

Revelation 3:7-22

Sunday 6/28/2009

One of the great studies in the book of Acts that really helps you put it all together is the study of a tale of two cities. The book of Acts is built around a story about two cities. But when you come to Revelation chapter 3, you are going to find that in that particular portion of the Word of God, the Bible is built around a tale of two churches.

Every pastor has a model for his ministry, or at least he should have. The problem is that the farther we get away from the Bible itself, the less biblical models we have, and the farther we get away from what God wants us to do. It is kind of like our own country. Our country was founded with the Founding Fathers. Basically, our country was based on the principles as a republic of a King James 1611 Authorized Version. Everybody who knows the definition of a republic versus a democracy understands that great truth. Our Founding Fathers were greatly influenced in what they did in our Declaration of Independence and in our Constitution by two of probably the greatest preachers that ever lived: George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. God used those men in a great time of this country and its beginnings where they preached the solid principles of the Word of God and influenced the Founding Fathers, and the unsaved ones to a great degree.

We see that just as our country has gotten so far away from that, the Church of Jesus Christ was built on some absolute fundamental principles too. God had a model for that just like the Founding Fathers had a model for our country. In both cases, we have seen it come very far away from what they originally intended, both with our Founding Fathers and God Almighty.

I. Foundational Principles of Old Paths Baptist Church

We started our church six years ago with about 24 people. I chose a name for our church very briefly here out of Jeremiah 6:16. People sometimes, if you ever go and they ask you what church you go to, you tell them, "I go to Old Paths," they kind of look at you like, "Where?" You do not think of a church with a name like Old Paths Baptist Church. They are all named Highland Park or North, South, East, West Baptist Church or Eastside or whatever. They give them some kind of name: Antioch, Grace Baptist, Fellowship Baptist, whatever.

But I wanted to make a statement. Very frankly, I did not think about this at the time, but the title for our church is found in Jeremiah 6:16, where it says:

Jeremiah 6:16

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

I definitely wanted to make a statement. I did not know to what degree, but it is kind of comical. Ever since we started the church, when you talk to somebody and you say, they say to you, "What is the name of your church?" I have had two responses when I say Old Paths Baptist Church. Some people look at me and say, "Oh, out of Jeremiah chapter 6, that is good." Other people say, "What is that?" Without even knowing it, they basically mark themselves of what

they know about the Bible. Jeremiah 6:16, that will be on the heart of every child of God that has ever been saved. Truly, it is a tremendous verse that talks about getting back to the Old Paths. If there is certainly a time when churches need to get back to the path, that is the Old Path that the Bible says is the good way, it is the day and age that we live in.

I told you when we started our church, I made no apologies about it, that I wanted to build a church as close to the New Testament church found in the book of Acts as I could. It is based on the Bible and nothing else, free from any kind of political goings-on that we find in many, many churches, and back to the basic fundamentals of the Bible. It is a church where leadership is earned by your life within the principles of the Word of God, not so much of who you know, but by the principles that we claim to believe, claiming to believe them and then putting them into our lives at the same time.

I think a church needs to have a three-way accountability system. Most churches do not have that. Most churches, the pastor wants you to be accountable to him and the church, but he does not want to be accountable back to you. That will never work. I told you when we started our church that we need to have a three-way accountability system.

1. I as your pastor need to be accountable to you. I need to be accountable for what I preach, for what I do, and for what I say. That needs to be my accountability to you.
2. The second part of that accountability is the fact that you as a church body need to be accountable back to me as a pastor. Notice I put me first and you second.
3. Then both of us in turn need to be accountable to the principles of the Word of God.

When that works the right way it is supposed to, it keeps everybody honest. Nobody has to really wonder or worry about what was said or what was done when everything follows the biblical principles. Accountability is not only key to our individual relationship, but it is also key as a church body. That is accountability to the principles of the Word of God.

II. The Danger of Complacency and Forgetting God's Hand

You remember when we came through Romans chapter 8, I taught you about the three infirmities that we all have. I took a whole Sunday on this. In fact, I think I may have taken three weeks and talked about each one of them. But I talked about how the Bible lists three specific infirmities that we have to struggle with.

- The first one is our flesh.
- The second one was our prayer life. We talked at great length about how we did not know how to pray.
- The third infirmity was the fact that we as God's people always forget God and His hand in our lives.

I could go back this morning in my own life in the last 40 years of my life. I have watched churches that 30 and 40 years ago, they had a Bible, they had God's heartbeat, they had a vision, they had a burden for the things of God. I think of the Akron Baptist Temple. If you ever get a chance to pick up a book, and you could probably buy it for pennies, you want to get a book

called God is Real. It was written 40 years ago by the pastor of Akron Baptist Temple, who was Dallas Billington, who many, many years ago went home to be with the Lord.

Dallas Billington represented so many of the last of the Philadelphia church-age preachers. He was trained, as many of them were, in the mind of J. Frank Norris. They all, seemingly, they all came north from south. He was from Kentucky. My pastor at my home church in Canton, Ohio, the Canton Baptist Temple, Dr. Harold Henniger, who has been home to be with the Lord, he also came up from Kentucky. You are going to find that the Bible belt as we know it today was all down through there. After the Civil War, a great revival broke out down in the south. It just really set the standard for what God was going to do in the next 30, 40 years. All of those old country boys down there who loved God, believed the Bible was the Word of God, they all came up north and started churches.

Dallas Billington was just an old country boy. He had never been to Bible college in his life, but he had a relationship with God and he had a Bible that he believed. He built a church in Akron, Ohio that at its heyday was running over 10,000 people. It is incredible to read the book God is Real. He kind of walks you through from the very beginning when he started and how he came through and the things that he experienced, the good things and the bad things, and all the things that he had to struggle with in building a church.

I look back at men like that and I think to myself, "You know what? I have watched that. I have seen that." I have watched those churches that 30 or 40 years ago, they had the vision of God. They had the heartbeat of God. They had the Bible. They had everything that they had. But today, we see those same churches. The old man has died now. Somebody took it over who never really paid the price to build that church. To him, he got it free. He walked into it and it was already done for him. There is a real value in your children learning the lessons of paying for something in life and not always getting everything free.

I think one of the tragedies of the churches that were once great across this country, Baptist churches that are now almost in apostasy. You would walk into the Akron Baptist Temple today where one time it ran 10,000 people. They are lucky to be 1,500 people today. They have no burden. They have no Bible. They have no vision. Like many churches today, they have no clue. I have told you, and you have heard me say this many, many, many times now, that we have got to always remember and learn the lessons of history. We never want our church to come to the point where it gets to that place where we forget what God has done for us and what God has given us.

I think probably the hardest thing in all of our lives and probably the most dangerous thing in all of our lives is to be able to keep that balance in our life and everything that we do. I know it is true in our personal life. Your personal life and my personal life is simply one of balance, being able to work and balance out everything that we do that God keeps the priority in our lives and that everything goes through Him and not around Him.

But it is also true of churches. I have found churches that I think there are two dangers in churches. Either people do not get any Bible at all, and that is a tragedy. You can go to places today where you will get 45 minutes of "give money" and then the second part of the sermon

where we get "Son of Give Money" and it will go on and on and on all day long and you get five or ten minutes of something in the Bible maybe. That is a tragedy. We all know churches like that and we all know situations like that. Many of you have come from churches like that.

But there is also a danger of getting too much Bible. You would not think that would be true, would it? You know as well as I, did you ever eat at a restaurant and it was the greatest restaurant you ever ate in your life and in a moment of passion for what you just ate, you said to yourself, "I am coming back here tomorrow." Maybe you went back the next day and it was really good too and then you said, "I am coming back next week." After three or four times, what happened? It was not as good as the first time that you went, was it?

Now I just had a hard thing for me to say about the Bible. But I want to tell you something, even in the Bible there is a danger. There is a danger in your life of you getting all the good Bible that you get all the time. You realize there is a danger. I know your answer to that, "Well, it just will not come as much." That is not the answer to it. Many of you already do that and how is it working for you, as Dr. Phil would say? But that is not the answer. The answer is to always keep that balance. Because what happens is, once you get to that point, then you begin to take what God has done for you for granted. You lose sight of the price that was paid for us to even have this church. You forget how God brought you through some personal issues when you first came in. Or maybe your marriage was on the rocks and God miraculously came down. Maybe you were just in a dead, cold church that had absolutely nothing. Maybe you were somebody that was desiring to serve God but you were in a repressive situation where you were never going to get a dead end street wherever you went. Then one day God turned a light on and God gave you everything you asked for. God healed your family. God took your life and made it what He wanted you to be. But in time, we lose sight of those things.

I remember when many of you came in, you had no Bible, you were confused, you were disillusioned with life, and many of you were disillusioned with Christianity. Then I remember how God gave you the truth. I think of what the psalmist said in Psalms 40 when he said:

Psalms 40:1-2

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

That is what He did for us. That is what He has done for us. And yet in the midst of everything that you have, in the midst of everything that I have, we begin to take things for granted.

I think this week, everybody knows now that Michael Jackson has died, and it is a tragedy in a terrible sense. But here is a guy that is a classic example. We look at Michael Jackson and all the things that he did and his weirdness and all that stuff, and I understand. But put this in a context. Here is a guy who in reality was much like everybody in this church. He had everything he ever wanted that money could buy. You, on the other hand, have everything that you could ever want that is in the Bible. The parallels are, I do not look at it as, "Well, maybe he was a child molester or maybe he did this or maybe he died of an overdose." I do not care. I look at the parallels. Here

is a guy who made how many millions of dollars? Probably billions of dollars. And yet when he is dead, he is 500 million dollars in debt. Here is a man with all that he had. He had Neverland and Tomorrowland and Future World and all of those things. And yet they say that with all the money he had, he consistently spent about 20 million dollars more every year than what he could have spent. I cannot even relate to that. Most of you cannot. But the bottom line is this, the parallels you do not want to miss it. He had everything that life could offer and you have everything that the Bible can offer. The truth of the matter is, in both cases, it was not enough. He ended his life a disaster just like many of God's people will end their life in disaster. Why? You know why? Because he forgot what got him there. He forgot how hard it was when nobody knew the name of Michael Jackson. He got to the place that because he had so much, he lost touch with where he had come from. You and I as God's people are the same way. We have so much. God has given us so much. We forget about the time that we had no Bible or we were disillusioned in life. We forget the day that God set your feet upon a rock and established your goings.

Personally for me, I think that my greatest challenge as pastor, without any question about it, my greatest challenge as a pastor is to keep this church balanced and at that mindset. To keep this church from not forgetting what God has done in our own church. The things that He has given us that we did not go out to look for. That God, because He has got His hand on this ministry, because this is a church that is based on a book that He loves, we forget the things that He has done for this church. We forget the things that He has done in our lives. We begin to take Him for granted. We get like any other four-year-old or five-year-old or six-year-old that when he gets everything he wants or she gets everything he wants, we get spoiled. When we get spoiled, we become complacent, and when we become complacent and spoiled, then we begin to complain. That is the way it works. When you have everything, you lose your sense of duty and obligation because you have got everything. Everything is fine. Everything is great. Everything is wonderful.

I have told you this before. The idea of taking a whole week off and just taking the baby Christians that have just come in and working with them and telling everybody else, "Hey, take next Sunday. No, better yet, take next week. Go find you another church. Go out and look and see what is out there." My philosophy in life, churches and ministry, is very simple. If you can find somebody better that will teach you the Bible, give you the Word of God, be there for you, give you everything that you need to help you and be some kind of person that is going to, on their part anyhow, give you everything you need to be the best saint of Christ better than I do, you need to be there tomorrow. Do not let any personal loyalty stand in your way. I mean, that is my philosophy on it. You need to be there yesterday. I would. I would not waste five seconds because I understand it. I am going to be held accountable someday. But we take those things for granted.

Sometimes, do not be surprised if I just do not shut down for the week, maybe the month, because this is a true thing in life. Sometimes you have got to lose something to really understand how precious it was to you. That is without a doubt the hardest thing that we struggle with. It is just true.

III. The Tale of Two Churches: Philadelphia vs. Laodicea

To me, a day like today, I think it is invaluable. I really do. I cannot imagine someone who is, and I know there are people that are sick today and people out of town and all that, but I just cannot imagine somebody who is a member of this church. Maybe it is just me. Maybe I am too into this. To me, this is the greatest day of the year. A day when we can look back and reflect and get a fresh perspective. Look inside ourselves and then refocus on what God has called us to do. Maybe I just answered my own question. Maybe the reason why you are not here this morning or you do not care about being here this morning is you are not focused on what God wants you to do.

Now I want to read Revelation 3:7-22 and I want to tell you an incredible story of two churches.

Revelation 3:7-22

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Now, Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. Lord, there is a lot to say today and a lot to get across to these dear people. Lord, I pray today that You will help us, Holy Spirit of God, that You will open up the hearts, that this day will be a joyous day. Lord, our time today, and in our time as we, Lord, I just do not think of anything more precious than the baptism of the people that have in this church that have trusted Christ to put their lives together. How anybody could miss that, how anybody would not want to be there and just soaking in everything that God has done in this church. My Lord, we love You, we thank You, and I thank You for this church and for the men and women who do care, for the men and women who have made this ministry the primary thing in their life. Help us today, Father, to go out of here with a joyous day, a day that we can rejoice in a church that we know is founded on the Word of God, under principles of the Word of God, that every man and woman in this room under the sound of my voice today have heard over and over and over again that they can have whatever they want out of the Bible. Lord, we thank You and praise You now in Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

This is an incredible story here. One of the ways that God teaches you in the Bible is by contrast. He shows you things that are opposite each other. We just took a segment talking about the last two churches here, but in reality, there are seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. The reason why I bring that to your attention is because there is something very important in here that God wants us to know. I am just going to touch on part of it today, but seven times you are going to find in these two passages, where these two chapters, where God tells you that if you have got ears, hear what He is going to say, that the Spirit has something that He wants to say to the churches. If God tells you something seven times to listen to, you better listen to what He has got to say. It is an incredible passage of the Word of God.

I look at the Bible this way: I look at the book of Acts as the birth of the church. I look at the book of Ephesians as explaining the function of the church. But I look at Revelation chapter 3 in this particular contrast of these two churches, and I find where Acts shows me the birth of the church, where Ephesians shows me the function of the church, Revelation chapter 3 shows me the heart of the church. The function of a New Testament local church, no question about it, is explained in the book of Ephesians. But it basically boils down to two aspects, and they are all found in the church at Philadelphia.

The word Philadelphia means brotherly love. This church represents an incredible period of time in church history, but everything that the church here boils down into two concepts:

4. The Word of God
5. The souls of men

Your job and my job basically, and you have heard me say this before, this is what I am talking about when I mean that we get out of focus. This is what I am talking about when I am saying we get off task. This is what I am talking about when I say that we lose our perspective and we get to the point where we get too spoiled, we get too satisfied, and then we lose what God has called us to do. We have so much. You are like a kid at Christmas. I look at my grandkids on their birthdays and I watch your kids at their birthdays. If I had all the stuff that my grandkids have gotten, my kids have gotten, your kids get, when I was their age, I thought I had died and went to heaven. You open up most of your homes and you cannot even walk, there are toys so many places. You know what happens when a child gets too many toys? They get confused because they cannot decide which one to spend any quality time with, so they do not really wind up spending any quality time with anything. It is one after the other, "Oh, this is new. Oh, this is new." I have even seen situations where they open a present, they do not even stop to see what the present was, they just, "Give me another present."

Your life and my life, if you are saved this morning, I have told you this many, many times, there are only two things in this world that are worth investing your life into, and they are the same two things that the church is built around: the Word of God and the souls of men. Those are the only two things that are going to last in a world where nothing is going to last. Everything else we put our investment in, everything else we wrap our lives around, there is coming a day, and you saw it when I just read that, there is somebody that is going to be ashamed, that is going to be naked, and of course we are talking about the judgment seat of Christ. The job of the church is twofold: the Word of God and the souls of men. Your life and my life, once we become saved, is about two things: investing your life in the only two things that are going to last for eternity. One of them is the Word of God, the other one is the souls of men.

In addition to that, in ministry, I have a very simple rule that I follow. I have several very simple rules that I follow, but in ministry and dealing with a church and building a church, here is one of the greatest rules and one of the greatest principles you will ever follow: however high your church goes attendance-wise, you have to broaden your base in accordance with your growth to support the growth that you have in a church. In other words, if you build a church high with a lot of people but you have no base support as it grows, as the church grows, you are going to become top-heavy and you are going to have a bunch of people with no foundation in their life. This church cannot, not that it will, this church cannot ever get to the place where we have a greater number of people in the regular congregation versus the foundation of men and women who understand the principles of ministry and have committed their lives to it. It is just that simple.

I am always looking for men and women who have the ability to be part of a fundamental doctrinal base of this church. I said that wrong, it is not ability, it is availability. People who

come to the point that they will realize what this thing is all about, that they will understand what God has called them to do, that we realize and we do not lose our focus. We stay focused on what we have got. We do not get so caught up with all of the things that God has given us that we lose sight and we forget the hand of God in our life.

My model for a church, my contrast, is the heart of the Philadelphian church versus the heart of the Laodicean church. We saw it in Revelation 3:8 where we just read, the Philadelphian church is called the church of the open door. The Laodicean church is called the church of the closed door. I told you from day one that my goal was to build a Philadelphian church in the midst of a Laodicean church period. As far as I am concerned, the success of this church, your life, my life, in this whole concept is found in one verse that we read here, and this is where I want to focus today. It is in verse 7.

In verse 7, and remember now we are talking about two churches in a contrast. We are talking about one church that was the church of the open door. What does that mean? It means that there was nothing that they could not accomplish. God opened the door, and in fact, it says that He opened it and no man can shut it. He also says it is not by their strength that the doors open, but by God's strength. Then He tells you that the key to that open door was their attitude of heart toward the Word of God in their own personal life. It is no wonder that this is the greatest period in church history. It is no wonder that this period of time produced the greatest preacher, the greatest missionary, the greatest Christian, the greatest men and women who understood the concept.

Then we contrast that to the Laodicean church, commonly called the church of the closed door. You will find in that passage over there in Revelation 3:20, Jesus Christ Himself says this about this church:

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

What do you think of that? Jesus Christ Himself is kicked out of His own church. The door is closed. He is knocking on the door to get back in. That is the Laodicean church. That is what happens when you lose your perspective of what God wants you to do.

As far as I am concerned, the whole key is in Revelation 3:7. He says in verse 7, "thou hast the key of David." He is talking there about Christ having the key of David, and then He says, "he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." One of the greatest studies you will ever take in the Bible is the study of studying doors in the Bible. You will find that when God opens a door, anybody can go in. You will find that when God shuts the door, nobody goes in. We saw in Genesis 7:16 when God was with Noah preparing an ark and it was looking for the time to come in and for the flood that came in, the Bible says that for a hundred and twenty years that door was open. In Genesis chapter 7, when God began to bring the judgment down, the Bible says that God shut them in. When that door was shut, it did not matter who on the outside wanted to get in, prayed to get in, begged to get in, when God shuts the door, the door is shut.

In Matthew chapter 25, you find the same concept in a story about the ten virgins. Five were wise and five were foolish. The Bible says, "While the bridegroom came, they all slumbered and slept." Then the Bible says that He comes, He takes the wise virgins, and then it says, "and the door was shut." God shut the door. It is shut. It is shut unless you have got the key. The key of David, Acts 13:22, God said about David, "he was a man after my own heart." The key of David, my friend, is nothing more than your attitude toward the Word of God. But you have got to realize that keys open doors, and in the Bible, doors represent opportunities. This is what I want you to see today.

I believe God will give every church, I believe God will give every Christian the keys to reaching our culture, and that is our function. That is the only reason this church exists. This church exists for one purpose, and I know many times because we have so much, we lose sight of that purpose, but I am here to bring it back to reality today. We only have one purpose, every one of you who are saved and count yourself a member of this church: that is to get the key to open the door to reach the culture that we live in and to penetrate that culture with the Word of God. The only way we are going to do that is to get the key that opens up the door.

I remember reading over in 1 Corinthians 16:9 that Paul was talking and he talked about a great door had opened to him, an opportunity to preach, but there was much adversity. I remember in 2 Corinthians 2:12 that the Bible said they came to Troas to preach and God opened up a door for them. He wrote in Colossians 4:3 asking them to pray that God would give them a door of utterance where he was going. You see, doors represent the opportunities that God gives us. You and I have an unending chain of opportunities every day.

IV. The Church's Mission: Reaching the Lost

The failure of churches today, the failure of missions today, is simply based on not having the key to the door and not knowing where to find it. Last year, I had a great Baptist convention taking place in Kansas City, and they had a number of things that were going on. One night, I saw that they were going to talk about the state of their churches, so I said to myself, "You know what? I want to hear this." So I went down and I listened. They got up and they talked about the fact that their churches were down 30% in offerings, 30 or 40% in attendance. You know what they did for the next hour and a half? They had one guy after another guy get up and try to explain away why their churches were dying. They would talk about the fact that people do not go to church anymore like they used to. I sat there for an hour and a half and watched one guy after another guy prop up their whole system trying to find reasons and excuses why the churches were failing, why people were not getting saved, and why things were not happening. They tried to look for everything, and they blamed it on the economy, they blamed it on the sign of the times, they blamed it on everything but the real problem.

Let me tell you something, you know where I stand on this. I believe the same Holy Spirit of God exists today that existed back in the book of Acts. I believe that people can get saved today just like they did in the book of Acts. I know when I read my Bible, I find that God does two kinds of preparation: He prepares sinners to be saved and then He prepares servants to go. When there are prepared sinners that need to be saved, the real problem is in that convention, the real

problem is in churches today, we have more prepared sinners than we have prepared servants. Why? Because we are spoiled. It is about us. So that is what we want to do. We will give God the crumbs. We will get what is left over. We will get all out of life that we want. We will do what we want to do first and then if there is anything left over, like scraps to a dog, "There you go, God, enjoy it."

We saw in Romans chapter 9, verse 1, we have read it now twice and talking about different areas, but you could not help but miss the tremendous burden that Paul had for the nation of Israel. He said that he would go to hell for them if Israel would get saved. What a burden! And yet, I will tell you, my friend, that is what is missing today. That is what happens when you lose your perspective. That is what happens when you get too much Bible. That is what happens when you come here and get everything that you want to get anytime you want it. That is exactly what happens. You wake up some morning and the burden you once had is gone. You work with lost people every day, they are going to die and burn in hell, but you have got your world and your plan, do not you? That is where we are at today.

Bob Jones Senior used to say when he was at every graduating class of the seminary back there in the days when it was teaching the Bible, he said, "I would like to take the last one hour of every young man's seminary training. I would like to take the last hour and suspend you on a rope over the pit of hell for one hour and let you hear the screams and the wails and smell the smells and see the stench and then turn you loose on the world." Now we know that cannot happen, not in that sense. But Paul saw it. How come Paul had the burden for his people so desperately that he was willing to go to hell for them, and you and I work with people every day and we never even think about eternity? Spoiled is the word. Spoiled is the word. Some of you are so dysfunctional you could not find your way to the men's room if you did not have somebody to help you, let alone finding your way through the Word of God and grasping the burden of what God wants you to do.

Ephesians 4:12 says the job of the church is "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." We have a teaching and preaching ministry in this church for me, it is one reason and one reason only: for you to learn everything about that Bible you can.

My father in the Lord is Mel Sabaka. I remember years ago when I was just a young guy, and Tommy Thomas, the guy I told you about that God in his death preaching really moved my heart for the ministry, was another man by the name of Phil Ward. Phil Ward was a World War I veteran that got shell-shocked in World War I and he could not move, could not speak. His eyes were wide open but he was still alive, but he could not do anything. You know what they did with Phil Ward? Phil Ward was unsaved, but he had a saved mama praying for him. You know what they did? They picked up Phil Ward's body out on a battlefield and thought he was dead and they threw him on a stack of corpses that were going to be buried. He told the story later that he is laying out spread eagle on these bodies looking straight up at the sky. People were throwing other bodies. He knew he was going to be buried and he knew he was still alive but he was paralyzed, could not speak, could not move a muscle. He laid there for like 12 hours, any moment thinking somebody was going to pick up his body and put him in a hole and bury him

alive. Then one medic was walking by and he looked over and he saw Phil Ward laying on that pile of corpses and he saw a tear running down the corner of his eye and he ran over and he found out he was still alive and he called the medics and they saved Phil Ward's life. That was the turning point in Phil Ward's life. I could see how it could be. He got saved and became one of the greatest preachers.

But I remember when he died, as Tommy Thomas died, I remembered that Mel said, "We just not only lost two of the greatest men that Christianity has ever had, but they never wrote anything down. Nobody ever, we did not have tapes back then, nobody got anything that they had learned. Nobody compiled, nobody reaped the blessings of all of those years of what God showed them, and when they died and went home to be with the Lord, it was all lost." Now I was not the smartest guy in the world back then, but I was the fastest one in the slow class, and I picked up on what old Sabaka said, and I made it my business for the next five years of my life that I walked with that man. I realized that he was the Apostle Paul of my life and God put him in my life. Every day in my life, every time I was with him, it never left my mind that I was not going to get everything out of him he learned. I was not going to allow what happened to Phil Ward and Tommy Thomas to happen to him. Now he is going to die probably any day. He is in a terrible way and he can hardly move around and it is just a matter of time. He is going to go home to his reward and it will be a great reward. But I want to tell you something, I got what he had. I gleaned, shocked, siphoned every piece of information about what God did, what God showed him, what the Word of God said. I got it out of him and I kept it. I am not going to be around here forever. Somebody better start sucking out of this brain what God has put in it because there will be a day coming. That is why the teaching ministry, that is why the preaching. You think I get up here and yell at you because I enjoy it? You think I labor over the Bible to make sure everything I say is 100% right on the target because that is just what I do? There is going to come a day where some of you are going to have to take over. Today, for the most part, God help us, spoiled. Rather do anything in the world but give your life to the ministry of Christ. I preach you and teach you the Bible for one reason: that you know it better, believe it better, and do better with it than I do. If you have been around here ten years or more and you do not know the Bible better than me or as good as me, God have mercy on you. What have you been doing the last ten years of your life? Your job is to glean and grasp and get from every source: the Bible, the men God has put in your life, the women God has put in your life.

Chris is going to talk to you a little bit about the financial structure and where we are at and talk about the missions program. I told you last week or a couple weeks ago, my missions program is built off of two guys: Zinzendorf and August Spangenberg. A guy asked me a couple of weeks ago, a pastor, a goofy little guy, and he asked me, he said, "Well," he says, "how many missionaries does your church have?" And I said, "About 60." He said, "Wow, how is it a church so small have 60?" And I said, "Because the difference is you think that a missionary is somebody who goes to Africa or goes to China. I believe that every saved person in this church is a missionary. If you are saved here this morning, you are a missionary."

We started a young marriage ministry a while back for one reason: to be missionaries to young marriages, for you to have the ability to work with young couples to help them to stabilize them.

We play softball, we play volleyball. To me, it has nothing to do with that. It is a mission field. It is your chance to reach somebody who is lost in a way that you could never get in their world. Were you talking to that boy about Lauren last night? I have never saw Zach so serious. I tried to go up and say hi to him, he pushed me aside, hurt my feelings for a minute. I tried to go up and say, "Hey Zach, how are you doing?" He said, "Fine," right back to it. I watched him get outside and talk to this guy. Then I watched John Busquette going over and talked to him. A kid came out, played softball last night. A kid came out, played softball, was lost. You think Zach brought him out or the people you brought out because they were great softball players? No, it is a mission field. It is reaching out and going after the ones that are lost, using your influence and what you know about the Bible to penetrate their culture.

Ministry knows no social barrier. Let me ask you a question here. Is Angie in the nursery today? Where is Angie? Where was Angie back here? Angie, other than you are saved, what do you have in common with Sandy Bidet? Well, obviously yes, but I watch you play softball. You were pitching last night, were not you? Sandy would not play softball, she? Sandy was not playing softball. You see, there are some things that socially you and Sandy will not do together. You play softball, Sandy is not going to play volleyball, Sandy is not going to play basketball, Sandy is not going to run track. You are going to do all those things. How old are you? You are 20. Sandy is 26. I have a point here, believe it or not. You do well in the athletic. Sandy, she shows well. I showed my pants legs together when Tom and I put them on. There is a trick and I fell over and cracked my head, but it is okay. You will reap what you sow.

My point is this: socially they have nothing in common. But I have done it before and will do it in the future that if I gave you two of the same girl to work on together, you can minister to her together. You know why? Because their bond is not social, their bond is ministry. You know what the mistake most churches make? They try to put the social aspect first. You do not come here to get socially involved. You come here to get ministry involved. When you get ministry involved, I have found over the years, your social circles will take care of itself. But as long as you put social first and ministry second, you will never accomplish either one of them because that is not the reason God brought you here. God brought you here to be a missionary. God brought you here to reach out to somebody and tell the story.

I tell you what I see it, Betsy, last night. Where is Betsy? I do not know whose team you did that for, that was a stroke of genius. That is exactly what I am talking about. There is a woman right there who loves God, whose whole family is in church, her family is involved in ministry. Incredible. Not only is she a great mother, but she was voted at the city in the mission the most one everybody wanted to sit next to on a plane. I do not know whose team she did it to last night. I know it happens all the time, but whoever thought of bringing her out to do a devotion for your young girls, that was a stroke of genius. That is what I am talking about. Betsy cannot run the bases, she cannot hit the ball, she probably cannot see the ball, but you did a great job last night in that devotion. That is what I am talking about. It does not matter socially. Why do we, why do churches always focus on the social aspect and never get the ministry when the truth of the matter is, when the ministry is done and that becomes the primary purpose, all the social things take care of itself? It is just that simple.

Learning how to penetrate our culture, getting on the inside of people's lives, becoming their friends, inviting them in, getting part of their life, bringing them into a church environment where people do not cuss, people do not drink, people do not do those things, letting them see there is an alternative to life out there. Let them see and understand that there are things going on here that are different. Put a contrast into their lives and then let the Holy Spirit of God do it.

The needs of our culture are very clear: broken marriages, busted lives, broken families, hurting people, disillusioned with life, disillusioned with themselves, disillusioned with God, looking for anything that is stable and real. You know what God wants to do in your life? God wants to take you and put your stability in the life of somebody with no stability. He wants you to be their introduction to Him. He wants them to see the contrast between the people they hang out with and where your life is and what goes on. That is what He wants. He wants to take you and put you in a scenario where a bunch of people who are struggling in life have an anchor. They can see where something changed. That is what He wants to do. You become their introduction to stability.

I have a young gal, she is in the nursery this morning. I talked with her this week about a girl that she keeps calling her on the phone and keeps having contact and they go to lunch together. The only thing the girl wants, the girl is unsaved and lost, and the only thing the girl wants to talk about is how she cannot believe how she does not do the things that she used to do anymore, that she has seen the change. I do not know what to tell you folks. To me personally, the greatest single asset of our church outside the Bible and the Holy Spirit of God is the people God brought into this church. I know people are human, people do dumb things, people make mistakes. I know that people come in under false colors and false pretenses. I know people come in and try to hurt to work and do all this and do all that. I understand that.

Let me tell you something I learned a long time ago. This book is the Word of God and this book is light. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Wherever you have got light, you have got bugs. Go out tonight on your front porch, turn the lights on, and five minutes later it will be every bug in the world swirling around it. You open up the Word of God and start preaching about the light, every bug in the world will show up. Now take that for granted. But I am talking about the men and women in this church. When I started this church six years ago, my prayer was not for quantity, my prayer was for quality, and God answered my prayer.

Last Thursday night, we talked about the seven stages of spiritual growth, and I walked you through those things. I look for, I asked God to give me men and women who would see my burden, pick my burden up, and together with me in this ministry reach people and penetrate this culture and then help me train young men and young ladies for the ministry that we can. I am looking for people like in 1 Corinthians 16:15. I am looking for people like the house of Stephanas that the Bible says about the house of Stephanas, they were addicted to the ministry. Now some of you have come out of addictions. I have only ever had one addiction in my life. I know when you go to AA, they say, "I am a recovering alcoholic." You go to Narcotics Anonymous, they say, "I am a recovering addict." You know what? I am an addict, but I am nowhere near recovering from it. My addiction is that book. I am looking for men and women,

cards face up on the table, I am looking for men and women who share the same addiction. I am a drug dealer. I feed people's addiction.

We have so many people at night come in and out of my house. It is just from five o'clock to six o'clock to seven o'clock to eight o'clock, in and out, in and out, in and out. My neighbor the other day, she said, "You know what? If I did not know you better, I think you were on a drug house over there." I said, "Well, do not be shocked at this, I am." Then I witnessed to him. He did not want my drugs.

People come and people go. I always follow a basic simple rule in my life in my ministry, at least I try to, and that is simply this, and maybe it will work for you. I never in my life, I cannot say I never because I try, because sometimes I do not do it very well, but I never try to in my life in my ministry, I never try to focus on what I do not have. I always stay focused on what I do have, and that is a great principle for you in life. I think most of our time we waste our time and spin our wheels because we spend so much energy and time worrying about things that we do not have and we lose sight of the things that we do have. I know what I have here. I know what I have here. I know this ministry is not for everybody. I never claimed that it would be. I know that you will have people come in and they will only go so far, and after where they are going to camp, they bring their tent with them, and after where they stay, that is okay. I understand that. I know that when people come in and they will leave, that when people come in and they will leave on good terms, that people leave and come in on bad terms, that is just the way it is. But I never lose sight of taking care of the people that God has given me who so desperately want to be part of this ministry.

You see, my job is real simple:

6. Stay as close to God as I can.
7. Get the burden from God and let Him show me what He wants us to do.
8. Communicate that burden to the church.
9. Then take it to the ones and see who will see this ministry and react to this ministry and want to pick up the burden with me and understand that we have got to build the base. We have got to continually build the base. I never let myself get distracted from that job. That is the only reason I exist. That is my calling in life.

Over the last six years, I do not know what to tell you today, words fail me. We talked about David's mighty men of valor many, many times, and to me in this church, I have some of the, without a doubt, some of the greatest people that any pastor could ever ask for. Many of you have become absolutely invaluable to this ministry. I look at some of you and what you do and I think to myself, "You know what? If I lost that person, if they were killed in a car wreck or something happened, I would have to find six people to replace that person." I look at the men and women in this church who have picked up the burden. You always seem to keep your focus. You always seem to get in the right perspective. I am not saying you are perfect, you do not make some dumb mistakes, we all do, but you never get sidetracked from what God has called you to do. You have picked up the addiction and you are right there and you are ready to go and you are going to do whatever you have got to do. You have committed to this ministry Sunday

morning, Thursday night. You see the athletic program for what it is. You understand and you are in the process of learning how to lead, and many of you have become absolutely invaluable. I could not do what I do and God has called me to do. I simply could not do it without you.

To me, on anniversary Sunday, that is what it is about. It is about you recognizing what we have, not losing our perspective, keeping our focus, and then building together the base that nothing pulls you away. I have to laugh with a couple last year, and this is what I am talking about, this may be absurd to you but it is funny to me. I had a couple last year, they had some relatives come in town who were unsaved and they are staying with them in their home. The relatives, they said, "Here is what we are going to do all week, and we go to church on Sunday morning and we would like you to go with us." And the relatives said, "Well, we do not think we are going to go to church." Now most people's response would be, "Okay, well, we do not want them to feel bad so we will stay home with them." No, not these kids. They said, "Okay, well the food is in here and the things over here, feed yourself, down to eat. We will be back about 1:30 and we will pick it up from there." When I heard that, I thought to myself, "What a testimony that is!" Now to you that is just a goofy little thing, but on my side of the river, on my side of the fence, what a testimony because I know how human nature works. I probably, these people knew that they were supposed to be Christians and that, and human nature does, when they can talk you out of church so quickly, they say to themselves inside, I guarantee you, "So they are a Christian, huh?" What a testimony to say, "You know what? We are glad you are here, but we are glad you are staying with us, but you know what? Did you see that sign over there? This house belongs to the Lord. We do not care who others may serve, but for me and my house, we serve the Lord. We will be back at 1:30 or 2:00."

I have watched some of you grow. I have watched some of you come through very deep water in life. I have watched some of you do what is right when you did not have to. I have watched you allow God to mold you through your mistakes and learn from them. I have watched how God used you in other people's lives who now have the same issues, and because you did what was right, God now is putting you in a scenario where you can be used the way God wants you to. I have watched what God has done with some of your families, how one by one like dominoes that God had just worked it down the line. In my mind, without a doubt, you are the greatest group of people. God has answered my prayer in giving me the men and women that understand this ministry, who want to put their lives and bolt themselves together understanding that God has placed you here in His church, us together in these last days to do His work.

V. A Warning and a Ministry Verse

Now in closing, let me just say this to you younger Christians. I see you younger Christians, some of you moms and dads, some of you even grandma and grandpa, some of you singles and some of you young couples. I see some of the greatest potential I have ever seen in my life. Sarah, let me tell you something, I cannot tell you, you did not know I was listening last night, you did your first devotion last night, did not you? I was standing, I was in that garbage can right next to it. It was a little hot in there and a fly was bugging me, but I got some free food and it was not too bad. You did a great job. You could not have done that a year ago. It was flawless.

There is nothing I would have changed about it. You hit every point down the line and then gave them a great plan of salvation. That is what I am talking about. There are some of you out there just as young as she is in the Lord that are right there. Some of you have already, I just happened to be in the garbage can looking for something when she did hers, so I heard it. But that is what I am talking about, you younger Christians. The last two or three years you have come in, let me tell you something, you get into that basic Bible class. I could not believe that almost a hundred people came that Saturday morning because you want to learn the Bible. I see some of you younger Christians grasping the Word of God and some of the, I see within you some of the greatest leadership potential I have ever seen. God just keeps bringing them in.

But then I am going to give you a warning and then I am done. I do not know if you saw it or not in Revelation chapter 3 as I read it down there, but look at verse 10. To the greatest church that ever lived, He said this:

Revelation 3:10

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

In every church and every Christian, there comes an hour of temptation. I am not talking about the temptation to go out and go back into the world or do something goofy. No, no, no. This church was tempted with something that wound up destroying it because it leads into the Laodicean church period. Where the Philadelphian church means brotherly love, the Laodicean church period means people's rights, justice of the people. And yet when you come down through here and you read this passage, you find this great hour of temptation for that church was a temptation that they forgot what God had done for them. They forgot where God had brought them from. They forgot the Bible by which God's hand went through in their life to touch them and bring them to where God wanted them to be. For you and for me and for this church, there lies the same temptation. I guarantee it will never happen as long as I am pastor of this church because I will never lose my focus on it.

The bottom line is this: I would rather have a church of 20 that are committed than a church of 200 that most of them do not care. It does not bother me. I have never been about numbers, never been about quantity. I am about quality, and that is the bottom line. We cannot ever lose, we cannot ever fall for the temptation that we forget, we take for granted, we become satisfied, we become spoiled. We have so much good, and you need it. You need as much Bible as you can saturate yourself with, but within that lies the danger of balance. That is where it lies. That is where it is at. Within that, I stand before you probably as the happiest man in the world tonight or this morning.

I want to give you this verse. It is my verse for ministry. Mel gave me this verse 35 years ago. I was looking in my Bible the day he gave it to me. He gave it to me about a month before I am giving it to you right now. He gave me this verse and he said, "You know what?" Because I was getting ready to come out to Kansas City and we knew I was going to the ministry, and he pulled me aside, he said, "I want to give you my verse that I have given that I have had for you, and this is why, Bob, everything I have done, everything I have said, the hard things, the sweet things, the

mean things, the bad things, all gets boiled down into this." He said, "This is why I took you under my wing. This is why I gave you what I have given you, and this is why I want you to have this verse. If after everything I have given you, if I failed to give you this verse, you would never have a context for it." So today on our anniversary Sunday, I give you the verse that he gave me 35 years ago in hopes that someday you will give it to somebody else.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

To me, it is not about ministry. Ministry means nothing if you are not one with the hearts of the people that God has given you. Ministry will never get accomplished if we do not have a common bond of the things that we do together. So I leave that verse with you. When he gave me that verse, everything that he had said and done almost came into crystal clarity of context, and I give it to you today. Today is our day. Rejoice in the ones that get baptized. Enjoy our day together. Enjoy each other and we will have a great time together with the Lord.

Now I want to have Chris come up here. Let me just say this, Chris is going to walk you through the financial setup in our Constitution. In fact, if you would like a Constitution, we have them over in the bookstore. You can have one if you do not have one. Chris, as far as I am concerned, is the great unsung hero of this church. Chris works a full-time job. He takes care of the business. He is the secretary of this church. He is the treasurer of this church. He just does about everything of this church and works a long, hard job. I want to say publicly, I could not do what I do without Chris Fender. I jokingly tell him all the time, "The day you quit, I quit," because I do not know who I would ever get to replace him.

In a man's ministry, and I have several, and I thank God for them. Some of you young ones have come in, have literally stolen my heart and I love you. I would give you anything in the world. But I want to tell you, I do not know of another man in my life that has been my rock in ministry, that has done for me behind the scenes what I do not have to do, that I can give myself to what I do. I want you to know, Chris, I love you, you and your wife, and I appreciate you. I am a guy who never, never lose sight nor do I ever take for granted what people do for me personally and my family, but also this ministry, even above my family, because this ministry is number one. But I want to say I love Chris and I love his wife and I appreciate all that he does. I just could not carry on and function the way I do. He makes it so easy for me to do what I have got to do because he is always got the hard work and leaves me the easy stuff to do. Chris, you come on up here now, and I love you, buddy, and you come on up and take this time. Are you going to have the guys pass those out that we are going to do? Let us get some ushers up here and pass everybody out one of these. Just take one for family if you would.