

A Church for the New Millennium

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

Code: 80-211

Tonight I want to address some thoughts to the theme of a church for the new millennium. Some of these things of course will be familiar to us but I just want to kind of pull them together in the context that faces us as we enter into this that many are calling the new millennium. There is so much discussion and I am engaged in it regularly by reading articles, reading books, discussing things with pastors, church leaders, theologians. Tremendous amount of discussion on what it's going to take for the church to reach this generation. The generation itself is incessantly being defined and redefined. Familiar terms - yuppie generation, the generation X and all of those kinds of terms are used to describe something of the cultural attitudes and morays of our society which are moving so very rapidly and churches are scrambling to try to react and find a place of relevancy in the culture under the fear that if they don't, they will not be able to reach that culture.

It was some months ago now, quite a few months ago, that I told you about a book which I read, which has become very popular among church leaders that essentially says the church is going to be out of existence in the next 50 years if it doesn't re-invent itself. By the mid-21st century, the church could literally be out of existence unless it redefines itself in terms of cultural expectations.

And so there seems to be almost a sense of panic among people in the church to scramble around and find a point of contact with the culture or sort of fade away into obsolescence. The church continually trying to redefine itself under the terms that are defined by culture, puts itself in a very difficult position since culture is going in the wrong direction to start with and it's going there very, very rapidly. We have always believed at Grace Community Church that the church is defined not by the culture but by the scripture. That it is God who defines the church not the society around us. And certainly not the prince of the power of the air, who is the source of the culture, morays attitudes and philosophies so even religious. So we are different than other churches.

In fact, I received a great compliment recently from some body who said you know the thing that's remarkable about Grace Community Church is that while everything in our society seems to be changing rapidly over the years, you haven't changed at all. In fact, he said to me you are doing the same things you used to be doing in about the same way you used to be doing them. And I said this is true. And of course, the question comes up aren't you concerned about being relevant? Well I'm only concerned really about being obedient to scripture and leaving the consequences to the Lord. So you know we've never been caught up in this scramble to try to adjust to the culture. And our church has grown and that's kind of turned us into something of a curiosity.

Because we don't grow in the normal way that churches say you should grow. We used to have the people from Fuller Seminary come here with the Church Growth classes and because our church was the fastest growing church and the largest church in Los Angeles, they of necessity would bring students here to show them a rapidly growing church and then they stopped doing that because they said we confused the students because we had no regard. We don't have any information about how churches grow and we grew anyway. And that was confusing so they felt that selective research that reinforced their point was more useful for them and so they stopped coming here.

But we have grown and we have drawn no small amount of attention. This church has been the subject of magazine articles and thesis. Doctoral dissertations have been written on our church and on my preaching. There have been all kinds of reports about our church seminars, newspaper articles, journals, tapes, books, all undertaken to analyze our church. And our ministry have been examined and analyzed every way possible. Studied, labeled, categorized, copied. We have been blessed. We have been cursed. We have been defended. We have been ignored. We have been endowed. We have been publicized and we've even been sued. So just about a little of everything has come against us and the church itself can be rather simply defined in a lot of ways.

Grace Community Church is a haven, a home, a harbor for those in need. It is a family for the lonely. It is a school for the untaught. It is a fortress of protection for the fearful. It is an open door for those who are shut out. It is a place of love for the unloved. It is a place of peace for those in chaos. It is a place of acceptance for those who are rejected. It is a place of forgiveness for the guilty. Hope for the hopeless. It's a place of a light for those in darkness. It's a place of life for those in death. And when we said all of that we have said something about how we are viewed by people but we really haven't gotten down to the core of what we are.

I think the key to understanding the amazing history of this church is not to analyze it, not to analyze its pastors or analyze its numerical growth in size, analyzing its staff or analyzing its sort of demographics, its location, its programs, etc, etc. The real key to the story of Grace Community Church, I think, is its name. Not Grace, as good a name as that is, that is really not distinctive. There are some ladies named Grace. There is a petroleum company called Grace Petroleum. There's Grace Shipping Company. There is Grace Trucking Company. There is Grace Fertilizer Company. There is Grace Investment Company and there's even some place called Grace that makes lemon cakes. So Grace is a good word but it really is not definitive enough and the word is not community. There are so many community organizations that it's just endless. Community is really sort of a generic term that refers to any coming together of people for absolutely any reason.

So our distinction does not lie in the word grace, although we believe that theologically it is a marvelously distinct word. Our distinction does not lie in the word community although we believe Christian community defines a theological and spiritual reality. The key to understanding our church is

to understand the word church. That's what sets us apart. That is the key to our identity. We are not Grace Community Club. We are not Grace Community Recreation Center. We are not Grace Community Self-Help Association. We are not Grace Community Divinity School. We are not Grace Community Convention Center. We are not Grace Community Theater. We are not Grace Community Philosophical and Religious Advancement Society or any of those or any other of those things.

We are Grace Community Church and the very name church immediately defines us. And we are compelled by that name because it is not a human name. We have had the privilege of choosing our name and the people who basically founded Grace Community Church chose well. They chose the word grace and that's a wonderful word but they weren't mandated to choose that word. That was an optional word. There are other places called First Baptist and First Presbyterian and Second Baptist and Last Presbyterian and this and that and our Redeemer Church and Savior Church and Faith Church and Bible Church. You got a lot of options there. And community is not really mandated. It's certainly not a divine mandate. It's a good idea to call us that because it gives us some sense of breadth and identity in our local area.

But what is mandated for us is the word church. That's what we are. We aren't anything else but a church. That is what we are. By definition we are a church. And if you understand that word means then you understand what this church is. That is the key to understanding Grace Community Church. It is the key to our identity. We are not like any other institution in the world. We are absolutely and utterly unique. And when you understand church, then you have a definition of what we are and what are to be in the world.

And it is really an unchanging definition. It is no different for us in the 20th century than it was in the 2nd century AD. It is not different for us than it was in the 10th century. It is no different for us than it was in the 15th century or any other century. We are defined by a divine designation church, not by anything cultural, not by anything contemporary, not by anything that society developed but rather by the word church, which is biblical. Now when you say church to most people, they think of a place. They think of a building. So you need to define it a little more than that. But everything we are committed to, everything we do is basically because we are church and that is distinct.

In English, the word is usually used to refer to a building. In fact in most people's mind, an old building that maintains a sort of outdated kind of institutional Christianity or some other religion. When people today think of church, they think of some building, some old building with old people and out of date antiquated approach to religion. They think perhaps at best some pleasant architecture and some well-intentioned people. They may think of hierarchy. They may think of the Catholic Church or some other church they may have experienced as a child that is hierarchical and they think of some sacramental or sacerdotal functions.

In Korean, in Japanese and in Chinese, the words for church all have the same root. And in those cultures, the word for church speaks of a teaching society. It suggests the idea of an educational group being lectured in a classroom by a professional religious teacher. And some years ago there was a book written, one chapter was devoted to our church and we were identified as a classroom church by someone who was unfamiliar with our church but nonetheless took the liberty to define us in that way.

And that is consistent with some linguistic words that refer to the church that's something like an education society where people are lectured in a classroom by a professional religious teacher. But that doesn't really get to the issue of what a church really is. It doesn't truly encompass the fullness of our identity. As we march into a new year, a new decade, a new century, a new millennium I want to go back and just kind of re-grip what we are as a church and I want you to understand that we will continue to be this because it is defined for us by the word of God.

The word church in the New Testament is from a Greek word *ekklesia* that is a noun that comes out of a group verb *kaleo*, which means to call. So *ekklesia* is simply the called, the called ones, those called together, those according to Romans 8:28 called according to God's purpose. We are called together. In Ephesians 4:1, Paul says I therefore the prison of the lord and treat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. You are the called because you've had a calling. And the church is simply the called ones. We are the assembly of the called. This was a very ordinary Greek word by the way. Very ordinary Greek word so it can be any assembly of any people called together for anything.

Christians gave it its rich meaning. We're a group specially summoned together by God for his purposes. When you said that you really defined the church. We're a group of people especially summoned together by God for his purposes. We are not a human organization built by good people. We are not a human organization designed by well-intentioned people. We are not a human organization basically constructed around some tradition. We are a group of people summoned together by God himself for his purposes. So we can say this the church is an assembly of people called by God. We are an assembly of people called by God.

The real identity of the church then is determined by divine purpose. God is calling us. God has called us into being. Now the church then is the assembly of the called. Our course has been charted by God. Our destiny has been planned by God. Our members have been chosen by God. Our purposes have been defined by God. Our ministries have been revealed by God. We are an organization of people, an organism of people assembled by God for divine purposes. That's why repeatedly the church is identified as the church and you need to understand the word church as the called ones, the assembly of the called ones. And as I noted for you in Ephesians 4:1, we are the called because we have received a calling. Down in verse 4 he talks about our calling again and had we time, we could go through a number of New Testament passages that refer again to the fact that we have been

summoned by God together.

We have been called by God together. Romans 1:6 you also are the called of Jesus Christ to all who are beloved of God in Rome called together as saints. And you find this in 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John and other places. Even Hebrews 3:1 talks about our heavenly calling and heaven is really a synonym for God. We've been called by God.

So if there is anything we need to understand at the outset about the church, it is that God has called us into being. We are a group of people who have been brought together by a divine summons. We are the handy work of God for his purposes. It is not, the church is not an expression of religious genius on the part of man. It is not the result. Our church is not the result of the power of persuasive speech. It is not the result of effective and dynamic leadership. It is not the result of countless programs. It is not the result of some kind of diligence and brilliance combined. The church is the work of God. This church has never been led by men though it has been served by men. It has never been led by pastors. It has been served by pastors. It has always been led by God through the lordship of Jesus Christ, mediated by the agency of the Holy Spirit through those who serve both men and women.

It is not our church. It is not my church. It is not the pastor's church. It is not the elder's church. I have to tell you, it's not even your church. It's Christ's church. He ordained it. He builds it. He leads it. We are simply called into it and he is the caller.

And this explains really all the goodness, all the blessing, all the success, all the power, all the things that we have seen by way of spiritual richness. It has all come from God. The weaknesses of our fellowship, the failures of our church on the other hand are the marks of humanness. Where you see us weak and failing is where you see the hand of men and women. The weak human vessels God has chosen do show up in the weak elements of life in the church. We fail because of us, not him. We succeed because of him, not us. So when you come to Grace Church and you want to analyze why it is what it is and when you want to find some pathway to success that might be repeatable somewhere else, you are going to find it very difficult. Because wherever we have succeeded it is because God has done a mighty work and wherever we have failed it is because the imprint of human hands is on this place.

The successes then cannot be easily defined. They cannot be easily analyzed. They cannot be easily canned and they cannot be easily reproduced and repeated because they are the work of God who is the caller of the called. The failures, yes, you can find those and you can certainly can repeat those. People can come to Grace Church and analyze our failures and go back and repeat them. But when they come and try to analyze our success and go back and repeat that, it's really impossible because the Lord is the one who has caused the blessing and the success. The Lord is behind the power and the impact of the church. And he is not easily defined, analyzed, canned and repeated.

So what I'm saying is that Grace Community Church has been blessed only as we have functioned as God's called people, not some human organization, not with some unusual level of human leadership or some unusual level of the power of persuasive speech. That is not what has caused this church to become what it is. That is not how we define ourselves and that is no reasonable explanation of the blessing of God. Wherever God moves, the flowers have always bloomed. Wherever we walk, they always die.

The single great goal, I should say of the church through all its life and this is true in the very beginning, the single great goal of this church through all its life has been to be the church. And what I'm concerned about today is so many people in the ministry who under this pressure to somehow let the culture define them are ceasing to be the church. You can look at some of those places and they may call themselves the church and there is a church in there somewhere. There's a community of the called in there somewhere not to be confused with what is visible. We never wanted to have somewhere hidden the midst of a visible human organization a real church. We wanted the real church to be visible. The single great goal then for the church through all its life has been to let God be at work and to allow the church to be the church. We don't want the culture to define what we are. We don't want the society around us to define what we are. We want to be whatever it is that God wants us to be. That's what we want to be. Nothing less and nothing more. We are the church. That's what we are.

And I find it hard to call certain institutions the church when there is no commitment on their part to let God build the church according to his purpose. Now in understanding the church by definition, I want to take you back to Ephesians 1. Last Sunday night, I did it purposely at our Communion Service; I referred to Ephesians 1 in a very brief meditation before we took the Lord's table. I knew I was going to come back to this chapter tonight and I am.

This appears in the original Greek Ephesians 1:3-14 to be one long sentence, though in the English translations the translators have stuck periods at certain points. Actually in the Greek, this could flow as one long sentence starting in verse 3 and not ending until the end of verse 14 just a linking together of phrases really defining the church. And I chose this particular passage because through the years, Ephesians has been so definitive for us. And I want you to look at verses 3-14 and understand here the idea of the church and what it says about us as the church. Now, remember the word church needs to be replaced in your mind by the word called. We are the called ones. And there are a series of propositions from verse 3 to 14 that define this calling. And as I was working through this and trying to figure out a way to sort of open up to you about eight different elements of our calling, I'm always looking for some kind of hook. I found the best hook to hang these elements on is a series of prepositions. Starting in verse 3 we're going to understand our calling and that is synonymous with being a church. We have been called by God. We've been summoned by God. We are a gathering of people that have been brought together by divine supernatural power through the

work of God in salvation.

And as we look at our selves, we can see the various features of that calling in a series of prepositions that unfold the propositions that are here in this passage. Let me just kind of suggest them to you and then we'll look at them. The Apostle Paul here says we are called before, called out, called from, called to, called under, called with, called unto and called for.

Each of those is essential to understanding what the church is to be. This can't change. I don't know what's going to happen. I told you a few weeks ago I didn't know what's going to happen on Y2K. I don't have any particular insights into the future. I don't have any prophecies to give you. I can't be like those people on TBN who get up there every night and say God told them this and God told them that and have a prophesy about this and a prophesy about that. And they have no such word from God and as we all know they are very wrong about many things. They can be glad they are living this side of the cross. Had they been living in Old Testament times they would all be dead because they would have been stoned for misrepresenting themselves as prophets of God.

I don't have any predictions for the future but you want to know something. I don't want you to misunderstand this. I really don't care what happens in the culture in the future. That has nothing to do with my understanding of the church. Doesn't really matter to me what the hot buttons are in the society. It doesn't matter to me what appears or doesn't appear to be relevant to people. The only thing that matters to me is that I function within a framework of understanding the church in the way that God has defined it and the timelessness of scripture. And I see that unfolding here in this marvelous, marvelous chapter. This is not arm's length for you. This is really our identification and your involved so this is really you.

Let's start by saying first of all; when we talk about the called, which remember now is a synonym for the church. We are the called, called by God. The first thing I want you to know is we have been called before. We are called before. In verse 3 blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who's blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. We were called before. This association of believing people was called by God initially chosen by God before the foundation of the world. We were called before. This association of believing people was called by God initially chosen by God before the foundation of the world. Obviously the actual calling came in time but the plan for that calling was established in eternity passed.

In verse 5, he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself according to the kind intention or good pleasure of his will. He priorized us in the Greek. He predetermined. He predestined us. This obviously speaks of the great doctrine of election. The doctrine of predestination. We were called before the foundation of the world in the purposes of God. That calling didn't actually come until time when we were born and we grew up and we heard the gospel and the spirit prompted

us and we believed and we were added to the church. But in the plan of God, that calling was established in eternity passed.

The passage literally tells us, verse 4, he chose us. He picked us out for himself. In eternity passed, God chose his church. Here is the first cause of our existence. Why is this church what it is? Because God before time began determined it would be this. Determined that there would be people coming here and hearing the gospel, people meeting you and having them watch your life and being drawn to Christ and you leading them to Christ, people hearing the ministry of the word of God on Grace To You or whatever means and coming to be a part of our church because they came to Christ. The first cause of the existence of this church, the first cause of the blessing of this church, the first cause of everything that's happened in this church is God's sovereign, independent, unaffected choice.

It was God who chose and then it was, according to John 6:4, the father who drew us. No man comes except the father draws him. Whom he chooses he draws. We know that great doctrine. By the way, draw was used in ancient pagan writings to speak of divine powers, which drew and also of great human power, which could draw someone in an irresistible force. Sometimes they would use that word draw to refer to a hungry person. For example, who was drawn to food like a magnet or they would use it to refer to that irresistible draw when two people "fall in love". We have been drawn irresistibly to God. God as it were has turned on the magnetism and in an irresistible fashion because of his choosing us has drawn us to himself. As George Chadwick once wrote, "I sought the Lord and afterwards I knew he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me. It was not I that found oh savior true, no it was I found by you." That's true.

God made a choice. God did the drawing irresistibly turned on the magnetism of his own grace and drew us to himself. So we are here because we've been called before. Isn't that an amazing thing to think about? Look around. This is a congregation of people chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be assembled in this fashion. There's no way I can market that. There's no way I can package that and go off to some group of pastors and say hey, you want a church like ours. Here's the five things you do. First you do you go back in eternity passed. Then you see if you can't convince God to make another church like this in Boise or Kansas City or wherever. You can't do that.

We were called before the world began. Centuries before the pastors of this church were born. Before time began, God determined who would lead this church. When I look back at my own life, my own family history and I don't want to bore you with all that, but God knew where that was all going. God knew that eventually there would be some MacArthurs who would migrate to Canada and they would start out working with the railroad but then eventually they would come to Christ and then they would be trained for ministry and out of that process would come by parents, then there would come me. And as a little boy I would be attracted to ministry and eventually I would be set apart by God through some pretty serious intervening in my life, some life threatening accident that came into my life. Sort of reoriented priorities and you know three months before I talked to anybody at Grace Church back

in 1968, three months before I talked to anybody here at Grace Church a larger and better known church at the time was talking to me about becoming the pastor of that church. I was willing and I was excited and I was ready to go there if that's what they wanted. And after several meetings with the leaders they decided I was too young and too inexperienced and so they said well it's been nice talking to you and sent me on my way.

But God knew what he had planned. He knew it before the foundation of the world. He certainly knew what was going. I had no idea what was going on but God knew all of that. And all of this, all of the planning of God comes to wondrous fruition. Every time I hear about somebody being saved, you know I have to go back in my mind to the realization that this was all before the foundation of the world. A gentleman came up to me this morning and said I just want to tell you that I this morning, after the message, just gave my life to Jesus Christ. That's a wonderful thing to hear, a glorious thing to hear. It didn't just happen this morning. It happened long ago and the Lord is just adding to the church those that he calls to himself.

This is a great realization. We understand that at Grace Church. I'm not sure every other person in spiritual leadership in the church has any idea about this. I remember reading recently in a book called "The Purpose Driven Church", which apprised to say that you could build strong churches by following a certain technique. There was a statement in there that says if you can find the key to a person's heart you can lead any one to Christ. That's a very irresponsible statement. That is not true because people don't come to Christ because of your leadership ability. They come to Christ because of the power of the spirit of God connected to the decree of God before the foundation of the world.

All we can do is be obedient and let God do what God will do. I can't tell you I can't find words to express the special sense of eternity I feel in my heart. The great joy and there are a lot of things that will steal your joy around here. I get weary with certain things that go on in this church. There are people who just don't ever seem to grow and you get concerned about them and you wish they'd listened to what you say and retain it and not lose it all before they get to their car in the parking lot after the service is over. They come with a thimble and somehow they trip and spill it on the way back to the car. And there are people, you know you pour your life into them for years and years and then they do some bizarre kind of thing and you can't really understand how you can be teaching them all these years and they can go off and do some completely irrational and sinful kind of thing. Those things are very discouraging. You get discouraged when there is disappointment at levels of leadership and when there is disappointment in the financial area and you can't do what you want to do. Those things are normal in life. You get disappointed when you are criticized about this or about that, whatever that might be.

But you know that all is very, very small. It's always been a very small issue to me. People ask me a lot about how do you deal with criticism; how do you deal with disappointment and the real answer is you know I have such an overwhelming sense of destiny that that stuff honestly is like water off a

duck's back to me. It really is because this whole thing is way beyond me to start with. And if it were left to me to build a church there wouldn't be one in existence because I can't do that. A reporter said to me one time, do you have a great desire to build a church? I said I have no desire to build a church because Jesus said he would do that and I'm not going to compete with Jesus. I can't build the church. None of us can build the church. And there is a sublime sense of the eternity of this unfolding called assembly.

It's just thrilling. Jesus said I'll build my church and as you know the gates of Hades won't prevail against me. So I can never really find the words to express the sense of eternity that I feel in my heart, knowing that I'm a part of something way beyond me. I'm not responsible for its successes. All I can do is muck it up by my disobedience. And I also have a sense that this is my place. This is my small, little place. It's a small, little place in terms of the world. It may seem like a big church compared to others but in comparison to a massive city like this and whole world, it's a small, little place. It's my small, little piece of history. Not only a small place but a small, little window of time, a few decades of ministry that God will give me in the midst of the sweep of all redemptive history.

But I have the sense that it's my place. And it's my time. And it's just my responsibility to obediently fit in to the unfolding purpose of God. I feel only in this sense like Esther, of whom it was said, who know but that thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this. And when you have that sense that this is where you belong. This is your time. This is your place and God is building his church and you are privileged to be a part of it then you really understand the church. We were called before. It's a great doctrine of election.

The second thing about our calling is we were called out. We were called out. In verse 7 in him we have redemption. Through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace. We have been called out. Called before, that's election. Called out that's redemption. We have been called out of darkness. We have been called out of sin. We have been called out of death. We've been called out of hell. We've are the regenerate church. We are the truly redeemed church. We have been redeemed through his blood. We have received the forgiveness of our trespasses by grace. That's what makes us the true church. Let me say that another way. The only true church is a regenerate church.

I don't know how people can fill up churches with non-believers trying to make non-believers as comfortable as possible and call it the church. It's not the church. The church is redeemed. The church has redemption. The church has been forgiven. The church has received saving grace. The church has received the application of the blood of Jesus Christ. It's been washed. It's been cleansed. Now admittedly from time to time, we want to certainly acknowledge that unbelievers are welcomed to come and to sit in and participate. But we function as the redeemed. It's not designed to be a comfortable place, a suitable place. It's not designed to be an affirming place for the unredeemed, for the unforgiven. And so we are very clear about that. We come together to worship God as the

redeemed. We come together to sing his praises as the redeemed. It's not important to me that an unbeliever doesn't like the style of music. That isn't important to me. What is important to me is that a believer praised God through the means that God has given us, the means of music, worship and praise. That's what's important to me.

I want the unbeliever to see, to eavesdrop on a worshipping community of truly regenerate people. We discover from time to time that there are tares among the wheat. That there are people who have claimed to be Christians who are not. And there are some people in our congregation, some of you here tonight who have claimed to be Christians but you are not. And it may never be discovered until, well it may never be discovered until Jesus comes. But nonetheless while we would certainly welcome unbelievers to come and while we certainly realize we can't rightly assess the spiritual condition of every person, we can't tell the tares from the wheat, we conduct ourselves as a group of redeemed people. And what concerns us is that we worship God as the redeemed.

First Sunday I ever came here, February 9, 1969 I preached a message on Matthew 7:21-23 and I called it How to Play Church because I felt the first thing I needed to say to these people in this church (we were over in the little chapel then), the first thing I needed to say to them was some of you are true Christians, some of you are not and the church is a place for true believers. And so I preached on many will say, Lord, Lord and the Lord will say depart from me, I never knew you. I discussed in that first sermon what it was to be a true, what it was to be a false believer. I talked about those who play church and those who are the true church about the wheat and the tares. I even read 2 Corinthians 6 about being unequally yoked with unbelievers and what fellowship as light with darkness. I talked about Luke 6:46 that first Sunday. Why call you me, Lord, Lord and do not things I say. What does it matter if you claim that I'm your Lord but you don't obey me? That is a useless claim.

I have reminded the people through the years that it was an old slab in a cathedral in Lübeck, Germany and it says this, "Thus speaks Christ our Lord to us. You call me Master and obey me not. You call me Light and see me not. You call me the Way and walk me not. You call me Life and live me not. You call me Wise and follow me not. You call me Fair and love me not. You call Rich and ask me not. You call me Eternal and seek me not. If I condemn you, blame me not."

We have always wanted to call people to true salvation. I think it was in that first sermon that I told a story about an actor at a dinner party who was asked if he would get up and recite something. Somebody said well I don't know what to recite. And somebody said well why don't you recite the 23 Psalm. You probably know that. And he said well I happen to know that and he stood up and recited it. And he did it as an actor would do it. There happened to be an old minister there as well who had preached the truth for many, many years. Somebody asked if he would get up and recite it and they applauded the actor but according to the story, people wept when the old minister recited it and somebody said the reason is he knows the psalm and he knows the shepherd. And that was the

difference. I wanted to be sure that there were people in the church who didn't just know the psalm but they knew the shepherd because the church is the called before who are also the called out. We cannot exist as a church if we are not the assembly of the redeemed people. We have always therefore been committed and I have always been committed to it and it's not about to change to the strong message of salvation.

You heard it again this morning right? Talking about repentance and forgiveness of sins. True repentance. True commitment. We have talked about that. We have talked about genuine faith as opposed to a false and shallow faith. We've dealt with false securities. We've called people to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. We have stressed baptism. Stressed evangelism. We believe that we must be genuine believers. Our standard is such. We don't want to set the standard any higher than that. If you are a true Christian, you can be a part of our church. Some people ask me, this is common, do people have to sign a doctrinal statement to join your church? And I always say no, if God will let them into heaven, we'll let them into Grace. They don't have to sign a doctrinal statement. But we want believers who are true because we are the called out. So when you define the church, we have to define it by the doctrine of election. You have to define it by the doctrine of redemption. Let's go to a third one.

We are called from, called from. Go back to verse 4, we have been chosen and we have been redeemed that we should be holy and blameless before him. This is called from. We have been called from sin. We have been called to holiness. This would be the doctrine of sanctification. The operative word there is holy, holy. We're called to be separated from sin. We are called by the spirit's power to remain unspotted from the world the bible says. And this has always been a concern of mine. You know even as a young pastor coming here in my 20s, I understood the doctrine of election and I understood because I was mentored well the doctrine of redemption and that the church was a redeemed community. And I understood the essence of sanctification, that we were not only called before and we were not only called from as it were, delivered out of sin - or called out I should say but we were called from and that is we were set apart as well as being called out, out of sin and darkness. We have been called from unholiness. We are to manifest holiness. That's always been a part from the very beginning.

We were concerned about an emphasis on humility. We were concerned about an emphasis on the confession of sin. Concerned about the Lord's table. Concerned about the church discipline. Concerned about worship because I believe that holiness is stimulated when God is exalted, right? And if you go to a church that never exalts God, very hard for you to see the holiness of God and measure yourself against that standard. That's why we've always emphasized worship. It isn't that worship in itself is enough. What happens when you worship God is you do worship God but the greater your understanding of God, the more God is exalted in your understanding, the more humbled you are when you look at your own wretchedness, the more you realize that you are not holy as God is holy and it calls you to a greater level of confession and the passion for purity.

So on the one hand, you lead people to holiness by setting the standard of a holy God high and keeping it there all the time, all the time. Another thing that calls people to holiness is an uncompromising attitude. And since we are the called ones who have been called out of darkness, called from sin, it is crucial we do not compromise with the unholy world around us. So you exalt God on the one hand and you debase the world on the other. That's one of the reasons why I resist letting the culture define the church for me because the culture is part of the ungodly, satanic system and its definitions are irrelevant to the church. But we've endeavored to do is to lift up God so high that we really do see God in all his holy glory and that shows us the standard and makes us intolerant of our sin. And then on the other hand, we have endeavored to deal with sin in an uncompromising way.

When a group is unholy, tolerant of sin, comfortable with sin, whatever it make call itself, that's not a true representation of the church because a church is a group of people called before the foundation of the world, called out of darkness into light, brought together, separated from sin. It calls us to constant self-examination, to as we've said before, the Lord's table. There's a fourth element to our calling. We are called before the world, called out of the world, call from the world but we're also called to. And this would be the doctrine of identification.

We talked about election. We talked about redemption. We talked about sanctification. Now identification. Look at verse 4. He chose us in him. In him. Verse 5 - He predestined us to the adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself. Again, we have literally been as it were placed in Christ, adopted as sons. Verse 6 - accepted by God in the beloved. In the beloved - a great statement. And what you have here is our identification with Jesus Christ. We are in Christ. We are adopted as sons of God through Christ to himself. And we have been blessed, freely blessed because verse 6 we are in the beloved one. Actually in the beloved one. What do you have you here? Well you have several things.

First of all, we have a tremendous identification with God because we're God's sons. That's how intimate it is. We are the children of God, the sons of God and we ought to conduct ourselves as sons of God should conduct themselves. Ephesians 5:1 the imitators of God as beloved children. If you are the children of God then act like it. We are God's children. We bear his nature. We bear his name. We bear his mark. We are called to intimacy with him and how intimate is that? Literally we are one with Christ. 1 Corinthians 6:17 he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. We are one with Jesus Christ. We have been called into union with God. Union with Christ. The Holy Spirit has taken up residence. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You know all these things.

We primarily are not saved to join a group. We are saved to enter into a personal intimate, unique relationship with the living God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. It's just an astounding reality. We can't even be understood by the world around us. They can't tell us how to behave because they don't even comprehend us. The average, well just anybody in the world looks at a Christian, they don't see

reality. They don't see who we really are. According to Romans 8 that's because the glorious manifestation of the children of God hasn't yet been revealed. If they only knew who they were talking to. They don't have a clue. When you walk into Target and do your little thing or go to the market or go to work every day or go to school or talk to your neighbor, they have no idea that the eternal God of the universe lives in you. They have no idea that you are an eternal child of God that the life of God pulses literally in your soul. They have no idea that you are a brother to Jesus Christ, a joint heir with Christ with whom he is not ashamed to call you brother. They have no idea who you are because that glorious manifestation hasn't happened.

Some day as in the case of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, when he pulled back his flesh and Shekinah glory of his true reality shown forth and the disciples when into a coma in shock, some day that will happen. That will be the glorification of the children of God before the watching world. But it hasn't happened yet. They look at us and think we are just like them. We are not. We are not just the members of an organization. We have entered into a personal intimate, unique relationship with the living God in Christ and in his holy spirit. This is a great reality. It's such a comprehensive reality that the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20 says I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I. It's as if he doesn't even exist but Christ who lives in me. I can't even tell where I end and Christ begins. We are so unique. This is identification. We belong to Christ. We belong to God. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Christ in his spirit dwells within us. God is in us. So when we teach, when we talk about Christianity, we're not talking about simply accepting mentally some dogma. We're talking about a relationship of intimacy with the living God that ties us to him in a common life, in a common sharing of all divine resources.

Poet once said near so very near to God, nearer I couldn't be for in the person of his son, I'm just as near he. Dear, so very dear to God, dearer I couldn't be for in the person of his son, I'm just as dear as he. That is an amazing and astounding reality. God views you as just as near and just as dear as his own son. We are called then to a sweet intimacy with Jesus Christ. We celebrate our oneness with Christ. We believe in the priesthood of every believer. That every one of us as a child of God has immediate and complete access to God. We don't need an earthly priest. We don't need some kind of sacerdotal machinery to get to God. We can be intimate with God at any point in time because God has taken up residence in our lives.

So we are identified with God, identified with Christ. And somebody who comes into the church, there should be so obviously a distinction that no person in the world could say this very familiar to me but rather they should say there is something about these people that is utterly unlike anything I have ever seen because our whole identification, our whole life is bound up with eternal God.

So the church is called before, called out, called from, called to and number five, called under. Called under. Verse 8 talks about the riches of his grace in verse 7, which he lavished on us and then he says in verse 8 in all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will according

to his kind intention, which he purposed in him. Now let me ask you a question. You tell me, where has God made known the mystery of his will? Where? Scripture. Scripture. Our relationship to God is a relationship of authority. We are not the authority. We are under authority. We have been called under. All wisdom and all insight has been known to God and revealed to us according to his kind intention and of course it has been revealed to us in scripture. That is the only source of that revelation.

God's wisdom and God's prudence has actually abounded to us, some translations say abounded to us. It is really a word that means to overflow. It's translated in the NAS that he has lavished on us his riches. He's lavished us with riches. He's lavished us with grace. He's also lavished on us wisdom and insight - the wisdom of eternal things and the wisdom of temporal application of eternal truth. And it all comes to us through the word of God. We understand God's mind. We know God's mind. You know it's amazing to realize that. We stand in the world so unique. History doesn't confuse me. I hear these people constantly on television as you do, I read in Time magazine or Newsweek or whatever periodical I happen to read or article in the newspaper or a book I'm reading and I read about all the philosophizing about what's going on in the world and all the people who are concerned about the direction of life and history. That has absolutely no negative affect on me at all because I know the whole story and so do you because we've submitted ourselves to the word of God.

And this church has always had a strong commitment to submit itself to scripture. I remember years ago, some of you will remember this as well, I was doing a series on men and women and marriage and it was right at the time that the feminist movement had exploded everywhere. And somebody called the Los Angeles Times and said that we had fired a woman from our staff because she was a woman, which wasn't true. The story wasn't true but that doesn't matter. It ended up on the front page of the Times - Male Chauvinist Pastor Fires Woman. And I was at my sister's house when I picked up the Times and read it. And I thought I wonder who that is. Who would do that? And it was me. But it wasn't true but so happened that there was a disgruntled person and it was at a time when I was preaching a series on the role of women and what they should - that series by the way has gone on and on through the years. God has used it and probably as greatly as anything I've ever done but immediately the National Organization of Women marched on our church and it was quite amazing. They were out there on the patio with sticks with signs on it protesting our church.

And of course our attendance went up about a thousand because of the media event and we had to file the choir out every Sunday and file in the visitors because of all the people who came late, who thought they could easily get a seat wound up in the choir loft. So they were sitting in the choir loft with all their various expressions, all of them basically visitors while I was carrying on this series. It was very interesting. The networks were all here. And ABC and CBS and NBC, they were interviewing people on the patio and they asked me to be on the - I remember Jess Marla, you probably remember him, interviewed me on NBC news. And he said to me these women in your church seem intelligent. He said how in the world do you get these women to believe this stuff?

They asked really ridiculous questions. Before he asked me that, he asked me what do I think of the Rams football team cheerleader's outfits, to which I made no comment whatsoever but it was just kind of a silly thing. And then he said you know the women seem intelligent, how do you get them to believe this. And I remember saying at the time, it's not very difficult. I said because you see they already consciously submit to the authority of the word of God so whatever portion of the word of God they hear, their response is immediate submission because they already submitted to the fact that the bible is the word of God.

That is the defining reality in our church in so many ways. We are called under the authority of divine wisdom and insight, which has been lavished on us and the mystery of the will of God revealed to us on the pages of Holy Scripture. That really has been the distinguishing element of the church. I don't think it's particularly the style of my preaching or the emphasis of my preaching as much as it is this conscious, total submission to the authority of the word of God and once you make that commitment to scripture, then whatever scripture says, you lovingly, happily, joyfully, obediently respond to.

So we are called under. You know I find that there are many churches that don't understand that. There are many people who have been in churches and I hear this a lot because people kind of cry on my shoulder who have been in churches for years and years and years and the thing their pastors have never done is bring the congregation to a point of conscious submission to the authority of the word of God. Maybe they listen to Grace To You or tapes or something and they say you know our church people have no clue about submitting to the authority of scripture. And if that's the case then you are not being a church. Because church is called under.

Dominant factor in our church is the control of the word of God. That for me of course is the great joy. The single greatest reality about this church is your willingness and your understanding of the benefit and blessing of submitting obediently to the word of God. And then number six, we are called with. We are called with. Go down to verse 10 there in Ephesians 1.

He says with a view to the administration or the purpose of God suitable to the fullness of time, that is the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. What he's talking about here is this, that in the end, it actually says in I think it's the Old Authorized, that God will gather together in one all things in Christ. That's the summing up of all things in Christ. This is the doctrine of unification, doctrine of unity. This particular verse, verse 10, looks together, looks ahead at the togetherness that comes in the fullness of redemptive history on the completion of the whole salvation plan, that the restoration of universal unity when everything is summed up in Christ. But that is a goal that is being lived out in some measure even now. We understand that the purposes of God are going to sum up everything in Christ. One day we will all be gathered in Christ. We'll all be gathered to glory. We'll all be the consummated bride of Jesus Christ, everything in heaven, everything in earth that would be believers in glory, believers here on earth, will all be gathered. The

whole gathering of everybody together in the end in one is the consummate purpose of God. That is - that's going to happen in what he calls in verse 10 the fullness of times. That is when time has been fulfilled, when all the purposes of time has come to an end and time is fulfilled as to his purpose and we leave time behind and we go to eternity. There's the gathering of everyone into one great bride, one great glorious assembly of eternal saints.

We've been called then to unification. That is the ultimate goal and certainly that is being lived out and expressed in the life of the church. Philippians 2 be humbled. Don't look on your own things. Look on the things of others. Ephesians 4 One lord, one faith, one baptism - celebrating our oneness, one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling, one God and father of all. Romans 15 talks about a very same kind of unity, the same kind of oneness. In verse 5, it says be of the same mind with one another in one accord in Christ. In one accord, with one voice, glorifying God. And of course Jesus' prayer in John 17 that they may be one. We understand that. And that's something that we as a church are committed to sort of believing that unity is in God's plan, drives us then to the path.

How do we get there? Well, how do you get to unity? Unity is a result of love. Love is a result of humility. You start with humility and that's Philippians 2 humble yourself. It's the way we start. We don't talk about ourselves. We don't parade our achievements. We're not into self-esteem. We're not into self-aggrandizement. We're not into bragging, building up ourselves. Rather we're concerned about humbling ourselves because when we humiliate ourselves and humble ourselves and see ourselves for who we really are, then we have the capacity because we look at ourselves and see that all we are is what God's grace has made us. And when we humble ourselves, we have the ability to love somebody else and give of ourselves and to serve somebody else and that's what produces the unity.

Our desire then is always to be a sharing, loving, serving, burden-bearing fellowship because we've been called with and ultimately we will be unified in eternity that follows the fullness of time. We try to have real fellowship here. We've traded in the superficiality for real fellowship, for working in each other's lives, for accountability groups, for discipleship, for a real fellowship that works at a spiritual core, not superficial as in so many churches. So we in defining the church, have to understand the doctrine of election, redemption, sanctification, identification, revelation, unification. Another great term, glorification.

We have been called unto glory. Look at verse 11; we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to his purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will. Literally we have an inheritance waiting for us. It is an inheritance of eternal glory. Verse 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of his glory and whom you also after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed were sealed in and with the spirit of promise who has given us a pledge of our inheritance with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of his glory. You were saved in order that someday

you might be to the praise of God's glory. So that in the end, the purpose of God is eternal glory and that's been a major theme. I mean that's the way it's going to be in eternity, that's the way it ought to be now. We ought to live to his glory.

I have preached on that. I have talked about that. One of the most milestone messages I gave in the early years of our ministry here was on the glory of God. It was a very definitive message to basically lay down the foundation. We live to the glory of God. Everything we do, whether we eat or drink is to be all to the glory of God. That's who we are. That's what we do. That's why we exist - to his glory.

Well we could say more but that one final note. I just want to add in verse 13, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed. We have also been called for something. And that is proclamation. We have been called for proclamation. The reason we believe is because somebody preached the gospel to us. Faith comes by hearing the truth. We have been called before. That's election. Called out. That's redemption. Called from. That's sanctification. Called to. That's identification. Called under. That's revelation. Called with - unification. Called under - glorification. And called for - proclamation.

Our responsibility is as long as we are in this world is to give the message of truth, verse 13, the gospel of salvation so people can hear and believe. And we've always believed that. We've always done that. Now folks this is a church for the 21st century. This is a church for the new millennium but frankly it's a church for anytime. Nothing changes. That's very comforting to me.

I'm not in a mad frenzy trying to figure out how to do church in the 21st century. We'll just let the Lord do what he's always done. He's clearly defined our calling. We are a called people and we've been called to these things. That's what a church is. Anything less falls short of the divine purpose. Now I think we have a great future as a church. It really has nothing to do with what happens in the culture. It has nothing to do with the declining morality. It has nothing to do with inclining materialism. It has nothing to do with the devastating shattering of family values. It has nothing to do with the framing up of the political structures of our society. The future of this church depends on one thing. Not what the culture does but what the church does. It depends on one thing. Are we willing in the future to remain what we are in the present, right? Only be more faithful.

And I am convinced that if this church ever lets go of any element of its calling, if it ever fails to remember that we are the church that God chose and that he is building, if it fails to have a redeemed congregation, if it fails to pursue holiness, if it fails to be intimately, personally committed to the living Christ that dwells in it, if it fails to submit to the word of God as its only authority, if it fails to be deeply, humbly, lovingly committed to each other, if it fails to live to the glory of God or if it fails to proclaim the gospel then it will be a church that will fail in its calling.

I obviously don't know how long the Lord has for me to be here but I do believe that we have great, great days ahead and it doesn't depend on the changes around us. Our future depends on the things it can't change that are true of us because they are defined by God. May God help us to be faithful. Amen. Let's pray together.

Father, this is great time to be alive because it's our time. It's the time for our church and your plan. It's our place. It's our time. What a privilege to be associated together in this assembly of called people. Keep us faithful to these great truths, these great realities so that we can be the church that you want us to be in the days ahead. May you be glorified greatly, mightily beyond all we can ask or think because we have been willing to be the people that you want us to be. We thank you for this privilege of which we are not worthy. In our savior's name and for his honor - Amen.

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