7 Ways Christ is Working in Your Church
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: GTY57

The whole idea of tonight is the coronation of Jesus Christ. The whole theme is His exaltation and that He be high and lifted up. And that is what I want to make a humble attempt at doing. I want to talk about Jesus Christ. I want us in our hearts and minds to see Him lifted up and exalted.

And sometimes that's not easy to do. Maybe in this environment it is because we feel the fever of the passion of so many hearts gathered around profound truths and great causes. But as we go back to those churches where we slug it out day in and day out, it's easy to get discouraged and disillusioned and even depressed. And we understand that the church of Jesus Christ is to be the all beautiful bride of Christ, but very often she appears more like a ragged Cinderella for whom the clock has struck midnight.

And we who preach and shepherd the church are continually burdened for the care of the church. The Apostle Paul said his concern for the church was more painful than physical torture. We're concerned for the church in so many ways. We long that our people have a deep fellowship with Christ and not some kind of shallow communion. We desire for our people in the church to have a triumphant spiritual experience to know what it is to triumph over trials and temptations and sin. And we pray for their strength. We desire their holiness, their virtue, the purity of their lives. We long that they would come under the authority of the Word of God and that they would not only believe it but they would live it. And we passionately crave that God would surround us with leaders who share our convictions and who will set the example for godliness before our flock. We desire that the church would be protected from Satanic deception, from grievous wolves from the outside and perverse people from the inside. And we are concerned that the beautiful bride of Christ be able to reflect the glory of her bridegroom so that many will be led to salvation. And every genuine shepherd carries these burdens in his heart.

And I'm here tonight to encourage you. I'm here tonight to tell you there is tremendous reason to be encouraged in spite of all the difficulties...not because of what we do, though we do our best, but because of what the exalted and crowned Christ is currently doing in His church. That's what I want to address not in my words but in the words of the Apostle John as he wrote about a vision he was given in Revelation chapter 1.

Take your Bible, if you will, and turn to the first chapter of Revelation. And here is the only passage in the Bible which gives us a detailed picture of what the exalted and crowned and enthroned Christ is

doing right now in His church. It is in the form of a vision, the first of the visions of this great apocalypse. It is a glimpse into the invisible world of spiritual and divine reality, a vision which came to the beloved and aged Apostle John in his exile on Patmos. And it must have been of immense encouragement to him.

Remember now, the beloved John was very, very old. He had lived to see the city of Jerusalem destroyed and at least a million, one hundred thousand Jews massacred. He had lived to see nine hundred and eighty five, at least, towns and villages in the land of Israel sacked and looted and devastated and its occupants killed. Any hope for the soon establishment of a Messianic kingdom in Israel seemed infinitely remote. He had outlived all of his fellow Apostles who had been systematically executed by the system. And he was doomed to die sitting on a rock five miles wide and ten miles long in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

And beyond that, the beloved church at Ephesus which had mothered six other churches, at least, and perhaps more had left its first love and the Lord threatened to shut it down. The church at Pergamos was idolatrous and it was immoral and the Lord was about to come with a sword in His mouth and smite that church. The church at Thyatira had compromised itself with sin and wearied the Lord with its iniquities and worldliness and faced divine judgment. The church at Sardis was dead. And the church at Laodicea made the Lord vomit. And there sat the aged Apostle.

From a human perspective you might have thought that the dream had totally unraveled. What hope for a kingdom for Israel? What hope for a church that would turn the world upside down? And John needed a word from heaven...more than that, he needed a vision because the picture was really bleak.

And we identify with that, we understand that. There are a lot of us here but there's a wide world not here. And it seems so vast and so impenetrable. But it's not just the world, it's the church that breaks our hearts...infected with liberalism and legalism and compromise with the world and immorality and unsound doctrine and heresy and apostasy and carnality and materialism and apathy and all the rest. And we're out there shooting our arrows as passionately and faithfully as we can. But we know our weakness and we know our frailty and we need something transcendent, we need a vision of the glorified Christ. We need to know when His hand is on the bow with us...what's He doing? And we find it in the text. Let's begin at verse 10.

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet saying, `Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'"

In the midst of John's loneliness, in the midst of his isolation, in the midst of his exile on a Sunday on the rock called Patmos, heaven opened up and revealed itself to John. And he was commanded to

write. When he heard that voice he turned around and verse 12 tells us what he saw. "And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me and having turned I saw seven golden lampstands."

Down in verse 20 we find out that those seven lampstands represent the seven churches. Made of gold they represent the preciousness of the church. Lampstands indicate that they are the light of the world. The number seven is the number of perfection, the number of completeness. So here we see the precious church compositely represented in the imagery of lampstands.

But there's more than just the lampstands. Notice verse 13, "And in the middle of the lampstands one like the Son of Man." This is an absolutely incredible vision. John sees the ascended coronated exalted Christ moving in His church. This is the vision that defines what it says down in verse 19, "Write the things which are." This is Christ moving in His church before the time of Tribulation, before the breaking out of the day of the Lord, the time of the millennial kingdom or the new heaven and the new earth. This is now and this is a powerful vision that all of us need to see. And I want you to see what Christ is doing in His church by just going through the elements of this vision.

First we see that He is building His church. It says in verse 13, "And in the middle of the lampstands one like a Son of Man." That takes me back to Matthew chapter 16 where Jesus said, "I will build My church." And there's a sense of intimacy there, "My church." There's a sense of certainty there, "I will build My church." And there is the sense of invincibility because "The gates of Hades will not prevail against it." He's building His church. He purchased it with His own blood. He paid the price. It belongs to Him.

Listen to me, He accomplished His incarnation. He accomplished redemption at the cross. He accomplished resurrection. He accomplished the work so perfectly that God exalted Him to His right hand and seated Him on the throne. And if He accomplished all those other things, I can promise you this, He will build His church. There is invincibility in that statement.

The term "Son of Man" is very important because it takes us back to Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14 where the prophet Daniel said, "One like the son of man was given dominion, glory and a kingdom." That's why you see Him here under the term Son of Man because here He is taking His kingdom. He is building His dominion. And Daniel wrote, "A kingdom of people and nations and men of every language who would serve Him and it would be an ever lasting kingdom that will never be destroyed." So Daniel provides the initial imagery that ties into this vision. When Daniel says that God is going to give to the Son of Man an ever lasting kingdom made up of people from all over the world, He will receive that Kingdom, He will build His church.

Now I want to give you just a little bit of insight into the profound nature of Christ building His church, listen very carefully. In Titus chapter 1 and verse 2 the Apostle Paul said that the whole process of evangelism, the whole process of sanctification and the glorification of the church was promised by

God...listen to this...before time began. The question is, before time began to whom did God make the promise? We believe that people were created when time began. It is very most likely that even the angels were created about the time of the creation of the universe. And so if you go before time began you have to ask the question...to whom did God promise this saving enterprise? The answer, 2 Timothy 1:9, it says that God made this promise to Christ Jesus. This is an immense concept. In eternity past the Father has perfect love for the Son. Love must express itself and so the Father one day says to the Son,"Because I love You perfectly, because You are the object of My divine affection, I want to demonstrate that love, and here's how I'm going to do it...I am going to redeem a humanity and I am going to give that humanity to You and I'm going to bring them to this very place where we are and forever and ever and ever they are going to praise and glorify Your name."

The Father deemed that was the greatest way in which He could unendingly offer the praise of His own love to His own Son. And so before the world began He wrote in a book the names of those who would make up that redeemed humanity. And it became the love gift to the Son. And it was before time began. And then the Father said to the Son, "But You have a part and Your part is to go into the world and pay the price to propitiate My justice, pay the price to satisfy My justice. And when You've paid that price as I impute the sins of all who will ever believe to You, I will impute Your righteousness to them. And on that basis I will gather them to glory."

And not only that, the Father went a step further...the supreme...the supreme demonstration of affection is imitation. And so the Father said, "I will not only bring them to glory to praise You forever and ever, but I will make them like You." And that's what it says in Romans 8:29, "We were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son that His Son might be the prototokos, the chief one among many who are like Him." And so why then does the church come into existence? Why is there a redeemed humanity? Because the Father is giving a love gift to the Son. And John 6 says, "All that the Father gives Me shall...what?...come to Me and I will lose none of them." Jesus Christ then came into the world to provide the atonement and now through His Spirit He is gathering His people and they will all come. I will build My church.

To those of us who have been chosen and called to be the agents who participate with Him in the calling of these people He promises, "Lo, I am with you always, I will not leave you, I will come to you. If anyone loves Me...He says...I will make My abode with him." No matter how we struggle, no matter how we battle, in the end the Lord will build His church.

Secondly, He intercedes for His church. It tells us in verse 13 that He was clothed in a robe which reached down to the ground to His feet and He was girded across His chest with a golden sash or belt. And that is the garb of the high priest in the Old Testament. And that depicts the interceding work of Christ. We look at our church and we look at all of their problems and all of their struggles and we see them battling temptation and going through the trials of life and struggling with all the issues. And as all faithful shepherds do, we spend a lot of our time on our knees and we pray for the flock

and how encouraging it is to know that the High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Priest, ever lives to make intercession for them. You think you care about them? He cares more. You think you want to build the church? He wants to build it more and He will. And we have a merciful and faithful High Priest who comes to the aid of those who are tempted.

That's such an encouragement to me. I can't get around all my people...but He can. He is faithful over His house, it says in Hebrews 3:16. No matter how our beloved people struggle and no matter how difficult life is and no matter how unreachable sometimes the path of victory seems, He will bring His sons to glory and He will be there interceding for them. And even when they sin He will bring no charge against them. And no matter how they fail, there will be no one to condemn and nothing to separate them from His love. He has an unequalled and undiminished devotion and sympathy with His beloved through all their dangers, all their trials, all their temptations. He is interceding for them.

Thirdly, the image of Jesus in His church is that He purifies His church. This is very vivid. "His head and His hair...verse 14...were white like white wool, like snow and His eyes were like a flame of fire and His feet were like burnished brass, or bronze when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters." And in that section we read about His purifying work, His head, His hair white like white wool, like snow...speak of His purity. His eyes like a flame of fire are that penetrating laser-like gaze that can see into the deepest corner of every life and search out the iniquity that is there. And when He finds it, His feet like burnish bronze are ready to move in chastening and every son whom He loves He scourges and chastens that He might bring that son to righteousness. There's nothing hidden from His eyes. He wants a chaste bride. He wants a pure virgin. He gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse His church. It is more important to Him that the church be glorious and without spot and without wrinkle and without blemish and holy and blameless than it ever is to us. He wants to present the church holy and pure and above reproach. And that's why in Matthew 18 He says, "Where two or three of you are gathered together in a case of discipline for sin, there am I in the midst." And when you say to someone you're bound in sin, you're only saying what heaven has already said. And when you see someone repent and you say you're loosed from your sins, you're only affirming what heaven has already affirmed. Heaven is moving in your church. Judgment begins with the household of God and every branch He purges...John 15:2 says. He's purifying His church.

At the end of verse 15 we see something else about our Lord in His church, "His voice was like the sound of many waters." John heard them every day...pounding the rocks. And when there was a storm crushing the rocks, I've sat on the traditional site where John was believed to have received the revelation on the island of Patmos and heard with my own ears the crashing of the surf. And the voice was like the sound of many waters...it was the voice of authority, it was the voice of commanding. And the Lord is ever commanding His church and He does it through the pounding voice of conscience and He does it through the pounding truth of Scripture, He does it through the preaching of the Word of God and He brings His church under the hearing of the truth. It's His truth, it's His

Word and we are told to disciple men by teaching them all things whatsoever He has commanded us. The church if it's to be anything, beloved, is to be the pillar and ground of the truth. It's to...

And Christ is proclaiming His truth, He's preaching and He'll always have faithful preachers, always.

The next thing I point out to you in verse 16, He controls His church. In His right hand He held seven stars, seven angelos, seven messengers mentioned in verse 20 as the seven messengers. I simply think they are the representative pastors from the seven churches who are going to carry back copies of this revelation to those seven churches. And by the way, the order in which they're given in verse 11 is the order of the postal route in Asia Minor. And as they went from Patmos with each carrying his letter, they dropped one off at each of those seven stops and delivered the book of Revelation which had been written and copied. These are the elders, the pastors of the seven churches and they're in His hand. God will always have His men. He will always raise them up. I suppose every generation of older men worries about the next, but He'll always have His messengers in His hand. I guess the question is, will you be one of them? He'll always have those who will be involved in the sovereign purpose of building His church. Ephesians 4 says, "And He gave to the church gifted men, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers."

Sixthly, verse 16 says, "Out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword." What is that? If you read further into chapter 2 verses 12 and 16 you read about it again, the sharp two-edged sword. Its purpose, very, very important. It is used to make war, according to chapter 2 verse 16. To make war against who? False teachers, those who bring in the doctrine of Balaam, those who bring in the corruption of the Nicolaitans. Let me tell you something. I worry about this. You know me, you know the books I write. I'm always battling against error in the church and I'm always comforted to know that behind me comes the sword out of the mouth of the living Christ. Even in the time of the Tribulation He cuts it short so that the elect cannot be deceived. He's protecting His church. And that two-edged rhomphaia, that big, huge, broad sword cuts every direction. And we're worried about the cults and we're worried about the isms and schisms and spasms and yogis and all the rest of the stuff that comes down the pipe, we're worried about the liberalism, the subtleties of Satan, the deceivers, the frauds, the fakes who seek to destroy the church...so is He. And what little power I wield on this earth can't compare with the exalted and crowned Christ enthroned in heaven and the sword that comes out of His mouth to deal with the deceivers.

Seventh, and this is so crucial a climax, "His face was like the sun shining in its strength." What does that mean? At high noon in full blaze on a cloudless day, John looking at the face of Jesus was as if he had looked right into the sun. What is that? What does that mean? It means simply that He reflects His glory through His church.

What are we saying? He puts Himself on display in His church. That's what He means. And Paul summed it up in these words, "He shines in us to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." What's this saying? It's evangelism. He evangelizes the world through His church, through the shining testimony of a transformed life, through believers who have moved from one level of glory to the next level of glory to the next level of glory and been conformed to Jesus Christ.

Do you see it? We serve the church. We live for the church. We die for the church. We work tirelessly to see it be what Christ wants it to be. And we're concerned with the saints' fellowship with Christ being full and rich. And we're concerned with the saints having the help they need in their temptations and their trials. We're there to hold them up. We're burdened that they would know the truth, believe the truth and live the truth. We want them pure and holy and undefiled. We want the church to be under control by Christ. We want the church to reach he world and everything we want He is doing.

I don't feel so lonely. John needed that vision. He needed to see the exalted crowned Christ empowering, interceding, purging, teaching, commanding, controlling sovereignly and evangelizing to gather His church. And He's doing it every moment.

And as Dr. Rogers said in the beginning of his great message, that's why we are always being led in triumph through Christ. It isn't because of us. It's because of Him.

All I can do is be a part of it or be set aside. And my love for Him moves me to be a part of it. My accountability to Him moves me to be a part of it. The privilege moves me to be a part of it. And the eternal reward moves me to be a part of it.

Do you see Him high and lifted up in His church? It doesn't depend on you or me.

What should be our response to this? Let's follow John, verse 17, "And when I saw Him I fell at His feet like a dead man." You know what that is? That's holy fright. I want to tell you something. If God really showed up in Toronto, they would not be laughing. (Applause) Manoah, the father of Samson, came home one day. He said to his wife, "We'll die, pack up the stuff, give it to the kids, we'll die." She said, "What? Why?" He said, "I saw the Lord."

Now why would he react like that? Because he knew that if he saw God, God saw him. That's terrorizing. I had a preacher say to me, "Sometimes Christ comes in the bathroom in the morning when I'm shaving and puts His arm around me when I'm shaving and talks with me."

I said, "You mean...you mean the risen and ascended Christ comes back like to the Apostle Paul, puts His arm, the literal Christ?"

He said yes. He said, "Do you believe that?"

I said, "No." But I said, "What bothers me is that I think you believe that. I do."

And he said...I just said, "I have one question. Do you keep shaving?" Because if the living exalted Christ ever showed up in my bathroom, I would be as a dead man. I'll tell you something, "Whom having not seen I love," and I'd just soon have it that way until I am prepared to see Him without being consumed.

Job came off of his experience and said, "I have heard of you with the hearing of mine ear, but now my eye sees you and I repent in dust and ashes." To have a visitation from the exalted Christ is not funny.

The disciples were out on a boat and it says a storm came in the gospels and they were afraid. And then it said Jesus got up and stilled the storm and they were exceedingly afraid. You know what's worse than having a storm outside your boat? Having holy God in your boat.

There was a woman in Mark chapter 5 who was healed by Jesus and the Scripture says she was terrorized, terrified. And it uses a word that is used of the shaking of the islands of the sea when the Lord comes in the day of judgment and destroys the earth. She was one shook lady. What shook her? She knew that if she had been healed, this was God. And if she saw God, God saw her and what He saw was sin.

John fell on his face.

I'm telling you, we need the Lord high and lifted up so we get things in perspective. And I really believe like Isaiah, what God is looking for is a man who is honest enough to pronounce a curse on himself. And literally Isaiah in chapter 6 consigned himself to damnation. Damn me...he said...woe is unto me, I am disintegrating, I've seen God.

Ezekiel had a vision of God and fell on his face several times. Paul had a vision of the exalted Christ and went blind. The disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration saw the exalted Christ and fell over like dead men. We need to minister in a sense of awe, with a sense of worship and reverence, holy fear.

But I love the next. Verse 17, "And He laid His right hand upon me." That was a familiar hand. It was Jesus but He didn't look like He looked last time John saw Him. But the touch was the same touch. "And He said, `Don't be afraid.'" Fear, yes...terror, no...don't be afraid, I'm the first and the last.

What do You mean? What I start, I...what?...I finish. I love that. And I'll tell you something more, you don't have to worry about your sin, John, because I'm the living one and I was dead and I'm alive.

What are You saying? What He's saying is your sin is not an issue, I already paid for it. It's a done deal. And furthermore, I've got good news for you, I have the keys of death and hell so you not only don't need to fear what I might do to you, you don't need to fear what anybody else might do to you because I've got the keys.

And then he reiterates his responsibility. Verse 19, just one word, "John, write. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, fix your hair, get the dirt out of your mouth and do exactly what I told you to begin with when I started this whole thing. Just go back to being faithful."

I don't believe in my heart that I could minister if I felt the Kingdom depended on me. I'm so glad it doesn't. And it doesn't depend collectively on all of us. He'll do it. What a privilege to be a faithful part...that's the issue. And to see Him high and lifted up and to live with holy fear and yet know that your sins are paid for and all He asks is that you give the message. Pray with me.

Father, thank You for the confidence that Jesus Christ is high and lifted up. Thank You that He will draw all men to Himself. Thank You...oh, thank You for making us a part of that unfolding glorious redemptive plan. We thank You humbly in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you, John. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).