you know what he prayed for? He prayed for their perfection. That's one of the elements of praying for spiritual mastery. You pray for someone's perfection, their maturity. That's been on the hearts of your pastors. You can thank God, you can celebrate this church, you can praise God for this church because the pastors of this church have faithfully prayed for your spiritual maturity night and day, exceedingly, that they might see your faith brought to maturity. That's the substance of the prayer, spiritual maturity. That's what we pray for, for you.

There's a second thing, look at verse 12, "And we ask the Lord to make you increase and abound (In what?) in love toward one another and toward all men." The second thing he prayed for was their love and their love that would bring about a wonderful unity and their love that would reach out to the ones outside who were lost. He prayed for their spiritual maturity and he prayed for their love. They already had love. They were taught of God to love. But they needed to abound more and more in it.

And then look at verse 13 and you see a third thing for which he prayed, "To the end that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness." So he prayed for their spiritual maturity. He prayed for their love. He prayed for their holiness, their righteousness, their hatred of sin. That was a burden in his heart.

He also prayed for their consistency. Look at chapter 5 verse 23, "And the very God of peace make you wholly holy," w-h-o-l-l-y, h-o-l-y, "make you wholly holy," for their total holiness, and watch this, "and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless." And this is a prayer for their consistency, that God would make you totally holy, totally sanctified, and that way consistently.

And if I may borrow from his second epistle, would you look at 2 Thessalonians 1:11. "Wherefore also, we pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling to" here it comes "fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power." You know what this is? This is Paul praying for their usefulness, for their usefulness, for their work, for their fulfilling the good pleasure of God, what He wants done, what He wants accomplished.

And may I draw you to 2 Thessalonians 3:16? Where he says, "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all." He prays for their peace. That's comfort. That's solace.

Now here...here is the prayer list of a pastor. He overall wants his people to be spiritually in control by the Spirit of God, having the victory, not being defeated; having spiritual mastery over the world, the flesh, and the devil. And to get to that end he prays for their spiritual maturity. He prays for their abounding love toward one another and the lost. He prays for their holiness. He prays for their

consistency, for their usefulness, for their peace, comfort, tranquility, serenity of heart in the midst of trial and pain and suffering and death.

And I suppose we could sum it all up by going back to chapter 1 verse 12 of 2 Thessalonians where he says that "The name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you." And that's the *summum bonum*, isn't it? Ultimately we pray for you that Jesus Christ might be glorified. We're not praying that you can arrive at spiritual mastery so you can be glorified, but that through you Christ might receive the glory.

Now you know where the heart of Paul was. Now go back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and when you read, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers," now you know what was in there, don't you? A prayer for their spiritual development, that they might be mature and loving and holy and consistent and useful and at peace to the glory of God. And so, a pastor is committed to pray for his people and to pray for their spiritual development. That's an unrelenting commitment.

And you look at Grace Church, beloved, and you ask the question: Why is this church the way it is? We're not perfect. And we're not even the best there is. But we are blessed of God and God has shown Himself in our midst. And I believe it is in great measure related to the fact that the pastors of this fellowship have prayed for the people. Spurgeon said, "I take it that as a minister one is always praying. Whenever his mind turns to his work, whether he is in it or out of it, he raises a petition, sending up his holy desires as well directed arrows to the skies. He is not always in the act of prayer but he lives in the spirit of it. If his heart be in his work, he cannot eat or drink or take recreation or go to his bed or rise in the morning without ever more feeling a fervency of desire, a weight of anxiety and a simplicity of dependence on God. Thus in one form or other, he continues in prayer. If there be any man under heaven who is compelled to carry out the precept 'pray without ceasing,' surely it is the Christian minister," end quote.

Paul said at the end of 1 Thessalonians in chapter 5, verse 17, "Pray without ceasing." And what he asked others to do, he did himself. I mean, all these churches he writes to, he says, "We pray for you continually." Can you imagine how long his list was? You must believe that the man not only had times for prayer and times when he gathered with others to prayer, but there were times, all times, when his mind and his heart was open to God and there was a continual flow of petition and thanks and praise. There are no gimmicks. A church is a church to celebrate truly and honestly when it's a church carried to God by those who are the priests who offer up unceasing prayers on the behalf of the people. And we can thank God for such. I thank God for those men gathered around me who are faithful to pray.

There's a second element, and that's proclamation, proclamation. And you'll notice that in verse 5. We're going to jump around a little in the chapter before we conclude it next week. But look at verse 5, and Paul marks another note that tells us about his ministry here. "For our gospel, our good news came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." That's such a great statement. He is saying there in chapter 1 verse 5, "We proclaimed the Word unto you in the power of the Holy Spirit."

That is essential to a church that is going to be one to celebrate. You notice what he says, "Our gospel." It isn't because he invented it, it's because he preached it. It became his because he was its preacher, as well as the others. And he says, "It came not in word only." It wasn't a lecture. It wasn't

just sermon. It wasn't a speech. He didn't just deliver information. It didn't come that way. It wasn't academic. It wasn't dry. It wasn't dead. It came in the power of the Spirit of God. It came with dynamite. In fact, the dynamite was so powerful it blew up all their idols. Verse 9 says they turned from idols to serve the living and true God. The message came with power.

Now, most of us have been around long enough to have heard the difference, haven't we? We've heard the insipid messages without power, not energized by the Holy Spirit though they may have been out of the Bible. And we've heard messages energized by the power of the Spirit of God and we know the difference, hopefully. It's a tragic thing that so many times the Bible is discussed and talked about and lectured on and preached on and so forth void of the Spirit's power. And it comes across dead.

And there are people, you know, who have heard people teach out of the Bible but it's so dead and so lifeless and without dynamic that they think the Bible is a dull, boring, dead book. That's why I tell pastors all the time, if your life isn't right and you're not walking in the Spirit and you can't get excited about the Word of God and preach it in the power of the Spirit of God, then don't preach the Bible because it's the ultimate crime to bore people with the Word of God. Preach something else. Don't bore them with the Bible. The Bible should come in the power of the Spirit.

In Acts 1 it says that you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you be My witness. Charles Spurgeon, when he went to preach on Sundays, always had the same routine. He'd climb those stairs to his pulpit, it was up high, and on every step he'd say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit." And when he got to the top, he knew he believed in the Holy Spirit. And he preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, energized, committed to the Spirit. What the world needs, what the church needs is Spirit-filled pastors, pure lives so that it's the Spirit of God energizing the Word of God, so important. When the vessel is pure, and that is important, when the vessel is pure and the call is clear and the Word is rightly divided, the message comes with power, conviction. And that's cause for celebration because you're hearing God speak in the power of God's Holy Spirit.

The result of it is marvelous. Look back at verse 5. When the message comes, not just in the dead word, "but with power in the Spirit, there will be much (What?) assurance." Oh, that's so important, that's so important. I believe people come to a church like this because they believe in their hearts they are assured of hearing the Word of God. That's why they're here because we teach the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. And your heart says to you that's the Word of God. I see it, I believe it.

I had a pastor say to me not long ago, "You have the audacity and the brashness to stand up in your pulpit and pontificate as if you were the one who could interpret the Bible and you never have the integrity to tell your people there are all kinds of views. You just teach yours as if it was God's truth." That's what he said to me. I said, "I don't think it's that hard to figure out, I don't care how many opinions there are." But you know what is the greatest confirmation in my heart? It is the fact that when I commit myself to the Holy Spirit and I stand up here and I ask the Spirit of God to empower me to preach His Word and you're out there filled with the Spirit, when the Holy Spirit in me proclaims the Word and the Holy Spirit in you receives it as the Word with assurance, we can be confirmed that we're on the same wavelength, right? It's the confirmation in your heart that this is the Word of God. And that's what Paul is saying that when we preach to you, you weren't just sitting there analytically saying, oh, that's a very nice sermon you're giving, fella, really appreciate good

thoughts, nice illustrations. No, but you're sensing the power of God on your heart and your heart is saying it's true, it is the Word of God, I see it there. And that's the assurance that comes on the other end of the line, see. And you go to a place where a person doesn't preach the Word of God or doesn't preach the Word of God in the energy of the Holy Spirit and you're going to walk out of there and you're going to say to yourself, "I don't know whether he's telling me the truth or not," because it isn't energized by the Spirit. We celebrate the reality of the fact that a Spirit-filled pastor, Spirit-filled elders, Spirit-filled teachers communicating to you the Word of God, a Holy Spirit dwelling in you affirming to your heart that it is God's message, that's assurance, isn't it?

And I believe people are in this church because they have a sense of assurance that they will hear the Word of God. And it's no testimony to our brilliance. In fact, what it is is a testimony to the fact that we confess like Paul that we're not going to stand on the words of men and the wisdom of men but we're going to preach the Word of God. And this pastor assumed that you couldn't understand the Word of God when he said there were so many opinions. He'd given up on it because he didn't know how to approach it, because he doesn't believe it's really the Word of God in every part. So what's he going to do?

But I believe it is the Word of God in every part and I believe the God who wanted us to understand it made us able to understand it by His Spirit. And your heart confirms that.

Now that is not to say that there can't be variations in some areas where there's not a lot of information in the Scripture. But on the great, sweeping truths of Scripture, the Spirit gives testimony in all our hearts that this is true. And so, in the Thessalonian church, when Paul said it, Spirit-filled and in power and when the others with him said it, their hearts were turned to it and they said, because the Spirit in them was the same Spirit, this is true.

To be honest with you, that's why I fear two things in the ministry. One is that I should ever deviate from the Word of God. Two is that I should ever stand here without the power of the Holy Spirit. Those are the two things I fear. I don't fear opposition, I welcome it. I don't fear somebody who disagrees with me. I don't fear that at all. What I fear is the loss of the power of the Spirit of God in my life, or a failure to articulate His Word. And that's why I never want to deviate from the Bible. You'll never hear me speak on politics. You'll never hear me give opinions on stuff even though all my opinions are right. And if you ask me in private, I'll give them to you. But you're not going to hear me stand in this place which is the place of the articulating of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God and give you my opinion on something.

And so, Paul says we came and we preached and we preached in the power of the Spirit of God. And the promise of the Word of God is that if we teach His Word filled with His Spirit, it will come across and it will assure the hearts of those who hear.

When we were back in Chicago at the Inerrancy Congress, we had the privilege of writing a statement. And all these great scholars came together and it was such a thrilling thing because they were all affirming the place of the authority of the Word of God and they were affirming the place of the power of the Holy Spirit. They were saying, in effect, that you can't understand the truth of God without the Holy Spirit of God. And they were saying that we must preach the Word, the Word, and only the Word. These are the finest theological minds in evangelicalism anywhere and this was their affirmation. In fact, we had the privilege of working on a committee to put together an affirmation and this is the affirmation that these men made:

"We affirm that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the whole biblical text as the Word of God."

Boy, that's a strong statement. And then a denial:

"We deny that the preacher has any message from God apart from the biblical text."

Boy, that's good. I mean, that shuts out everything. There's no word from God unless it comes out of this book. That's what these men are saying. There aren't any visions. There aren't any loose revelations running around. There aren't any human opinions that stand at this level. The only message we can say we have from God is His Word and the only way it comes across is when it's energized by the Spirit.

Dr. Barnhouse said, "If I only had three years to minister, I'd spend the first two studying and preparing and the last one preaching." Why? Because he wanted to make sure he got the message from God out of His Word. Micaiah the prophet said, "As the Lord lives, what the Lord says to me, that I will speak." And the Spirit promises to make clear and energize the Word of God not the word of man.

So, you can thank God for pastors, beloved, who are soaked in Scripture. You can thank God for that. If this is a church to celebrate, it is a church to celebrate because these men have given themselves to prayer on your behalf for your spiritual mastery. It is, if it is a church to celebrate, so because they have given themselves to proclamation of the Word of God and nothing stands equal with it.

There's a third element in the role of a pastor that I see here in a church worth celebrating, and that we'll call pattern, pattern. You'll notice in the middle of verse 5 he says, "As you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." He says you know how we lived. You know the manner of life we exhibited for your sake. "And when you saw it, you became *mimētēs*, mimics, imitators of us and of the Lord." And we'll stop right there.

Here Paul presents himself as the pattern that the others are to follow. And if the one who prays is the priest who takes his people to God and the one who preaches is the prophet who brings his God to the people, then the one who sets the pattern is the king, if you will, who sets the example for all under his care to follow. And so, Paul set an example. And he said you are a church to celebrate because you imitated us.

You know, that is a tremendous truth, followers of leaders. In Hebrews 13 it tells the congregation of Jewish Christians that they are to follow the faith of their leaders, they are to pattern their lives after them. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul says, "Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ." He says to Timothy, "Be thou an example to the believers." He says to the Ephesian elders, "You know how we served among you. Do it that way."

If this church is a church to celebrate, beloved, it is because the men of God who have been in leadership here have set a pattern. A church can never be what God wants it to be where you have one message but another conflicting lifestyle. You can't preach one thing and live something else. If

there is a holy word from God, there ought to be a holy life behind it. And if a man cannot maintain that kind of life, he cannot serve in leadership in this church. He cannot.

Richard Baxter, that sixteenth century model pastor of Puritan cause, wrote a marvelous book which I read and reread and it warms my soul and washes out my heart, said this: "He that means as he speaks will surely do as he speaks." What did he mean? He meant this, if you preach a message but don't live it, you didn't really mean your message, right? When you look at so many churches and wonder why things aren't the way they are and if you look closely you'd see that there are pastors, elders, leaders in that church who do not live the message they affirm to believe. Spurgeon called them "graceless pastors." He said this, "A graceless pastor is a blind man elected to a professorship of optics, philosophizing about light and vision while he himself is absolutely in the dark. A graceless pastor is a dumb man elevated to the chair of music. A deaf man fluent on symphony and harmony, he is a mole professing to educate eagles." I mean, if your life isn't right, you undermine everything. And you know what? They'll follow your life, not your message.

The most effective praying and the most effective proclaiming comes from those who live their passions out. They are the message in human flesh. And the reason we're so grateful to God for this church and the reason we've seen God's blessing is because we've had men who prayed and men who proclaimed the Word and men who set the pattern. We're not perfect but when we fall we seek restoration and we give you the pattern of how to fall and get up again. It's not that we're better than others. It's that we've endeavored to be what God wants us to be with all of our failings. And therein lies the key. You see, the chief...the chief characteristic of integrity is that it is willing to suffer personally for what it believes without compromise.

Jeremy Taylor wrote, "You must be a man of God after God's own heart and men will strive to be like you if you be like to God. But when you only stand at the door of virtue for nothing but to keep sin out, you will draw into the folds of Christ none but such as fear drives in."

What did he mean by that? He meant that if you don't have that winsome godliness in your life, you don't attract people. You just collect the ones that were scared of going to hell.

Now what is a... What is a proper evaluation of our church. We've been analyzed, evaluated, theses have been written on us, seminaries haul out all kinds of students to sniff around here and find out what the secret is. They do. They bring them over here and they want to know all of these little deals and look through all of our stuff and they try to figure out why we are what we are. I read about us in magazines. I read about me there. And they're saying this is why this is going on there, you see, MacArthur does this and then these guys do this and then there's Barshaw and Mayhue and these guys and they're doing this and there's these guys over here. And, boy, we've got it figured out. They've got eight of these and six of those and nine of these.

And one seminary got so frustrated with us that they stopped bringing their students because we didn't fit their model, because we didn't do it the way the book said but it got done anyway. And so they just don't come because it confuses the students, because the professor's lecture doesn't match the reality, which hasn't bothered professors for years, I don't know why it should particularly bother that professor. But...

And if you sit them down and you say, listen, you know why this is a church to celebrate? You know why this is a church in which we can give God glory? You know why this is the church that Reinhold Niebuhr never attended or he wouldn't have said what he said? It isn't because of any of the things you think, it's because through the years there have been men of God who have prayed for the spiritual maturity of the church. And through the years there have been men of God who have proclaimed in the power of the Spirit of God the truth of the Word of God and the people have received it with assurance and confidence that it is the Word of God. And through the years there have been men who have set spiritual patterns by the righteousness of their life. And those are the things that make a church.

Now, that message was for us. If you want to hear the part that's for you, that's next week. But you've got to have the role of the pastors right and then you bring together the response of the people and you get a church worth celebrating. Let's bow in prayer.

I just want to ask you this, may I ask this? Dear men of God lifted up by the Holy Spirit, recognized as leaders in your midst, honored by you and beloved, have served in this place faithfully. They have prayed for you and do so continually. They have proclaimed, taught you here in the worship service, in the fellowship groups, in the Flocks, in Bible studies, in Sunday school classes, in LOGOS classes, seminary classes, so many places. They have proclaimed always the Word and always with a heart desire that it come in the energy of the Spirit. And they have endeavored to set a pattern for you, a pattern of living, and to uphold that pattern as best they can with all their weakness, leaning on the Spirit's power. And this is a day to be thankful. And I'm thankful, not for me, but for the men around me who are the patterns to me of what I should be. And I find myself today saying thanks to the Lord for these leaders who followed in the train of Paul and Silas and Timothy. Oh, we've never had one equal to Paul and probably never had one equal to Silas and never one anywhere near Timothy, but we've tried to follow the patterns they set. And I think it's a time for thanksgiving because if we have celebration it's because God has given us those who have led us the way we should have been led.

And so, perhaps your heart can express that thanks in this moment. And then, also, as a corollary to that, we have prayed for you and we have taught you and endeavored to set an example to you, and maybe your part is to pray for us, to turn that around as Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him, and to pray for us and to encourage us and to demonstrate to us that pattern of life that you're living.

Our Father, we thank You so much for what You've done here. We just can't find words. It's foolish to try, but we long for the day when we enter into heaven because in eternity, everything that You've ever done will come clear to us. Nothing will be missed and we'll spend forever celebrating and finding out all the things we never knew that You did. Thank You, Father, for what You've done here, what You're doing, what You will do. Thank You that we've had the privilege today to give out of love and thanks. Help us to keep on giving. May we not be satisfied with what we've given, ever seek to give more of ourselves and our substance, all we have to You. And thank You for making this a special day. We eagerly, anxiously, excitedly await for the application of these truths in our hearts. Amen.

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