

I. The Laodicean Church and Deception

I have been waiting for a while to really put this whole thing about Christianity, churches, and pastors into perspective for us. It has been quite a while, but I needed the right place to be able to unload it all. Last week, John 14:1-3 was certainly the right place. I used it as a primary example, building up to it, of truly the mess that has come upon God's church and God's people today.

This is the great fraud of the Laodicean church period in church history. If you know anything about your Bible, you know that church history was darkened around 60 AD and runs up to the last year of the church, which is still in the future. You know that it is broken down into seven periods, which makes it easier to study and break down. We are definitely in the Laodicean church period, and of course, Laodicea means "the rights of the people." It is a time in church history that we are living in right now, where people are more concerned about their own personal rights than they are the rights of God. They are more focused on what they want than what God wants from their life.

It is a sad situation, and even more sadly, it has been put into effect by men in the pulpit who have lost the power to preach the Word of God. They want to build great congregations and understand that if you preach hard and preach against sin, you are not going to be able to build a big church in the world we live in today. So instead of preaching against sin, they allow sin to come in, and that is the way to build a mega-church today. It is a great flaw that has been perpetrated on God's people today. What has happened is God's people, who lost their Bible, or maybe they were never really into it to begin with, have failed the warning that God gave in Luke 21:8, where He told us and admonished us never to be deceived.

Because when you get deceived as a child of God, the next thing that happens, once the deception takes place and the devil comes in, is that you get disarmed. Once you get deceived and once you get disarmed, the next thing that happens is that you are going to get discouraged. God's people today are the most disturbed people on this planet. There used to be a difference when you could talk to an unsaved person whose life was a mess and show them Christianity, where things got fixed in your life, and you had a good relationship with God, and you had the victory. You cannot do that for the most part anymore.

While in many of your lives that is still true, when you look across Christianity, God's people today are in the same disastrous shape as unsaved people are. When it comes to your life and my life, whether it be your marriage, your own personal relationship, whatever it may be, whatever problem we can get into, the Word of God has the answer for us to get out of it. The world does not have that. The world has the model through life where there are problems, issues, discouragement, and disappointment. God's people are supposed to live above circumstances, but that is not true today.

God's people's lives, even though they probably go to heaven, for the most part, are a disaster. There is no power brought into life; there is no difference in their life. Now they go to a church

that propagates everything the world does, like down in Westport: the booze, the music, everything that takes attention away from the greatest single thing that God ever gave us—the Word of God that you are holding in your lap this morning. God's people were warned not to be deceived; they were warned not to be disarmed, and when they are, they become discouraged.

II. Paul's Fear: Corruption from Simplicity

This was Paul's great fear for the church. We talked about a little part of this last weekend. Paul wrote 2,000 years ago; he started the church and was the apostle to the church. He gives incredible directions and warnings to the church. In 2 Corinthians 11:1-3, this is what he said. He is speaking to the church, but he is speaking to us today.

2 Corinthians 11:1-3

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

That is what has happened today. Men in the pulpit who disarmed you because they deceived you, now bring you to the place where you wonder why your life is so upside down. You have had your mind destroyed from the simplicity that is in Christ. You are told today that the Bible is a hard book to understand. You are told today that the Christian life is a hard life to live. Well, it most certainly is when you do it man's way, but God's way was a simple way. God's way was always a simple way. From the beginning, God's way was a simple garden. The first murder in the Bible created a city. So we go from the simplicity of the Garden of God to the complexity of the asphalt jungle. That is the difference between God and man. God will always keep it simple.

Some of you this morning need to be saved. There is nothing simpler in this world to do than for a man or a woman to trust Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior. But when man gets a hold of that, he makes it so complicated. Now you have to go to classes, now you have to get baptized, now you have to join a particular church, now you have to do this, now you have to do that. No, all you have to do is come to the cross and say, "I am a sinner. I need to be saved. I believe that He died for me. Will You come into my heart and save me?" And you are in.

One of the greatest studies you will ever take in your Bible as you get a little farther along is this idea of the devil in Genesis 3 beguiling Eve. The word "beguiled" in the Bible is one of the greatest word studies you will ever undertake. It is defined differently in the Old Testament than it is in the New Testament. You find it when the devil came to Eve in Genesis 3 and then you find it in the church when Paul is giving the warning. In both cases, the devil destroyed what God's plan was, and what it was, it was the simplicity that is in Christ. The body of Christ today, our minds have been corrupted. It has been corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus. Somebody who is a Christian should be getting God's mind, the way God looks at everything in

life, and now they are getting a different mind, and it is doing nothing but complicating everything about God's simple plan of salvation and Christianity.

III. Satan's Infiltration of the Church

Then Paul goes on to tell us in 2 Corinthians 11, a little bit farther in that chapter, talking again about this deception, this beguiling. He is talking about Satan now and his cohorts.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Now, you see, we all think the devil today is in the bars. We all think the devil was down in Westport last night, or wherever your party spot is. We all think that the devil today is out there destroying and doing all those things. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, he does not mess with those people. You know why? He has already got those people. You know where the devil is at today? He is in churches. He has transformed himself as an angel of light, and he has ministers that are in the pulpit today, propagating his plan. The idea among God's people that the devil cannot get into a church today and infiltrate any church today is beyond me. We get the idea that the devil is down in the bars, he is down in the strip clubs, he is out in the casinos; he is in all those places. But when it comes to church, there is a big sign over the church that says, "Devil, you cannot come in here." Yes, he can, and he will, and he will.

I used to think that the ministers of unrighteousness that he talks about here were the cult people, like the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the people like the Church of Christ, Catholics, all the people out there that teach another form of salvation, the Methodists, the Lutherans, all that crowd. I have changed my thinking on that the longer I am in this and the more I see the devil infiltrating churches. This is talking about somebody who is pretending to be a minister of righteousness, not somebody who is in a cult. He is talking about somebody who gets into the pulpit, who pretends to be teaching the Bible, who pretends to be giving you the truth, and does it, beguiling them.

Of course, we know that this starts back in Genesis 3:1, all the way back with Adam and Eve, where Eve is the first type of the church in the Bible. This is why Paul uses her as an example in 2 Corinthians 11. When the devil shows up to Eve to get her to sin and to destroy the plan of God and to ruin mankind for the next six thousand years, and to get everybody in this room, your soul, in hell, you would have thought that he would have got her into some deep sin. You would have thought he would have got her to run away from her husband. No, you know what he did? The first words out of his mouth are simply, "Yea, hath God said?" Then he changed what God said. You know what he did? He destroyed with Eve the simplicity by changing the Word of God, what God said, and perpetrating a fraud on her. Some things never change.

As we saw last week in 2 Thessalonians 2:18, which we have been talking about, this is the mystery of iniquity. This is the mystery of the devil, the Antichrist, and the forces of evil and hell at work down through history for one purpose: to destroy the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus and take the church, salvation, the Bible, and make it so complicated that either you cannot get to it in your own mind, or you just give up and do not want to. If God's people today—and I know they are not going to—but if God's people today could grasp the reality of what is actually really going on around them in these last days, based on what the Bible and all the information God has given you, it would change your mind and your world immensely. I told you last week, my job, whether you like it or not, my job as your pastor, is to try to protect you from this work of deception that will in time destroy everything about you.

IV. God's Sure Provisions: Salvation, Word, Calling, Reward

There was a time when the two safest places on earth were for a baby within its mother's womb and for a young, baby Christian within the church of Jesus Christ. Those were the two safest places on this planet. Look at it today. Babies are ripped from their mother's womb through abortion. There is no safety there. A woman can go out and live her frivolous lifestyle and engage with whoever she wants to engage in, and when she turns up pregnant and does not want it, she discards that baby like she throws away an empty cardboard box. Not safe anymore. Churches were once safe for young, baby Christians. But just as we have aborted real babies out of mothers' wombs, we have aborted baby Christians out of God's church, and we are destroying them.

Last week, I was getting gas at QuickTrip and saw a big sign that QuickTrip is now a safe place. If you are a kid out there and you are scared or somebody is after you, you can run into QuickTrip, and there is a hotline in there, and now QuickTrip is a designated safe place. It is pretty bad when you have to go from the church to QuickTrip to find a safe place. But you can get a hot dog at QuickTrip that you cannot get here, so maybe there is some balance out; I do not know.

In my relationship with you as my people, I want to try to help you in your life recognize and then build into your life the three things that are sure of God that He has for you. Obviously, the first one—this is not one of the three—the first one is your own salvation. That is a sure thing, in hope of eternal life with God who cannot lie, promised before the foundation of the world. If you are unsaved this morning and you trust Christ as your own personal Savior, that is the surest thing you are ever going to get into in life.

Now, once you do that, God now has three things for you that are sure. Maybe you do not know them this morning. Maybe nobody ever told you. My job, my life, and everything that I do as a pastor to you, my people, is to try to build those three things into your life:

1. to understand it
2. to receive it
3. to let me help you develop those things in your life

This is a great devotion, the three sure things for a Christian, and this is what I try to do. The first thing I want you to see: in 2 Peter 1:9, God tells us that He has given us a sure word. The Word of God is the only sure thing you have in this life. Nothing else will matter. I am not saying there are not other fun things to do; I am not a stick in the mud. I like to have fun and do things and go places and see things; I enjoy it too. But when it comes down to the bottom line and the bedrock of life, you only have one sure thing that God has given you, and that is the sure word.

Once you understand that God has given you a sure word and you accept that, like many of you have, the next thing God will give you through that sure word is a sure calling. You will find that in 2 Peter 1:10. God saved you for a reason; God has a purpose for your salvation. I would like to think that God just saved me because He could not stand me not being in heaven, and maybe that is true to a point, but He had more for me than that. Once you get the sure Word of God in your life and you become sure in that book, through that book, God is going to give you a sure calling. This is what I want to talk about today, because some of God's people, most of God's people, have had that taken away from them by the fraud that is perpetrated in churches today. You have a sure word; through that sure word, you have a sure calling. Then, through that sure word and that sure calling, Proverbs 11:18 says that God has for you and for me a sure reward. Those are the three things that you can count on in life that are sure, added to salvation.

V. The Pastor's Watch Care and the Church's True Asset

My job, Hebrews 13:17, whether you like it or not, my job as a pastor is to have the watch care for your soul. The reason for that, and the reason why God has churches, Bible-believing churches with pastors who understand the Word of God, is to keep you from being deceived. Because it will creep into your world; it will seep into your life just like water will seep into the foundation of your house. It will come to the point where it will get into every aspect of your life, and in time, if you do not have some kind of system to protect you, you are going to be in trouble.

For most pastors, their greatest asset will be the big church bank account where they can do all the things they want to do, or the great buildings that they build. They will stand back and walk out there and look at all these big monuments to whoever, these buildings that they built, and they will brag about this and brag about that. To them, that is their greatest asset. Well, I want you to know today that the truth, the greatest asset in this church, which should be in any church, is you. You are the greatest asset. I do not care about the building, though I thank God for the building God gave us and that He provided this for us, but I would just be okay with being in a big tent this morning if that is what it is. I do not need to have four walls. For many, many years, before a child built the temple, Jesus Christ, in the form of the tabernacle, was in a tent. If Jesus Christ can be satisfied with a tent, so can I. I thank God for what He gave us; I appreciate it. But I am telling you, a building to me, a bank account to me, will never be the number one asset of any church. It will be the people that God gives you.

Every one of you, and many of you do not see this yet, unfortunately, some of you may never see it, but everybody in here, no matter what level you are on spiritually, you have a value to this church. You have something that you can contribute. You are important here. There is no

deadbeat, and even if you are here this morning and you are not saved, where most pastors would see you as an unsaved person and really not count on you for much, I see you with great potential. Because all you have to do is get the sure salvation, and then God will give you the sure word. You stick around here, you will get the sure calling, and if you answer that sure calling, you will wind up with a sure reward. That is the plan God has for everybody here.

I do not care if you got saved a week ago, maybe you have been saved for 50 years, maybe you have been saved for 20 years; I do not care. But whatever level you are on spiritually, God brought you here. You say, "Well, I have problems." Hey, pal, God brought you here so you can solve your problems. He did not bring you here so you can still have your problems. Now, maybe you will, but that is not His plan. His plan was to bring you here and fix you. Fix you. The Bible says by the washing of the water by the Word, you get clean.

You know as well as I do, you wear the same clothes all week long like I do, and by the end of the week, Saturday, they are pretty rank. It is a thing where you want to wash them, right? So you take your clothes off and you put them in the washer, and you put the soap in. I did not know anything about this when I was living by myself years ago. My mom got remarried and moved out. I paid, back then it was a lot of money, \$40 because I went down to wash the clothes and the washing machine would not work. So it was a Maytag. I called the Maytag guy because they do not do anything at all. He came over, and I said, "It will not work." He looks around, closes the lid, pushes the button, and it starts right up. I did not know you had to close the lid to get it going. I paid \$40 for that.

I remember one time I locked my keys in my car, and I called the guy that comes out and does the lock stuff. He popped that sucker open in 10 seconds, \$35. Two weeks later, I did it again. It was just one of those things. Do not laugh at me; you have all done that. So I called him again. The same guy came back. I said, I was kind of embarrassed. He popped that sucker, and I said, "I got my money out." He says, "\$25." And I said, "\$25? Last time it was \$35." "Yeah," he says, "I gave a discount for stupid." You see, that would make some of you mad. I come out \$10 ahead. I am okay.

I am telling you, no matter where you are at spiritually, God will take you and use you. He brought you here for a reason. Now, I know you have some things to learn; I am still learning. I know you have things you have to work on; I am still working on things. But I am telling you right now, it is no accident that you are here today. There is no accident that you are listening to what I am saying today, because He has provided for you, after a sure salvation, He has provided you a sure word. But He also has given you a sure calling. You need to answer the phone. The hand of God.

VI. Satan's Infiltration and the Church's Defense

In my ministry over the years, I can reflect on many things and things that I have seen done and things I have thought about. But there was one key word that, in my mind, the way I am put together, I hold up as probably the highest concept for me in ministry, and it is the word "loyalty." Being loyal. It first starts with my loyalty to the Word of God. Then it starts with my

loyalty to my own family. And then it starts with my loyalty to every one of you, recognizing that God put us together, that we are, as 1 Corinthians 3:9 says, "labourers together." All we have is each other. In the world that we live in, brother, that should mean something to you, because outside those doors, outside these walls, outside that sure word, it is waiting to devour you, your family, everything you count as good.

Over the years in ministries, I have seen this and experienced it more than once; it is just the way that it works. All churches go through it, but it is just the way that it is. I have had satanic implants come into my church, not here so much, but all through the years, I have had satanic implants come in and try to destroy the work. They will undermine my authority. They will get people together, call people up on the phone and say, "You need to really be careful what Bob is teaching because it really is incredible. Correct. I am the really one who knows the Bible." You get things like that; we get things like that. Our loyalty to the Word of God will always be our first line of defense, because we have to stick with the Book. We have to judge what somebody says or what they do not say, including me, by what the Book says. So that is our first line of defense when it comes to satanic implants coming into any church.

Our second line of defense will be our loyalty to each other, having each other's back. Just like Judas got implanted into the early apostles, the devil has done it all down through history, and he will do it through churches. You have seen Paul's warnings all through his writings on this. Back in 3 John 1:9-10, he talks about a guy by the name of Diotrephes and how he tried to stop the work of God. He tried to undermine what Paul was doing. I learned from things like that. I learned when Paul says, "Mark those who cause division among you." If you would go back to my Bible in 3 John, I have not looked at it for a while, but I have a list of probably 16 or 17 guys back there that through my years in the ministry did exactly what this guy tried to do to Paul. I never published those names; I would never talk about those names with anybody, but they are there for my reminder that it happens.

No matter how good a church is, no matter how biblical it is, probably the more biblical it is, the more danger it is in. But I am telling you this right now, there will always be that chance where the devil infiltrates somebody in, just like Judas. Some will creep in with bad doctrine. I can always spot those guys because they will show up; they will come to Bible study on Thursday night or church, and they do not go to church anywhere. They will show up here just to find what is going on. They will look for some weak, young Christian, pull him aside, start talking to him, engage them, be nice to them, and unbeknownst to you, they are looking to get their hooks into somebody. Every once in a while, they come in, and they are so stupid they will hook into somebody who really knows their Bible and get themselves into a real fix with somebody who knows the truth of the Bible, the Word of God. Praise the Lord for that.

But that is why I asked you over and over last week, "How much error will you allow in your life as a Christian?" When it comes to God and the Word of God and your life with Him, how much bad teaching are you willing to put up with? How much bad doctrine are you willing to associate yourself with? How much false teaching are you okay with? How much non-biblical junk will you allow in your life to corrupt your mind with? The Bible says, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." So the answer to that is there should not be any when it comes to those things.

Taking your stand, I have told you many, many times, I know we are in the Laodicean church period, but I understand my church history, and the church before our period, the Philadelphia church period, was the greatest period in church history with the greatest church. I am committed in my ministry and my life to build a Philadelphia church within the Laodicean church, and it can be done if you go back and see what made them special.

VII. The Trojan Horse Strategy

Now today, you begin to see how the devil infiltrates. I like the movie, maybe many of you have seen it, with Brad Pitt in it, I like the movie Troy. I like it because so many people think I look like Brad Pitt, so I really enjoy that movie. But I am telling you, it is based on a real time. I know it is Hollywood and all those things, but honestly, there was a real city named Troy, and it was a mighty fortress of a city. They went to war, and nobody could breach the walls; the walls had not been breached for hundreds and hundreds of years. It was impossible to get inside that city to destroy the people. They stayed on top and just decimated everybody that attacked it.

I learned from reading in history before that, not that movie, that is a great picture of what the devil tried to do to the church, because if you know Isaiah 27 and 28, you know the walls of churches and Christianity are Bible doctrine. You lay them in courses and you build up the walls that make the church strong so the devil cannot get in. They knew they could not breach those walls, so they came up with a Trojan horse syndrome, did they not? They gave the appearance that they left. They put a hundred or so of their key warriors in this big wooden horse and left it. The people of Troy came out and thought they had a great victory, and they brought the horse into the city. While everybody went to sleep that night, guess who came out of that wooden horse and defeated the city? That is how the devil will do it. You see, most people are so stupid; you think that when the devil attacks the church, he comes in a frontal assault. He never does. No, no, he will look for the back door to be unlocked. He will look for the windows to be unlocked. He will not come at you straight on.

VIII. The Siege of Jerusalem Analogy

I think of the great example of the destruction of Jerusalem in 606 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the devil, wanted to destroy the people of God, so he comes down to destroy Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a walled city, unbreachable. I mean, it was an incredible fortress. You know what he did? He laid siege to it for almost nine or ten years. He did not make a frontal assault; he just starved them out. He just waited out there. No food came in; nobody came out. He just waited. He wore them down, and after a point, when they were so weak, he breached the walls. You know what the devil has done to Jesus Christ's church today? He took your Bible from you, so he took any food, and then he just waited and wore us down. Then he got on the inside. It is so simple; it is so easy to understand.

IX. The Way, The Truth, and The Life

Now today, I want to go just a little bit farther in John 14. After His great discourse last week on "My Father's House," we went through that. We now know that there is absolutely nothing in this for the church directly. Now we are going to look at verses 4 through 12, and He gives us some great insight. After He gives them the discourse, now He gives them instructions. He tells them that He is going to leave. He tells them that their hearts should not be troubled. And then now He shows them why and He gives them the instructions before He goes back to the Father. So let us read it. John 14, picking it up in verses 4 through 12.

John 14:4-12

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

Now, Lord, help us today. These are good people here today, and they love You. For the most part, they care about You. They care about the Word of God, and they want to do what is right, and you do not find that very often today. So help us today; help me today to give them the truth; help them today to receive the truth; help us to find, Father, that sure salvation, and then the sure word, and then the sure calling, that we might all receive a sure reward. I will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for Your sake we ask it. Amen.

Historically here, we know what we have now. The eleven apostles are up in the upper room. We have covered all this, and Jesus is now telling them that one of them is going to betray Him, that He is going back to the Father, and they are now to carry on His work. As it starts here in time, if you know your Bible, we are coming to the end of John here pretty quick, and then we would get into the book of Acts and then on into the church. We know that what is starting here, as far as Him going back and giving them instructions, is also fit for us because He tells them two things: they should know where He is going, and the second thing, the way they are to go. This is based on what He has already told them.

Now, first off, let us talk about this thing called "the way." It will be the way that I showed you a while back in Proverbs 8, "the beginning of His way." In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth; that beginning is the beginning of the way that God was going to go down through history. The way of God down through history and how we are to be a part of that, you are seeing in John 14. He has now called these disciples out, called these apostles out. They worked for three and a half years; now He is going back to heaven, and He has given them instruction that they are to know the way. As a New Testament Christian, you and I are to understand that, I say this again, our sure calling. We get that sure calling through the sure word, and then someday we are going to receive a sure reward. 2 John 1:8 says that we need to get a full reward. So we are seeing how this starts with them and then moves, after they die off, into the early church under Paul, and then as they die off, into the New Testament church down through Christianity, and here we are.

I want to talk to you today about your sure calling. There is no question, and I am sure that He has called you if you are saved. You did not get saved and then He lost your phone number. If you are saved here through a sure word, He has a sure calling for you. The question you have to ask yourself is, "Have you answered that call?" You know the goofy Charismatics, they have this little thing called "dial-a-prayer," where you get up in the morning, and if you are having a bad day, you can dial this number, and there will be a recording, and on the recording it says, "This is the day the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice in it." And that is supposed to get you through today. You know that is a farce. If you really want to dial a prayer, you call it up, and if I am on the line, I am going to say, "This is the day you are going to get it in the neck, so you better get in that book and walk with Him." Now the atheists came up with one. The atheists came by, they saw the Charismatics and all that stuff, and they said, "Well, we are going to have one; we are not going to be outdone by these Christian people." So they got a dial-a-prayer, and you call that line as an atheist, and nobody answers. That is how it works. God called you. If you are saved, you have a sure call; I am sure of that. I do not look at you as a saved person and say, "Well, maybe He did or maybe He did not." He said He gave you a sure word, and then He gave you a sure call. If you want a sure reward, you better get the first two and be sure. See how it works? I want to talk to you about that for just a little bit.

Then we find the example of most of God's people in our story: Thomas. God love him, who for time and eternity has been coined with the phrase "Doubting Thomas." This is the guy in John 20 when Jesus shows up, he says, "I am not going to believe that You are the Son of God unless I can put my hands in Your side and Your nails in Your hand." And he sees it, and Jesus says, "Go ahead." And when he did that, he says, "I believe that Thou art the Son of God." John 20, that is a great study. Jesus is standing there; He has holes in His side and in His hand, but He is not dropping any blood on the ground. Work on that for a while.

But Thomas, Doubting Thomas, he just cannot get it. He is like so many of God's people. He says unto Him, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" You know, that is what most of God's people would say today. They say, "Lord, how in the world do I know?" And then Philip gets over there in John 14:19, and Philip kind of says the same thing. Here it is again. You know what He says to Philip? He says to Philip, who does not get it either,

and to Thomas, "Hey guys, have I been with you so long that you do not know these things?" I ask you a question: You have been saved 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, 30 years. You walk with God those years, most of you probably have, five years, eight years. How can you be with Him so long and not know where He is at?

See the problem God's people have? They should have known exactly where He was going, exactly what He wants them to do, because He had given them a sure word. They should understand by now their sure calling, and so should we. But the body of Christ today, most of God's people, are floundering around in the sea of life with absolutely no direction in life. We do not know what we are doing. We are as depressed and discouraged as any unsaved person out there. You have the sure Word of God that has the power to transform your life to live above the circumstances of life, to have the victorious Christian life that a Christian should have. And look at us.

Now, I do not know what you have gone through in life. I do not know what tough trials you went through. Do you think your trials were worse than what Paul went through? Have you ever been beaten 39 times save one on your back? Have you ever been kicked around and left for dead? Have you ever been put in jail and beaten and tortured for what you believe? Have you ever been tried to be stoned for what you believe? I bet Paul's therapist was a busy man. The only therapist you need, the only therapy I need, is found in the pages of those books. God gives us everything we need to live above the circumstances. What is wrong with us today? We have been deceived, and we have been disarmed. They have absolutely no clue. They are standing there saying, "Lord," they just walked with Him for three and a half years. They heard every message He preached. They saw the miracles that He did. And now here they are, and it is crunch time. He is going back to heaven. And what they are saying is, "How are we to know the way? How do we know the way we are to go?" Boy, God's people are just like that today.

I am polite to them; I am kind to them; I am nice to them. I would never say anything derogatory to them. But in my own mind, I look at most of God's people and I say, "What a joke." God saved you how many years ago, and here you are instead of standing on the promises, you are sitting on the promises. You are doing the way you want to do it. You care nothing about the things of God. Your whole life is before you, and it is all fashioned around what you want, nothing that He wants. And then you think there is something wrong with me. Well, there is.

Let me ask you. In Genesis 1, 2, and 3, you find in Genesis 1, very early on, I think it is the third verse, where the Bible says, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Now I want to tell you something: that is the first time you find the Spirit of God in the Bible, and the first time you find the Spirit of God in the Bible, it is moving. Do you know it never stops? The key for you and for me to understand where He is at today and what He is doing and what He wants you to do is to be able to follow the Holy Spirit of God where He goes down through history. He filed a flight plan in Genesis 1, and He has been moving in a certain direction ever since that time.

God's people, you are told in the Book of Ecclesiastes that there is a circuit to the Holy Spirit of God. It runs in a circle, and God's people today are scratching their head, wondering where God

is at, what God is doing, looking at the mess in our country, looking at the mess of everybody around them, looking at an upside-down, inside-out world that is on the brink of disaster, and they are actually wondering where God is. No, it is not where God is; where are you? I know where God is. I can read the Book of Esther. The Book of Esther is the greatest key in your Bible to show you where God is at today and what He is doing. The question is not where God is at; the question is where are we at?

Now Jesus gives them an answer in John 14:6, and He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Now that is quoted by so many of God's people and preachers, but it is understood by very few. He says that "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Then you get His way only through His truth. When you get His way through His truth, it changes your life, and the life you now live in the flesh, you live by the faith of the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you. It is not your life anymore. He is the way, He is the truth, and He is the life, but I am not talking to some little Christian talking point to fill in my blank in my sermon. He is the way, the way He is going. You find it through His truth, and it gives you the life to do what God wants you to do: a sure calling. A sure calling.

X. The Purpose of the Church: Perfecting the Saints

Then it gives us a verse in John 14:12 that will be for me the real reason for God saving me and showing me His way through His truth. If you are a Christian and you ever pondered or wondered why God saved you, we hit gold today. Here is the reason. In the book of Ephesians, it will be the book in the New Testament that explains the infrastructure of the workings of the church. He says in Ephesians 4:10-13, as He is laying all this out, talking about Christ and the establishment of the church.

Ephesians 4:10-13

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Now, this church is here for three reasons. I gave you the three before about your sure things. Now here is the reason we are here:

4. We are here for the perfecting of the saints. That is you.

The perfecting of the saints is not to make you perfect, because you are never going to be perfect, not perfect in the sense of a sinless life. No, no, no. The perfecting of the saints is in relationship to the work of the ministry. We need to perfect ourselves for the work that God has given us.

When God gives you a sure salvation, and then you get a sure word, and you get a sure calling, you have to understand what that calling is as within the body of Christ, the church. A pastor teaches you and perfects you. He takes you to the point where he perfects you for the work of the ministry, and then he edifies you. What does that mean? It means he makes you better than you are. You know how a pastor makes you better than you are? Because he does not see you in your problems. He does not see you with the struggles that you have. He sees you in the potential that if you get the sure word and the sure calling, God will do the rest, and He will perfect you.

I have watched God do that in so many of your lives. So many who came in here, you were lost as a goose in a hailstorm. You could not find your way around anywhere. You knew nothing about God. You knew you had a longing, a hole in your heart. You knew something was not right; something was incomplete. You know what you found? First off, you found God's sure salvation. And then the second thing you found, you found that God gave you a sure word, and then you allowed this church to perfect you for the work of the ministry. You got involved on whatever level you were. Maybe you are mowing the grass, maybe you are parking cars, maybe you are driving a shuttle, maybe you are a disciple. Whatever level you are on, you allow God to take you, mold you, and make you, and use you. And then this church stands here to edify you, make you better, make you better, make you better.

Look at Ephesians 4:11. Here is the order of the church and its development, all built around us, starting in John 14 where we are at, and then moving up through it. He says in Ephesians 4:11, talking about Christ after He went back to heaven—this will be Acts 2 on—"And he gave some, apostles." You will find those apostles called out in Matthew 10. You will find them at work in Acts 1-7. Then you will find another set of apostles as you go through the early church age. He has twelve apostles to the nation of Israel, but He has seven apostles to the church that are listed for you. So we see that He gave some apostles. That is where it started. And then He says in Ephesians 4:11, "and some, prophets." You will find them in Acts 11:27-28 at the church of Antioch; you see, we are moving along. And then He said in Ephesians 4:11, "and some, evangelists." Now there will be Paul and Philip in Acts 8 and Acts 20. We will be, as we move through the book of Acts. And then He says in Ephesians 4:11, He moves right into the church. He starts with the foundation, the apostles, moves up through the book of Acts, He moves up through the evangelistic time of starting churches, and then right into the church age, "and some, pastors and teachers." That will be Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and yours truly.

He gave the church pastors. Why? For the perfecting of the saints, that makes you better than you are. God did not want to save you and just take you to heaven. He has a sure calling for you. He wants to save you to do His work, to do His job, and He wants it done through the church, so He gives you a pastor in a long line starting with the apostles, which winds up with pastors and teachers for three reasons: to perfect you in the work of God, and then edify you to make sure you keep getting better. That is His work. So we are part of His work through His truth, and through that, we find the real life that He wants us to have. We are so satisfied that once we get saved, we think that is the life—not going to hell, going to heaven. That is not the life that He wants you to have all by itself. He saved you and gave you life in Christ Jesus so you could fulfill your life with Christ Jesus.

XI. Greater Works Through Believers

And then look at John 14:12: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." The average child of God looks at that verse and scratches their head, wondering how they could ever imagine how you and I could do greater works than Christ did. It almost sounds blasphemous. It almost sounds like, "Well, that should not be in the Bible." I mean, He is Christ; how could I, how could you, do greater work than He did? Really? Are you that shallow? Christ's whole life and ministry is a model for us and our church, and of course, our work together.

You see, He only lived 33 years. Some of you have lived a lot longer than that. His ministry was really three and a half years. Some of you have been ministering a lot longer than He had. You see where He is going with this? In that 33 years of His life and that three and a half years of His public ministry, He never got 20 miles outside of Jerusalem. And yet, He came to reach the whole world with a gospel message. Did you ever stop and consider that? He wanted to reach, "For God so loved the world," He wanted to reach the whole world. And yet God did not do it with Him. He never got outside probably 20 miles from Jerusalem or where He was born. But the next two thousand years, He gets it done after He went back to heaven, through His spiritual body: you and me.

You and I, through a sure word, are to get a sure calling, to let this church perfect you for the work of the ministry, that you and I can carry on and do greater things in your 50, 60, 70, 80 years of life, and your 40, 30, 50, 20 years of ministry, compared to His three and a half. I think about that. I told you last week, the only two things worth investing your life in this life: one of them is the Word of God, and the other one is the souls of men. You do that through a sure calling for the sure book.

I look at Martin Luther. He transformed all of Germany from the Catholic Church to the Lutheran Church. Christ never got to Germany, are you kidding me? I think about America. America was one of the greatest nations on this planet that God had plans for. And America's foundation of Christianity that was written into our Constitution by the Founding Fathers and stood for many, many years before we got into the Laodicean church period, was put out there by two men: George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. Christ never did that. Or did He?

I think of Adoniram Judson, the great missionary to Burma. Christ never got to Burma. Or did He? I think of Samuel Nott, who spent his whole life in India. Jesus never got there. He spent three and a half years not 20 miles in a circle from where Jerusalem was. I think of Jan Hus. Jan Hus turned the whole country of Czechoslovakia to Christ. I think of John Paton to the New Hebrides Islands. They were all cannibals. When John Paton spent 51 years—Jesus only spent three and a half—when he went into that place on those islands, they were cannibals, and there was not one Christian. When he died after 50-some years on the mission field, there was not one lost person, and there were churches all through those islands. Instead of eating people, now they were devouring the Word of God. Jesus never did that. Or did He? I think of Hudson Taylor in China. You see, you and I can do greater things than He did. That was His plan.

The reason why it is such a foreign concept to you is because you do not know the way. You got lost in the shuffle. You think He saved you so you could go to Sunday school. You think He saved you so you would not go to hell, and that all may be true. But the same God who gave you a sure salvation, gave you a sure word, gave you a sure calling, and that calling is for you to finish the work that He started. In that, you will do greater things.

XII. Starting with What You Have

I cannot speak for any of you. I look at my own life, and let me just say this: I do not compare myself to any of these guys. I am the biggest mess you ever saw in your life. I mean, I am not very smart. I do not have an education. I just make a ton of mistakes. As I stand here before God, many times I wonder why God even decided to use me. I look at it and I thought to myself, "You know, up there in heaven, they must have looked at me." I looked around, and God said, "We need somebody down there to preach the book," and everybody looked around, and somebody said, "Well, there is Bob Alexander down there," and God said, "We will use him." When I look at that thing, I think to myself, "God, if I am the best You got, we are in trouble." I do not look at myself as anything other than a wretched person saved by the grace of God, but I will tell you one thing that separates me from some people: I have a sure word.

I have a message I preached; I have never preached it here. I used to preach it when I was preaching around other places, and it is a thing where I used to preach on the Word of God. The church says, and I took the Bible and I broke it down into the four simple concepts, and I do not know of anything that illustrates where I am at with the book and how it has impacted my life. But I start out by saying, when it comes to the Word of God, I have a book that is of God, and this book here is the mind of God. So the first thing I have in this Bible, God thought it. The second thing I have in this book is that Christ bought it. The third thing I have in this book is the Holy Spirit of God brought it. And then I have the next thing: the devil fought it. So I look at that thing and I say, "Hey, you know what? God thought it, Christ bought it, the Holy Spirit of God brought it, the devil fought it, but I got it." And that is all the difference that it makes. A sure word that will give you a sure calling, that no matter how bad you are.

Hey, I am going to tell you something: many of you are farther down the road than I ever could get to be. You have your whole life ahead of you. I am telling you, and yet I understand God took somebody like me, and I do not compare myself to any of these guys, but here I am. I got saved way back in the day, and probably in 51 years, I wasted the first 20 years of my life, but so did most of you. But what I got, the sure calling, brother, get out of my way, and I do not know what. 51 years, probably 60,000 messages and Bible studies, maybe more, I do not know. I look at that, and I am thinking to myself, "You know what did I, and I think that my Christ did that too." I look at the fact that, you know, YouTube, all over the country, I get week after week after week, people sending me this, sending me that, they have no churches, they have no Bible. Jesus did not have a YouTube channel, or does He?

I wrote the discipleship lessons way back in about 1978, the ones that we use now. I had no idea; I was just doing it for my own people. I had no idea that over the next five years, they would go to England, they would go to France, they would go to Russia, they would go to Ukraine, they

would go to Romania, they would go to Hungary, they would go to South Africa, they would go to Middle Africa, they would go to South America, they went to Central America, they went to Canada, they went to Germany, they went to the Philippines. I mean, I am thinking to myself, "How, if God can do that, what can He do with you?" You are better than I am, you are younger than I am, you are smarter than I am, you are stronger than I am. I did not get to do those things because I am anybody great; I got to do those things because God gave me a calling, and He asked me to finish what He started, and if He had stayed here, He would have been all those places. He chose to do it through people like you and me.

Why are you so satisfied to be halfway through what your Christian life and done nothing? Your work is stalled; are you on strike? We have our lives, we have our families, we have everything that we are supposed to have, and we talk about how good God is to us. How good are we to God? He did not save you so you could just have a good family; He saved you so you could train your family to be a ministry team to carry on His work. It is you and me; greater things He wants to do through you. If He can do those piddly things through me, with the mess that I am, with the stupidity that I have, the inability that I have, what could He do with you guys? This is why I pour it into you. You want to know the bottom line? This is why I do what I do with you. This is why I give nothing, hold nothing back. This is why I give it. I know you do not like it sometimes; sometimes it is hard. But the bottom line is somebody out there has the ability to pick up the work and finish it for Him.

I think the greatest deception the devil has pulled off was to get God's people to never see and understand your sure calling. Oh, so many have a sure salvation, and that is where you stopped. When you got on a sure salvation bus, you stop at the first KOA campground you could find, and you pitch your tent. It goes beyond that. He did not allow you to have a husband and a wife and have a family so you can just have a family that everybody loves and it is beautiful and it is cute. That is God's way. It should be. The surest people to be saved in all of the world should be the children of Christians. And they are the worst. They are the worst.

God's people today have been deceived; they do not understand their sure calling; they never understood the sure word. And they allow the devil through the New Testament churches and pastors today—not the world, not the Jehovah's Witnesses, not the Mormons—churches that claim to be the real deal. And in Revelation 3:10, at the end of that great Philadelphia church period, as it descended into the darkness of Laodicea, John told that church that there would be an hour of temptation coming.

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.

That is the work of Satan, starting with Laodicea, that infiltrated in to deceive you, to disarm you, and to discourage you, to beguile the church of Jesus Christ, to destroy it from the simplicity that is in Christ. Why your life is so complicated today, it is a simple answer. You say, "Well, I have more problems than you know what to do with." Yeah, I am sure you do, but the reason why your life is so complicated is because you have forsaken the simplest book the world

has ever seen. There is nothing complicated about the principles here, doing what God wants you to do.

I look at Moses. Moses is probably more written about than any other man in the Bible than Jesus Christ. The first five books in the Bible are written by him; he is referenced all through there. God had a calling for Moses to deliver His people. But Moses was just like so many of us. He did not speak well. He was not educated like everybody else was. So when God told him that he was going to go up before Pharaoh and do all these mighty things, he felt so inadequate. He just argued with God over and over again that "I am just not able to do that." I am going to tell you, you and I are a lot like Moses. God has great things for you because He not only gave you a sure salvation, He gave you a sure word, but He has given you a sure calling. He has got some great things that He will do with every one of you. But we are just like Moses. We look at the obstacles. We look at the opposition. We look at Pharaoh. We look at Egypt. We look at all the things that he was up against. And Moses had never done anything like that before. Just like right now, some of you whom God wants to use to reach the end of this world, you cannot see and understand how God could do that with you.

You know what God said to Moses? Moses says, "Well, I do not know how." And He says, "You know what? Do not give me that, Moses. Let me ask you this: What do you have in your hand?" And Moses said, "Well, I have my shepherd's rod." And He says, "Then we will just use that." It was that very rod that he threw down and became a serpent that ate Pharaoh's serpents. It was that very rod that he touched the waters, and they turned to blood. It was the very rod that he stuck in the Red Sea, and it split. In other words, my dear friend, you do not have to know all of the Bible. Whatever level you are on, God will start with just what you have in your hand. He will go from there. Whatever you have in your hand is what He will start with, and then let this church perfect you. Let this church edify you. Let this church put you into the ministry that God will do what He did with Moses, what He did with me. He will just take you, grow you, edify you, and use you.

XIII. The Sure Calling and Finishing the Work

I am telling you right now, the greatest tragedy of Christianity will be for people in this church who have every ability to be a thousand times better than me and to do greater things than Christ did in His three and a half years, limited to where He was. God wants to do it through you. He wants you to get in His way through His truth and then get in the life, and then God will take you and do the greater works through you that He would have done if He would have stayed here. But God decided to take Him home and then give it to you and me. Now, what are we going to do with that? It is just that simple. He, through His sure word, gave me a sure calling, and He is sure about it.

I asked Him when I started this, "How sure are You about it?" I have only had one real philosophy in ministry when it comes to people. I know I do a lot of things, and there are a lot of pieces to it, but fundamentally, I have had one goal with every person I have ever met. I have never—sometimes you cannot do this, but it has always been my goal. Sometimes they will not let you. Sometimes it does not go anywhere. But my goal has always been to leave people better

than when I found them. To help them to see who they really are. To help them not be satisfied with who you are now, but to see who you really could be. If you just get the sure word and answer that sure calling, the sure reward will take care of itself. You are better than that. Whatever you are at today, whatever level you are on today, do not come to the place that you think you have arrived. Wherever you are at, I am going to tell you this, you can be better than where you are at. Perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry. That is simply how it works.

It is impossible for us to imagine that after He went back to heaven, He just threw everything up into the wind and said, "Let it take care of itself." He did everything He has done through my life, through the lives of the great missionaries, through the lives of the great preachers, through the lives of the great men and women down through history. He finished the work through them, and He wants to finish it through you.

Every head bowed and every eye closed. Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. Thank You for these good people. May they see and understand their true value to You, their true value to me in this church, but only as they recognize their sure calling. Help us no matter where we are at, no matter what level we are on. Help us to be better tomorrow than we are today. Help us to be a little closer to You. Help us to be a little more involved in Your life through Your way, through Your truth. These are good people, Lord. You saved them. You brought them here. You brought us together as laborers together. Help me to protect them. Help them to understand that loyalty to the Word of God and loyalty to each other is all that we have. And we will be careful to give You the honor and the glory and the praise in Jesus' name, for Your sake we ask it. Amen.