

THE CHURCH'S ENEMIES**Part 2 – The Flesh****3 John**

Intro: Every Christian has three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Put a group of Christians into a church, and the church has the same three enemies: the world, the flesh, and the Devil. It is always a sad time when an individual Christian is influenced by the world, the flesh, or the Devil. But put that same problem into a church, and the difficulty is magnified many times over. It is true that no Christian can avoid trouble from the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and the same is true of a church – whether we are talking about a local church, or the whole body of Christ. We are all engaged in spiritual warfare.

Two weeks ago we considered the world – the enemy which is all around us. The world puts pressure on us to conform to its ways – to conform to its ways, to its speech, to its dress, to its pleasures. Remember what our Lord said to His apostles about the world. You will find the words I have in mind in John 15:18-19:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

There can be no reconciliation with the world. There can be no compromise with the world. There can be no cooperation with the world. We are to go into the world to preach the Gospel, but to take on the ways of the world will only weaken our message which would otherwise be powerful! That is why it is alarming to see how the church has adopted many of the ways of the world. That is clearly against the teaching of Scripture.

Tonight we want to think about a second enemy every Christian has. The world is outside of us, but this enemy is inside of us. It is our old nature, called in Scripture, *the flesh*.

Until we were saved, we followed the ways of the flesh. We lived according to the lusts of the flesh. But the moment we were saved, the Holy Spirit came to indwell us, and immediately we became conscious of a

battle that was going on within us. We may have been bothered by some of the things that we did before we were saved, but this conflict within us was more intense after we were saved than it ever had been before! The Apostle Paul spoke of that conflict in his letter to the churches of Galatia. This is what he had to say:

16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would (Gal. 5:16-17).

Let me spend just a moment or two talking about the word, *lust*.

The way that word is used in every-day language, it is usually linked with immorality of any kind – adultery and the like. But actually the word *lust* means *a desire*. Before Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, she looked at it and *desired it* because it was beautiful to look at, it was good for food, and it would make her wise. What made it all evil was that God had told them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Usually a lust is something that is forbidden by God. People lust to be rich. They lust to have power so they can do what they want to do, and often so they can tell others what to do.

When James and John, and their mother, requested that they be able to sit at the right hand and the left hand of the Lord when He came into His kingdom, that was a sinful lust. If the Lord had granted their request, then they probably would have gotten into an argument about who would be on the Lord's right hand!

This request from James and John made the other disciples unhappy, very unhappy, maybe because they hadn't gotten their request in first. But then it was that the Lord spoke to all of them. Here is John Mark's account in Mark 10:42-45:

42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.

43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:

44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of

all.

45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

What was the Lord seeking to teach His disciples? He was seeking to show them that His ways were different from their ways. They were applying the world's ways to the Lord's work because it was what they wanted. They *lusted* after that position of honor. They should have known Isa. 55:8-9 which I have quoted or read to you many times. They should have been acquainted with the teaching of Isaiah because he was one of their greatest prophets.

Tonight I want to read those verses to you again, but I want to do something in addition to reading them which I have not usually done. *I want to read the two verses before 8 and 9 because the eighth verse begins with the word "for," linking it with verses 8 and 9.* Listen to the four verses together:

6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7 Let the wicked forsake **his way**, and the unrighteous man **his thoughts**: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 **For** my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:6-9).

What is the wicked person's way, and what are the unrighteous man's thoughts? They are that way of life dictated to him by his sinful nature. So when we are saved we have to begin learning the ways of God, and we need to learn the will of God for our lives. And our Lord set the pattern by the whole course of His life. He did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister. What is the mind of Christ which we are supposed to have? It is a mind of submission to the will of God, a mind in which we humble ourselves in order that we might glorify God.

One of our verses in Psalm 103, which is one of the most important verses in all of Scripture because of the truth that it conveys, was verse 7: He [the LORD] made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel (Psa. 103:7).

I remember hearing of a Christian who was in great distress of mind, and when he was asked what his problem was, he said, “Because I’m in a hurry, but God isn’t!” Have you ever felt like that? I have, lots of times! Sometimes we are in a position where we don’t have to wait, and so we move ahead only to regret later that we didn’t wait for the Lord. At other times we have to wait because we can’t do anything else, as when Moses came up to the Red Sea. But even then a lot of murmuring goes on, as it did with the Israelites.

Our old nature keeps working, trying to guide our lives even after we are saved. But it will always get us into trouble.

I want to talk to you tonight about a man in the Bible who is an illustration of the flesh at work in a church setting. He is only mentioned once in the Bible, in the New Testament, and only two verses are devoted to him. I don’t know if he ever changed, but he was not afraid to “lock horns,” so to speak with even the Apostle John. His name appears in 3 John along with two other men. His name was Diotrephes.

But let us spend a few minutes looking at the third epistle of John itself.

I. THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

This epistle was written by the Apostle John to Gaius. There are several men mentioned in the NT by this name, and we are not sure who this Gaius was. But we can tell that he was very dear to the Apostle John. From verse 4 it seems that he may have been John’s son in the faith. He may not have been very well off financially, nor strong physically because John wished that he would prosper and that his physical health would keep pace with his spiritual health. How many of us are even more concerned about our spiritual health than we are about our physical health? Everything that the Apostle John said about Gaius was good! And John was encouraging Gaius to help the strangers who were believers, and who had come to their church. Notice verses 5-8.

But there was one problem, one obstacle that stood in the way.

II. THE MAN, DIOTREPHE (3 John 9-10).

I have two Greek lexicons, and I looked up this man’s name. Both of

them called him a Christian. Not all expositors agree that he was a Christian, but I am inclined to agree. There is nothing in the epistle to indicate that he wasn't a Christian, unless it was his behavior. He surely did not manifest any love for the brethren, but the Apostle John put his finger on Diotrephes problem when he said that "he loveth to have the pre-eminence." He always wanted to be first. He wanted to be able to tell others what to do. He wanted to determine who could stay in the church, and who couldn't. He may have been jealous of the Apostle John because he didn't want him to come.

Now we don't know if Diotrephes was married, but there is nothing about immorality in what the Apostle John had to say. Nor is there any indication that he was spreading heresy. One expositor I read said that he thought that Diotrephes was a Gnostic, but I don't see any evidence of that in John's epistle.

Where did such an overbearing attitude come from? It came right from his old nature, his flesh, and the Apostle John knew that if he were allowed to continue doing what he was doing, it could ruin the church!

- But what would you call his sin – because sin is what it was! His sin was as old as the Garden of Eden, and even older, because the Devil had been guilty of this sin before it made its way into the human race. It was the sin of P-R-I-D-E – old fashioned, and always offensive, PRIDE!

But even though Diotrephes did not want the Apostle John to come to their church (and we are not told where their church was), he was planning to visit them, and intended to face Diotrephes with his sinful behavior.

When we talk about our flesh, our old nature, we can talk about a lot of sins, but somewhere, involved in all sin, is this obnoxious sin of pride. It permeates the world, and often encouraged. But the one place you will never find PRIDE is in our Lord Jesus Christ, and we are to be like Him.

But what is the remedy?

III. IS THERE VICTORY OVER THE FLESH?

This question is not answered in 3 John – probably because it had been so

well answered in the epistles of Paul and Peter, in addition to the marvelous teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't know what happened to Diotrephes. We don't know if he ever changed, if he saw the utter sinfulness of what he was doing, repented, and looked to the Lord for victory. The battle against the flesh is constant, and often very severe. It may take on different characteristics with all of us. But there is a battle, and, as I have said, at the heart of the battle is *pride*. What made Aaron and Miriam think that they were as worthy as Moses to speak for God if it were not pride? What caused David to send for Bathsheba if it were not pride? What made Peter think that he would never fail the Lord, if it were not pride? What made Ananias and Sapphira pretend that they were bringing all of the money from the sale of their property when they were only bringing part of it, if it were not pride? Men who were young in the faith were not to be appointed as elders because of the danger of pride. Pride is the root sin, and it is in everyone of us. The answer is for us to cultivate humility, and that can only result from submission to God and the closest possible fellowship with the Lord.

There are several passages of Scripture which can help us in dealing with the sins of the flesh, but let me ask you to turn to Philippians 2 as I read that very important passage. (Read Phil. 2:1-13).

Concl: A good exercise for all of us would be to read our Bibles through one year soon making notes on all the verses that have to do with pride, on the one hand, and humility on the other. A proud person is never a happy person. Pride not only damages us, but it makes us think that we don't really need any help. Oh, that God would give each one of us a hatred of the pride in our hearts, and a constant prayer that we would be made like our Lord Jesus Christ in the humility of His walk before God and before men. That is the way of blessing for all of us. Sin makes us proud; salvation humbles us when we realize that this precious gift of life is ours even though we don't deserve it at all. We are never to exalt ourselves. That is God's work. Ours, by His grace, is to humble ourselves before Him.

Pride in a believer's life is always a grievous thing, but pride in a church does damage which cannot be measured.

THE CHURCH'S ENEMIES

Part 3 – The Devil

Matt hew 13:24-30, 36-43

Intro: The Greek word for enemy is ἐχθρός.. It speaks of one who *hates*, one who is *an opponent*, one who is *hostile*, one who seeks the downfall and destruction, even the death of the one he considers his enemy. Thayer in his lexicon says that “the Devil” is “the most bitter enemy of the divine government” (p. 265). That is saying a lot because it means that he is the most bitter enemy of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of the Word of God, and that which concerns us tonight, he is “the most bitter enemy” *of the Church* – the local church, and the Church, the whole body of Christ. Of the three enemies that we need to be concerned in the church, the world, the flesh, and the Devil, the Devil is the Mastermind behind them all. We are dealing with a very wise, subtle, powerful, and wicked creature. He is an angelic being. He hates everything that is good and holy in God’s sight. He is a rebel at heart with designs on the whole universe. Paul said in 2 Cor. 2:11, “We are not ignorant of his devices.” He meant the Devil’s *purposes*. But not every Christian can say that. Often we are guilty of living like we do not have any enemies. We forget the nature of the world in which we live, and that the Devil is the god of this world. We forget how responsive our hearts are, that is, our flesh is, to the temptations we face in this world. But we can be sure from Scripture that the Devil and his demons never let up in their opposition to God. The Devil did not hesitate to take on even our Lord Jesus Christ when He was here on earth. It was Satan who indwelt Judas Iscariot to engineer the betrayal of our Lord into the hands of His enemies. He sometimes appears as an angel of light, as when we are faced with false teachers. At other times when persecution is directed at the Church, he is like a roaring lion. See 2 Cor. 11:14 and 1 Pet. 5:8.

But there is one thing that we need to keep in mind as we think about the Devil, or Satan as he is also called – Devil, meaning *adversary*, Satan, meaning *accuser*. *The Bible is absolutely the only true source of information that we have about the Devil and all that he is up to. The Bible tells us where he came from, and the Bible tells us that hell was prepared for the Devil and his angels – that he is doomed to spend eternity in the lake of fire. The Bible also tells us how he can be defeated.* The world may joke about the Devil, but that only shows how completely people are blinded to the real nature of the Devil, and what His objectives are. That

is why I have said that he is the greatest enemy of the Bible and of those who believe the Bible.

— This is a subject so vast that books have been written seeking to explain what the Bible teaches about the Devil. Many sermons have been preached about the Devil, but you need to be careful when you hear sermons about him that the preacher is staying by the Scriptures. There is a lot of false teaching coming from the pulpits of our land about the Devil but men who let their fancy and their imagination run away with them. As with everything else that the Bible deals with, God has given us everything in his word that we need to know about the Devil, what he does, and how we can defeat him.

I want to begin tonight by reading to you a parable spoken by our Lord Jesus in which we see one of the common tactics of the Devil, and which we need to be concerned about in the church. Then I want to go on to a couple of other passages where the apostles of our Lord deal with the ways of the Devil and ways in which he works against those of us who are members of the body of Christ.

— (Before reading, comment on what our Lord's response was when His disciples asked Him why He spoke to them in parables - Matt. 13:10-17. Explain the Biblical word, *mystery*. This means that even understanding a simple parable, the illuminating work of the Spirit is required. Then read the parable in verses 24-30 and the explanation of the parable in verses 34 through 43.)

I. THE PARABLE OF THE TARES (Matt. 13:24-30).

A man who would treat his neighbor, or anyone else, like this, was really an enemy. He was out to destroy this particular farmer's entire crop. But the part of wisdom was to let the wheat and the tares grow together, and then separate them in the harvest.

A tare was a kind of grass which resembled wheat, but the seeds are black instead of being like wheat.

— What the Lord was teaching was that the kingdom of heaven on earth was like this. It was true in OT times in Israel where we read of a "mixed multitude." It was true during our Lord's time on earth. And ever since

the church began, it has been true in the church.

— Now the explanation of the parable is given to us in verses 36 through 43. (Explain.)

It is significant that in the parable we are told that this enemy of the farmer did his work “while men slept.” They evidently were not expecting that an enemy had designs against them. This is an indication that the Devil is doing his work either when we are spiritually asleep, or at least when our guard is down.

— This is a parable that ought to be preached in every megachurch in our country because in most of them the big thrust is to get more and more people into the church, and they are being attracted by worldly methods, and in too many cases even the truth is watered down so as not to offend those who are not believers. So what is happening as a result of these methods? Many, many people are coming into churches today who are not saved, who are not really interested in salvation, and when the time comes when the church needs to stand for the truth, such churches are going to find themselves in big trouble. Often unregenerate men are finding their way in among the elders and deacons, and even sometimes into the pulpit. So churches are not heeding this warning that the Lord gave to His disciples almost 2,000 years ago!

What is the solution?

— Obviously ever precaution needs to be taken so that only those who know the Lord actually become a part of the local church. The Gospel must be declared clearly, and people need to be told again and again that the primary purpose of the church is the edification of the people of God. And it certainly is true that one way to send people on their way who are not interested in the teaching of the Word, is by teaching the Word. On the other hand, if the Word is faithfully taught, those who come not knowing Christ, may be drawn to the Lord by the preaching of the Word. The Word itself has a cleansing effect on any church where it is faithfully taught and preached. Remember what the Lord Jesus told His disciples as we learn from John 15:3: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” The Word has a cleansing effect on individual believers, but it also has a cleansing effect on churches.

So we need to keep in mind that the church, the local church, needs to be a pure church, ministering to the Lord's people, and exercising real discernment when admitting people into the fellowship.

The Devil knows that a "mixed multitude" means trouble. That is why the kings of Israel, even wise King Solomon, made a disastrous mistake when they married foreign wives who were still worshiping their heathen gods.

But let us go on to another passage.

I have in mind bringing three more messages on the Church before I conclude this present series, and one will be on church discipline. But tonight I want to go to one of the passages on church discipline because it leads to another passage that has to do with a way that the Devil works.

I am thinking now about:

II. THE CASE OF IMMORALITY IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (1 Cor. 5 and 2 Cor 2).

I just want you to note the problem, and what Paul said should be done.

Now let's go to 2 Cor. 2.

It is generally thought by reliable expositors that here the Apostle Paul was speaking about the same man who was disciplined in response to what Paul told the church to do in 1 Cor. 5. But apparently he had repented of his sin, and had sought restoration with the church. How wonderful it is when something like this takes place. God was quite clearly at work.

But the question now was, What should the church do? Should they continue to exclude him? Or should they join together in forgiving him, and receive him back into the fellowship of the church at Corinth. *At this point Paul said in so many words that now the church was on trial. It was a crucial time in the history of the Corinthian church.* And notice especially verses 10 and 11 in 2 Cor. 2. (Read.)

Now we can be thankful that we have not had to face a situation like this, but it does suggest one of the ways of the Devil in his attack against the

church. You can be sure that the Devil wanted to get the full benefit out of this difficulty. So how do we apply this to our church, or to any other church where the people want to please the Lord.

The danger facing the church at Corinth was that they would respond to this man with *an unforgiving spirit*.

I was reading just the other day in a work written by a very godly man of past days, that this subject of forgiveness was one of the greatest subjects that the Lord spoke about while He was here on earth. And it is interesting that what the Lord said about forgiveness that must have been the hardest for the disciples to accept, was stated right after what He had said about discipline in the church. And then our Lord followed it with the parable about the servant who had been forgiven a large debt, but who would not forgive a fellow-servant for a much smaller debt.

Look at Matt. 18:21 and 22, and then verses 23-35.

Notice also what our Lord said about forgiveness in the Sermon on the Mount after giving them the model prayer. Cf. Matt. 6:14, 15.

Now let me ask you to turn to a third passage. It is 1 Peter 5:8-9.

III. THE DEVIL AS A ROARING LION (1 PETER 5:5-11).

The first epistle of Peter was written to some of the Lord's people who were suffering – suffering because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And such a time gives the Devil a great opportunity to do a great deal of damage in the church. People are inclined to wonder why the Lord does not put a stop to what is going on, and so rebellion against the Lord can be a problem. Discouragement is a real possibility. There is a real tendency to neglect the truth. Read through 1 Peter thinking of what he said that often is a problem when believers are suffering for their faith.

And it is here that the Devil feels that he has just the situation that he is always looking for. It is in this kind of a situation that the people of God see him as “a roaring lion” who goes from believer to believer seeking whom he can devour!

But what is the defense of the people of God in such a time – and this

suggests what we all need to be concerned about all of the time. Peter said that there are two things we need to be concerned about. See them in verse 8: “Be sober,” and “be vigilant.”

“Be sober” is the word that would have been used for a drinker of wine. But its mean here is that they needed to be calm, to think clearly. They needed to do the right thing.

“Be vigilant” means to stay awake, and to be on guard. It is not a time for quitting, but a time to exercise greater strength.

How were they to do this?

- 1) By humility - vv. 5 and 6. And notice that Peter spoke especially to the younger believers.
- 2) By prayer - v. 7.
- 3) By resisting the Devil “stedfast in the faith.” This means stable, strong, even stiff. And Peter was not speaking here just about what we believe (although that is included). He was speaking about how we live!

And you see, any failure in any of these points is certain to lead to spiritual defeat under the attacks of the Devil. He can’t take away our salvation, but he can defeat us if we are not using the provisions which the Lord has given to us.

Concl: This is just a brief glimpse into a big subject. Let us pray that our church will remain pure, that we will never lower the standards given to us in the Word of God just to get people to come to church.

And let us be careful about how we forgive, and how quickly we forgive. We are always afraid that someone is going to take advantage of us. If they do, that is between them and the Lord, but our part is to forgive even before people seek it.

Then let us be humble, let us be prayerful, and let us be godly. Pride, and prayerlessness, and disobedience give the Devil just the opportunity that he is looking for to bring us down in defeat.

And then notice the wonderful prayer with which Peter closed this section of his epistle: 1 Pet. 5:10 and 11.

HOW GOD SUPPORTS HIS CHURCH

Philippians 4:10-20

Intro: When I began this series of messages on the church the first Sunday night of October last year, I started with that familiar passage in Matthew 16 where the Lord Himself mentioned the church for the first time. It was on that occasion that Matthew recorded for us those very important words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “I will build my church.” It was not until later during the ministry of the Apostle Paul in particular that what the Lord had in mind became clear. In the weeks since then we have looked at many NT passages where the character of the church, and its mission, was clarified by the ministry of the Apostle. But I take you back to that original statement tonight because, when the Lord said, “I will build my church,” He was assuming the responsibility for meeting all of the needs of the church. As Dr. James Boice once emphasized in one of his messages speaking of how the Lord promised that He would build His church, and then Dr. Boice added, “With, or without, us.”

From Pentecost on the church has had many leaders. The church has gone through good times, and bad times. But today, approximately two thousand years later, the church continues. The Lord continues to save people, add them to the body of Christ, and it is from Him that the needs of the church have been met. He has given the church her leaders. He has led in the expansion of the church to nations all over the world. The leaders of the church have not always handled the doctrines of the church accurately, but the Lord has never let His church die. And it never will! There will be a church, the body of Christ, throughout all eternity. The Lord is the great Intercessor on behalf of the church, and He is gathering His elect from the four corners of the earth, and bringing each believer into the body of Christ.

So there is prophecy, there is truth, there is power, and there is fulfillment in our Lord’s words, “I will build my church.”

Most of the time it has been His plan to work through His people. I say “most of the time” because there have been times when He has personally intervened Himself, as in the case when Saul of Tarsus was saved. But Saul became the Apostle Paul who was a mighty instrument in God’s hands in the early days of the church, and to the glory of God he saw the church spread through the Empire. But the nature of the Lord’s work was

very different in those days. As people were saved, they met in homes. It was much later that buildings were constructed for the meeting of believers. Paul had certain material needs as he took the Gospel on his journeys which are recorded for us in the book of Acts. Part of the time he worked as a tentmaker to meet his own needs, but gradually the work became so large and the demands on his time so great, that God provided for him through the giving of the Lord's people.

Giving has always been a part of the lives of the people of God. When the Lord gave Moses the plans for the building of the Tabernacle, and the establishment of the priesthood, the people were asked to give. Moses made it clear that the people were bringing their offering to the Lord. See Ex. 35:5. But it was to be that the giving was to be done by those whose hearts stirred them up to give. And it is important to notice that because it is God who stirs His people to give.

As the people brought their gifts for the building of the Tabernacle and the garments of the priests, they brought so much that Moses had to put a stop to their giving. **(Read Ex. 36:1-7.)**

This same thing happened in the days of Hezekiah when he was restoring the Temple. We have just read about that in our Bible reading. The account is given in 2 Chron. 31. God moved upon the hearts of His people, and they gave and gave and gave. And as they gave, they were taught that they were bringing their gifts to the Lord.

It is very interesting to study through all of Scripture to see how the Lord moved upon the hearts of His people to give to meet the varied needs of His work.

There are two chapters in 2 Corinthians devoted to the subject of giving, and Paul called it a "grace." Those chapters are 2 Cor. 8 and 9. So we can speak of this part of the work of the Lord as the grace of giving. It is God Who provides for His work. It is God Who meets the needs of His people. He gives us our homes, our food, our clothing. And from what He gives to us, we have the privilege of giving back to Him to be used as He directs. And chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians begins by telling us how during of great difficulty in Macedonia their poverty caused them to abound in giving to the Lord.

— George Mueller who was directed of the Lord to establish orphanages in England, and who depended upon the Lord to move upon the hearts of His people to give, said that *always* when times were hard in the economy of England, the Lord's people seemed to give more than ever! That is what had happened in Macedonia. That was true NT giving.

I am not going to take the time to expound in detail these two chapters in 2 Corinthians, but I do want to pick out some of the outstanding details to help us understand in a better way that giving is a grace, and that it is designed to be a ministry of great blessing for all of us who are the people of God. *But let me point out at the beginning that there is no hint in Scripture that either in Israel in the OT, or in the church in the NT, the people of God were to appeal to the world for support. The work of the Lord is to be supported by the people of God, and the people of God are to look to the Lord for what they have, and that they are responsible to the Lord for the way they use what is given to them.*

Now let us look at these two chapters. And let me call what we have here:

— **I. THE DOCTRINE OF GIVING.**

A. The example of the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

They had to plead with Paul to accept what they gave, and the secret of their joy and generosity in giving was that they gave themselves to the Lord first, and then to help His servants as they were able.

B. Giving is a part of growing in all other graces (2 Cor. 8:7-8).

Just as we seek to grow in our faith, in our speech, in our knowledge, and in diligence and love, we are to grow in our giving as well – remembering that our giving is to the Lord even though it is given to the church, or for the spread of the Gospel.

C. The greatest example of giving – our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 8:8-9).

— It is interesting how the Gospel is brought into all the teachings of Scrip-

ture. We saw an example of that this morning in the account of the Lord turning water into wine. Where would we be today if the Lord had not *become poor that we might be rich*. Paul certainly did not mean that we give everything we have, but he was indicating that our giving of our money can often result in the spiritual enrichment of others – if it is given to the Lord and for His glory. We spoil it all if we start to boast in how much we give.

D. Paul's teaching is illustrated by the children of Israel gathering manna each day (2 Cor. 8:12-15; cf. Ex. 16).

Those who were able to gather more than they needed were able to share with those who did not gather enough. The result: Everyone had just what was needed.

E. The responsibility of the leaders (2 Cor. 8:17-24).

Be sure to notice the times in which Paul mentioned Titus in this part of 2 Corinthians. See verses 6, 16, 23. The apostles and their coworkers often had the task of taking money from one church to another. And they wanted to make sure of the principle that Paul expressed in verse 20 and 21. This is an extremely important matter for us to be concerned about today. And we are! To be entrusted by the people of God with the proper use of the money given to the Lord, is a sacred trust which calls for total honesty before our fellow believers, as well as before the Lord.

Now let me pick up two more important points that Paul made, this time in chapter 9.

F. Sow bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

This verse is often misinterpreted. There are those who would treat giving like an investment in the stock market. They teach that the more money you give to the Lord, the more He will give back to you – so that in the final analysis you can actually get rich by giving to the Lord.

Is this what Paul was teaching? Did the Macedonians give generously because they thought it was a way out of their poverty? No – absolutely not! They gave to the Lord because they loved the Lord, and because they loved the people of God. They gave because they knew this was

pleasing to the Lord, and not because financially they would be better off if they gave. Sometimes the Lord blesses that way, but that is not what Paul had in mind.

Do you remember what we read in verse 7 of chapter 8 here in 2 Corinthians? Paul linked giving with all of the other graces that we are to be concerned with as Christians – our faith, our knowledge of the Word, our work, our love for each other. And we could add to that our prayers. You see, giving is to be a part of all that concerns us as Christians. And when we are faithful in our giving, it enriches every other aspect of our lives and our fellowship with the Lord. This is how we abound!

One more matter:

G. Not how much we give, but how we give (2 Cor. 9:7).

Let's take the negatives first.

“Not grudgingly” means *not if it makes you unhappy to do it*. “Nor of necessity” means *not because you have to do it*. Again the idea is of something that makes you unhappy, or even distresses you. “For God loves a cheerful giver.” The Greek word translated “cheerful” gives us our English word, hilarious. But when we think of something hilarious we are thinking of something noisy, boisterous. That isn't what Paul meant. We are not to broadcast what we are giving to the Lord. What Paul did mean that we give promptly, willingly, and happily!

Now let us go back to the first part of the verse.

We are to give as we purpose in our hearts. What is our purpose to be? Well, Paul has already made that clear. We give, not primarily to the Church, but to the Lord. And we give because we love the Lord and because we love God, and because we love the people of God, and because we want others to receive the Gospel so that they will know Him and love Him too. We give because this is a major part of all that we are to be doing every day to please the Lord.

Now in closing I want to take you to an outstanding example of giving, and it is found in Philippians 4, verses 10-20.

II. THE GIFT OF THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH TO PAUL (Phil. 4:10-20).

Do you know where Philippi was? It was in Macedonia, and it was about the Macedonian believers that Paul was speaking about in 2 Cor. 8. But the difference between these two passages was that in 2 Cor. 8 and 9, Paul was speaking to the Corinthian church. In Philippians 4 he was showing how those who are leaders in the church, and dependent upon the support of the church, should feel about giving. This is a passage for pastors and missionaries and all who are supported by the Lord's people. And what a testimony this is to the godliness of the Apostle Paul, and his desire to see blessing in the lives of the people who had a part in his support. How different Paul was from much of what is going on among church leaders today, and young pastors who are looking for a place to serve the Lord. (Explain.)

Notice all through this passage the gratitude of the Apostle Paul for what they had done for him, but, if anything, his greater concern for their blessing.

Concl: And let us remember to give ourselves to the Lord, to give what we give, not to a church, but possibly to the church for the Lord, and we do it joyfully, gladly, promptly, and as generously as possible expecting spiritual blessing from the Lord.

KEEPING THE CHURCH PURE

Matthew 18:15-20

Intro: It has always been the purpose of God, both in OT times as well as in NT times, that His people be holy. Every child of God is holy in his or her standing before God. In Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth, after giving a list of sinners, he said this:

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

"Ye are sanctified." That is, you have been made holy. That is our standing before God. And that is a perfect standing. However, our condition, or "state," as some theologians have termed it, is not perfect. We need to grow in grace, and that means that we grow in holiness. And, as I hope to point out next Sunday night, some day that, too, will be perfect. Then we will be morally pure in every way—in what we are, the way we think, how we speak, and in what we do.

Sanctification carries with it the idea of *being set apart, set apart from the world, and set apart for God*. The result is a holiness of life, imperfect in all of us now, but we are to maintain the ground that we have gained, and then press on to greater holiness of character and life.

Actually *holiness, or moral purity*, is the ultimate objective of our being chosen by God. In Ephesians 1:3-4 we read these words:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him (Eph. 1:3-4).

And in the fifth chapter of the same epistle the Apostle Paul said this in addressing himself to husbands:

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

However, the fact remains that the Church is not perfect yet, nor will it be until the Lord finally gathers all of the Church together in His presence. In the meantime, the leaders of the Church, and the members of the Church, are responsible before God and Christ to pursue holiness before God.

The writer of the book of Hebrews had this to say on the subject of holiness:

14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled (Heb. 12:14-15).

We are to be watchful over our own lives, but we are also to be concerned about each other. "Bitterness" is rebellion, and rebellion is sin against God. And in this text speaking of many being defiled by the little bitterness, the writer was saying in different words what the Apostle Paul said to the believers in Corinth, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6). Leaven is sin. The "lump" was the Church. And even one sin, if allowed to remain, will quickly spread to other members of the Church, and so the whole lump will be leavened.

Paul used the human body with its various members to describe our relationship to each other in the Church. Perhaps you remember that he wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:25-26:

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

And this same care applies to anything that would divide us and hinder our fellowship with God and with each other.

So while, as we have learned, the world is an enemy of the Church, and the Devil is an enemy of the Church, the Archenemy, yet so are our old natures enemies of the Church over which we must all continually stand guard.

The importance of this matter is emphasized by the fact that this is what the Lord spoke about in the second of the only two passages we have in the Gospels in which the Lord used the word "Church." The first mention

— that the Lord made of the Church is in Matthew 16:18 where the Lord said that He would build His Church. The second passage, also in the Gospel of Matthew, is found in chapter 18:15-20, especially down through verse 17. (Read.)

And so the first point in maintaining fellowship in the Church has to do with:

I. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS (Matt. 18:15-17).

— Now being the sinners that we are, it is easy for us to go around with some kind of a chip on our shoulders, hoping that someone will knock it off. That is not what the Lord was talking about here. But if we are like that, supersensitive to the way people look at us, or what they might say or not say to us, that is our problem – and we need to take care of that ourselves before the Lord. But the Lord was speaking here about trespasses, some way in which one member of the body actually sins against another. This might be a matter of gossip. Or it might be the way one believer will seek to exclude another believer from what is going on in the Church. We need to be sure that what we are concerned about is actually something that is sinful in the sight of the Lord.

What are we to do in such instances?

First, we go to the person who has sinned against us. And hopefully that will be the end of the matter. The two are reconciled to each other.

But if that is not the case, then the offended brother is to take someone else with him, one or two others, and go to try to resolve the problem. If the first didn't produce a solution, it is hoped that this will.

But if not, a third step is to be taken. It is to be told to the Church. This third step must surely be successful. But if not, then the irreconcilable brother or sister is to be treated as a heathen or as a publican, that is, as an unregenerate person.

— The point that impresses me about these words of the Lord Jesus, and let us remember that this is what He said we should do, is that this comes down to a very minor matter: an issue between two believers. It is not something that the whole Church knows about. In fact, it is possible that

not even the pastor and the elders know what is going on. But it is a situation that can grow until people are taking sides, and then there is a major breach of fellowship which can ruin the effectiveness of a Church.

Now the object of all of this action is that the offending brother, or sister, might be restored. This is something that displeases the Lord, and so it needs to be settled. But the best way to settle it, is before anyone else knows anything about it. How often we offend others by what we say, or because we refuse to talk to certain people, or a certain person. James reminds us that we are all inclined to offend, and that the person who does not offend with his tongue is a perfect man who is not going to have trouble with the rest of his body.

So if we have offended someone, let us all be careful to seek forgiveness even in a situation where we may be totally unaware that we have offended anyone.

Just before the Apostle Paul wrote about the oneness of the body of Christ, he said this:

- 1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
- 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
- 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

May the Lord help each of us to see our own responsibility in maintaining fellowship with each other, careful about what we say, but quick to acknowledge our wrongdoing if we find that we have offended a brother or a sister in some way.

But let us go on to another matter.

II. A MORAL PROBLEM (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

I have been in the ministry for many years, but I have never faced a situation like this, and I hope that I never will. Paul said that in those days it was a problem that you would not find among unsaved Gentiles—and the situations among the Gentiles was really terrible in many cases. It was a situation where, as well as we can understand it, that a young man was

— having a relationship with his step mother. Paul does not give us any of the details, but just enough to know that he was alarmed about it—very alarmed! And what bothered Paul as much as the sin itself was the fact that the Church had refused to take any action against this man. It may have been that the woman was not in Church, but the man was! And you can see the action that Paul had taken.

Such moral problems are very likely to become more of a difficulty for the Church in the days to come because people in the world have become so lax in maintaining what before God is a proper relationship between men and women. But Paul took this very, very seriously, and rebuked the Church for its failure to do something about it.

Fortunately, it seems that the story had a happy ending because in 2 Corinthians 2 it seems that Paul was talking about this same man, and that he had broken off this relationship and was seeking forgiveness from the Church. And now that presented a new problem for the Church. Paul expressed what they should do in verses 10 and 11 of 2 Corinthians 2. (Read.)

— Now the question facing the Church was, “Should we receive this man, and receive him back into fellowship?” And the answer was a strong Church because an unforgiving Church, including every member, is itself a grief to the Lord. Perhaps one of the greatest sins of the Church is a failure to forgive those who have sinned, and to restore them to fellowship. When the disciples ask the Lord about forgiveness, they thought that they were being generous when they asked if they should forgive “seven times.” How amazing was His answer! Here is what He said, and you will find it immediately following our text for tonight in Matt. 18:22:

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Let me mention one more point where the Church needs to be on its guard, and to take action if this happens. And it has to do with:

III. TEACHERS OF FALSE DOCTRINE (2 John 5-11).

— There are several passages where we could find exhortations along this line. But I will ask you to turn with me to the second epistle of John. The Church has to be on its guard always for any defection from what the

Apostle John called “the doctrine of Christ.” What is “the doctrine of Christ”?

Well, the answer, at least in part, is given to us in 1 John 4:1-3. (Read.)

If a teacher is wrong about Christ, he can't be right about anything else. And so regardless of the good things that he might say about Christ, that He was a good man, a good teacher, and so on, if he denies that our Lord was God in human flesh, the Church is not to have anything to do with him. He is a false teacher, a deceiver, he is anti-Christ. And to give him any kind of support or acceptance, is an affront to our Lord and to the God Who sent Him. The beloved Apostle became like an attacking lion when faced with people who were spreading error about His Lord.

There are Churches all over this land of ours tonight where the Gospel used to be preached, and where people were being saved, but seminary graduates who were trained under theological professors who were rank liberals in their doctrine, came in. The Church in the name of love accepted them, and tonight in those places the truth that was once preached with power and blessing, is denied from beginning to end.

Concl: And so the Word of God is very clear on this subject. The Church

is to be wide awake at all times to the slightest difficulty between two believers as well as to major departures from the teaching of godliness which we find in the Word. And everybody in the Church is to be taught the doctrines of Scripture so as to be able to detect any hint of false doctrine that might come along.

And the Word teaches that we should judge sin on a personal basis, that the Church should take action on moral departures from Scripture. But the Word also teaches that where the Church fails to take action, the Lord will! God has saved us, and cleansed us, and is working to make us more and more like our Savior. The world stands in the way, and has found its way into the Church. The Devil never lets up. But in our own hearts we can be led astray if we are not walking daily in fellowship with the Lord, feeding upon His Word, quick to check sin in our own lives, and prayerfully upholding each other that the Church may remain pure and holy before God.

THE CHURCH'S PROSPECT FOR THE FUTURE

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Intro: I began this series with our Lord's statement to His disciples which is recorded for us in Matthew 16, verse 18, that the Lord said, "I will build my church." He and the disciples were at Caesarea Philippi. And Matthew recorded that it was at that same time that the Lord began to teach His disciples specifically that He "must" go to Jerusalem, that there He would suffer many things at the hands of the leaders of Israel, be killed, and be raised again on the third day. It seems that they paid little attention to His comment that He would be raised from the dead on the third day because they were so disturbed by the Lord's prediction that He would be killed. It is obvious that they did not understand what the Lord's mission on earth was. They really expected Him to establish His kingdom on earth at that time.

When we move on to the Gospel of John, chapter 14, we find the Lord speaking to His disciples in the Upper Room, and He made this statement to His disciples:

- 1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.
- 2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
- 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

When the Lord spoke these words His arrest was at hand, but the Lord introduced another truth that the disciples were not prepared for. The Lord had moved ahead in His teaching to tell that He was going away, but that He was coming again to receive them to Himself so that they could be where He was.

We all know what happened. The Lord was arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. And then in fulfillment of His word, He was raised from the dead. The Lord spent only forty short days with them afterwards, and then from the Mount of Olives, after He had charged them with their mission on earth, to carry the Gospel to every creature, suddenly He was taken up from them, and a cloud quickly obscured their sight of Him. They continued to look up, hoping that they would be able to catch a glimpse of Him, and that possibly He would return to them.

But instead of the Lord returning, two men suddenly appeared to them just as two men had appeared to the women who had come to the Lord's tomb on the first day of the week following His crucifixion. And as those two men, probably angels appearing as men, announced the resurrection of Christ, so they on the mount of Olives, following the ascension of the Lord, said this to the disciples:

10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:10-11).

This was a confirmation of what the Lord Jesus had said to them in the Upper Room. Neither the Lord nor these special messengers stated a time when the Lord would come back, but simply that He was coming – and it was the Lord Who said that when He came, He would take His own to be with Himself where He was.

So we have in the Gospels the record of our Lord's first coming, the account of His perfect ministry, His arrest by His enemies, the false charges that they brought against Him, His conviction, death, burial, and His resurrection. Yet over all of this was the promise that the Lord was going to return. And it seems that the disciples took the statements about His return to mean that He was coming back during their lifetime.

Time went on and He did not return. But they continued to look for Him. However, as time continued to pass, some believers died, and this caused great concern among the survivors as to what was the state of those who had died before the Lord would return. It was to answer that question that the Apostle Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to write the words of our text.

Please turn now with me to 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and I will read the final six verses of the chapter. (Read.)

Notice how this parallels what the Lord said to His disciples in the Upper Room. The Apostle Paul was not there; he wasn't even saved at that time. But this was revealed in a special way to the Apostle Paul by the Lord, as he said in verse 15, just as the truth of the Lord's Supper was given to Paul by direct revelation from the Lord because Paul was there

when the Lord spoke instituted the Supper.

It is thought that the Apostle Paul wrote the Ephesian epistle eighteen to twenty years after the Lord went back to heaven.

But now let us look at a third passage. This one was written by the Apostle John forty or forty-five years after Paul wrote the Ephesian letter. At this point Paul and all of the other apostles were in heaven. The Apostle John was the lone survivor. He had had some sixty years, or maybe a little longer, to think about and to pray over the teaching of the Lord Jesus and of the other apostles. But instead of giving up on the return of the Lord, we see that John was still anticipating the coming of the Lord. Listen as I read 1 John 3:1-3:

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Now I would like to gather together some of the more important parts of what is recorded in Scripture about the coming of the Lord for the church, and then look at some of the practical effects that this teaching should have upon us today. And these are not practical effects that are peculiar to our time, but effects that this teaching has always had ever since the Lord first spoke to His disciples about His return.

The first is this:

I. THE LORD SAID THAT HE WAS COMING BACK.

He told His disciples, "I will come again." He said He was going to prepare a place for them where there were already many dwelling places. Now He did not elaborate on what He meant that He was preparing a place, and none of His disciples asked Him about that, probably because they were so disturbed at the thought that He was leaving them. He did not say that He was coming to the earth, but that He was coming so that where He was, they also would be.

Paul in the passage in 1 Thessalonians made it even clearer. He gave us the added information that the dead in Christ would be raised from the dead, caught up first to meet the Lord in the air, and so would we ever be with the Lord. So at that time He would not come back to the earth, but He would catch away His people to take them where He had gone to prepare a place for them. They would be transported from earth to heaven. And this is why it is called a rapture. The Thessalonians had no reason to worry about believers who had died because they would be caught up first, and those of us who remain, if the Lord should come during our lifetime, will be caught up after them. This will not be the end of time, nor will it introduce the Lord's reign upon the earth, but it will be the removal of the church from the earth.

Now notice a special emphasis which the Apostle Paul made, an emphasis which is consistent with the Lord's original promise.

II. THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME (1 Thess. 4:16).

He may be accompanied by angels, but the important thing to Paul, and it should be to us, is the Lord Himself will come. He is not going to send someone else to bring us to heaven, which He could do, but He is coming for us Himself. He said He would come, and the Holy Spirit led Paul to underline that glorious fact.

But let us note another fact, and this comes from the Apostle John.

III. WE SHALL SEE HIM (1 John 3:2).

As you have read through the Gospels, haven't you wished that you could have seen the Lord while He was here on earth. I have! I have wished that many times. Well, some day, and it may be very soon, you and I are going to have that privilege. "We shall see Him as He is." If this doesn't excite us, it is difficult to say what could excite us. We see Him in the Word now. The writer of the book of Hebrews said that even now we are to be "looking unto Jesus." And hopefully we are doing that by faith. But then we are going to see the Lord for the first time *face to face*. What a wonderful day that will be!

But this is not all. As we bring together the teaching of these passages, we find that other great things are in store for us. And this next one is

right here in 1 John 3:

IV. WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM (1 John 3:2).

This will be the effect upon us of seeing Him. "We shall be like Him." This is the grand objective of our salvation, not just to be with Him, but to be like Him. We have been predestined "to be conformed to the image of His Son, God's Son. That work of God which has been going on in each one of us since we were saved will finally be completed. "We shall be like Him."

The Apostle Paul described in 2 Cor. 3:18 what is going on in our lives right now. This is what he wrote:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Now we see as through a glass darkly, but then face to face.

Then the work of salvation will be completed in us. We will not only see the Lord, but seeing Him, we shall be like Him.

Cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-58:

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

No more sin. No more broken fellowship. No more trials. Then we will

understand what it means that all things have become new!

But there is still more.

V. WE WILL BE WITH THE LORD FOREVER AFTERWARDS.

Paul said it this way, “And so shall we ever be with the Lord.” We won’t know the grief that filled the hearts of the apostles and early believers when they realized that the Lord was leaving them. Of course He promised His presence with them, but it was unseen even though it is real. And we enjoy the Lord that same way. But what a difference it will make to see Him, to be like Him, and to know that we will be with Him forever!

Now let me conclude by pointing out:

VI. SOME PRESENT, PRACTICAL EFFECTS THAT THIS TRUTH IS TO HAVE UPON US.

Let me begin where the Lord did.

A. “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1).

Then let us go on to what the Apostle Paul said.

B. “Wherefore, comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).

And then to the Apostle John.

C. “And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

And then back to the Apostle Paul for two verses.

D. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmove- able, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

And then we must not overlook Phil. 3:19-20.

E. “For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself (Phil. 3:19-20).

To “look for” Him means that we persistently and patiently await His coming. That is our hope.

One further word from the Apostle John.

F. “He which testifieth these things said, “Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

In all of our praying, this ought to be a constant prayer upon our hearts. It is not that we just want to get out of the mess we are in (although that would be a welcome change), but it is that we want to be with the Lord and be like Him forever!

Concl: When can we expect Him? It seems to me that we can expect Him at any time now. No one knows when the Lord will come for us, but we cannot doubt but that He is coming, that He most certainly will come. And this is to motivate us to live holy lives, to be persistent in serving the Lord, and to rejoice in the glorious prospect that is ours as members of the body of Christ, the Church which He is building, and which one day will be completed. May the prayer of all of our hearts be, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” And when the Lord comes, may He find us watching and waiting for Him.

We all need to make sure that we are ready for that grand and glorious day.