

THE HIGHEST CALL

1 Timothy 1

If you had met someone yesterday that you had never met before at our new Foster's meeting place, the Foster's Supermarket, and they would have asked you, "What will you be doing tomorrow morning?", you would have most likely said, "I'm going to church". And they would have certainly known what you were talking about. And here you are, sitting in church. But let's say that the person who asked you that question was an alien. He had just touched down on the Foster's Supermarket parking lot from Mars. He had just gotten out of his space ship, and you are the first person that he talks with. So when he asks you what you're doing tomorrow morning and you say that you're going to church, what's the next thing that's coming out of his mouth? I'd like for one of our brilliant young people to answer that. What's the very next thing that Martian will say? Yep. "What's church?"

Now, that question is a bit more difficult, but it's still not too hard for most of us. We would tell this alien that church is not really a building; it is people who've had a life-changing experience with Jesus Christ. And they are also called Christians. And that is easy enough. But then he would most likely shoot a third question to you. "What does the church do?" Now, that one can be pretty thorny. In fact, if that Martian asked 50 different shoppers the same question he'd probably get 50 different answers. What would you tell him? Well, this morning I want us to see from God's Word the only right answer.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 Timothy. In the text we've just read we see three functions, three duties of the church, of Grant's Creek Baptist Church and of every other church that names the name of Jesus. But don't forget, the church is made up of God's people. So we also see three duties and wonderful privileges of every one of us who belongs to Christ. And it is only as we pursue this high calling with one another that we will ever know the blessing and power of God in fullest measure upon our lives.

And the first thing that we see that we must not fail to do is to **exalt the Word of God**. The church at Ephesus had some teachers in it that were teaching things other than the OT and the things that they had learned from Paul. Paul calls their teachings "fables and endless genealogies". We have written records of some of these fables, these myths, in ancient Jewish literature, with tales like the arch-angels observing the Sabbath, presumably in the heavens, before it became a practice in Israel. Another myth tells of angels practicing circumcision. Another tale was that Jacob never deceived anyone, and that's practically all that he ever did before he got right with God, and his very name means "trickster" (Gen. 25:26). And the genealogies Paul mentions were those family trees that extended way back into the

past and which sparked debate in post-exilic years between Jews and Jewish Christians.

And so all of these myths were being taught as truth, and all of these nonsensical debates about who was in whose family was going on, and Paul urges Timothy in verse 3 to remain in Ephesus and charge those false teachers there to stop it. And the word “urge” in the NKJV means to beg or to implore. He said, “I beg you, Timothy”. But Timothy’s charge to the false teachers to stop was to be much stronger than that. The word “charge” is a military term that means to command. So Paul was saying, “Timothy, **command** these false teachers to stop!” To Paul, teaching anything but the Word of God was a serious matter!

Now, do you think that we have this same problem in with God’s people today, these false teachers who propagate fables and genealogies among God’s people instead of the Word? You bet we do! You see it everywhere you turn. Go to many Christian book stores and you see it. You see tons of self-help books on any area of life you choose, from your physical health to building a business to your love life. Now, nothing wrong with being healthy, nor even being rich, and he that finds a wife finds a good thing. But in many of these books verses of Scripture are about as easy to find as a whale in your aquarium. And what you read is nothing but man’s wisdom sugarcoated with Jesus.

Turn on the television and you see it. You see some TV preachers who preach to thousands week after week and never hear them say one word about man’s need for a Savior and that men must repent from their sin and trust Jesus Christ or they will perish. Or you hear them preach that if you will trust God you will never have financial problems again, or that you better get ready because Jesus is coming by such and such a date. And you see it in many churches just like ours, where preachers and Sunday School teachers tell lots of entertaining stories but never plumb the depths of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God (Romans 11:33).

Listen to what author Guy King said regarding the lack of sound teaching in the churches of God. “I am personally of the opinion that one of the causes of weakness in the churches today is the virtual disappearance from our pulpits of sound, steady, Scriptural, expository teaching, and that a widespread return to that desirable practice is essential to the solid building up of our members in the faith”. Sounds like he might have written those words last week, but they actually were in a book published in 1951. And that is because the plague of false teaching and insipid teaching of the Word has never ceased since Paul wrote to Timothy.

Now, I want to quickly show you two things that happen when the Word of God is not exalted in a church. Look at verse 4. Paul says that there will be disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. A better translation there would be that there would be disputes rather than God’s administration which is in faith. And Paul is talking about salvation. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, Paul

says in verse 15. That's the number one way that God gets glory for His holy name. We'll talk about that in a few moments. But Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. And without the Word being exalted, when we come to church there will be disputes about all kinds of trivial things that really don't matter, and we will major on the minors, and there will be no salvation.

But there will not only be no salvation, but without the Word being exalted there will be no love. Look at verse 5. The commandment here is Timothy's command to the false teachers to stop teaching heresy and to teach the Word. But the purpose for this changeover in teaching is love; the love of God through Jesus that springs forth from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. And beloved, none of those things come from hearing feel-good stories and glorified pep talks week after week. A pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith come only as the Word of God is preached and taught and as Paul says, we are washed by the water of the Word (Ephesians 5:26).

I want to stop and ask you two questions. First of all, is the Word of God washing your spirit day by day, purifying your heart, cleansing your conscience, and growing your faith? Beloved, we try to preach and teach the Word at Grant's Creek. But let me tell you, one Sunday School lesson and sermon every week won't cut it. Unless you feed on God's Word day by day, you'll do just exactly what you would do if you didn't sit down at your kitchen table, or maybe in front of your TV or at McDonald's, and feed your tummy day by day. In either case you would dry up and blow away. You must have nourishment to survive!

And the other question. If you would say "yes" to that question, "Yes, I'm into the word day by day", do others see it by your love? When you come to church, do others see it by your loving concern when you greet them, or is it just a perfunctory thing with you? Do you go out of your way to greet a stranger, do you inconvenience yourself to help someone, or do you say, "Let me go get the preacher or a deacon"? Sometimes you need to do that, but many times you could help that person yourself. Do you ever think about not being in such a rush to get home after church, but take your time to speak to others in the parking lot, asking about how they are doing? That's what love is all about.

One of our Tuscaloosa Baptist pastors who is currently without a church was preaching recently in a church that is currently without a pastor. And here's what he said about his experience. He said, "I'd tell whoever they call as pastor just not to go in there and mess it up. They were the sweetest, most loving people I've ever been around. The service lasted about an hour and 20 or 25 minutes, but no one complained. After the service they just stayed around for about another 30 minutes, just talking with one another and enjoying one another". I can tell you, the Word has been preached in that church!

And do you show love when you have a concern about something in the church? If something is said or done that you don't agree with, do you complain to

everyone else in the church, or do you go the person involved privately in a quiet, loving way? Friends, not one of us is perfect. All of us say things we wish we hadn't said and do things we wish we hadn't done. I know that I do and I'm sure that you'd say that you do, too. But do you know what? Most people will respond in a positive way when their faults are pointed out in a positive way. The psalmist said to the Lord, "Your gentleness has made me great" (Psalms 18:35). Gentleness! Love! But this gentleness and love comes through the Word of God exalted in our lives.

So God has called us as His people, the church, to **exalt His Word**. But He has also called us to **exclaim His grace**. Paul says in verse 12 that God had enabled him for the ministry because God counted him faithful. Now, there was nothing at all in Paul that merited God to reach down and save him – it was all by grace. But Paul said that God looked at him as a newborn child of God and saw that his character had that element of faithfulness, that Paul would be one that He could entrust with the gospel, to carry it to the Gentiles. And so God put him in the ministry. And almost from the day He was saved Paul began to tell people about Jesus and never quit.

But I want you to notice the way He did it. Look again at verse 14. "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which are in Jesus Christ." Beloved, Paul was a grace preacher!! In every single letter he wrote he began by pronouncing grace upon his readers. "Grace be unto you, and peace, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he concludes each one in the same way. In fact, he uses the word "grace" 87 times in his letters. In Romans 3:24 he wrote, "Being justified freely by His grace..." In Ephesians 2:8 he says, "For by grace are you saved through faith..." We could go on and on. But I want us to stop and to dig into Paul's mind here, to see inside the depths of his soul. In verse 13 He has just proclaimed his utter filthiness before God. He was a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christians, and arrogantly violent. He deserved nothing but death and hell. In fact, he says in verse 15 that he was the chief of sinners, he was the worst.

Oh, but what precious words we read in verse 14. "The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant..." Paul says, "God's grace was exceedingly greater than all of my sins, and completely covered every one". It is like he said in Romans 5:20, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Now, the words "exceedingly abundant" in verse 14 are only one word in the Greek language. And another way to put it is that God's grace super abounded in Paul's life. It was way, way more abundant than the abundance of his sins.

But Paul did something else to hammer home this truth. When the writers of the New Testament wanted to emphasize a word, they often placed it at the beginning of a sentence, even though it would make the flow of reading very awkward. And that's exactly that Paul did here. What should have been the seventh word in verse 14, Paul made the first. The sentence literally reads in the Greek, "Super abounded and the grace of our Lord with faith and love in Christ Jesus". He was saying, "Timothy, do you see that word, "Super abounded"? That's what God's

grace was for me when I was hell-bound in my many sins. It super abounded over them and Jesus washed them all away”.

And notice what replaced those sins; “Faith and love”. Friends, do you know that these two things, faith and love, are the best two evidences of true salvation? Where does your faith of your hope of Heaven lie today? Do you see yourself as having died with Christ, as Paul says in Galatians. 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ?” And does your soul rest in His finished work on the cross, knowing that it was a sufficient payment for your sins? That’s the first sign of salvation. But not the only one!

And do you know what else is in your heart? LOVE! You love Jesus, and you tell Him that you love Him. You tell Him in your private prayer life. You tell Him in your public worship. You seek to show Him you love Him by how you live. And from time to time your heart is just so overwhelmed with love for Jesus that you cannot help but just have yourself a spell. That’s what Paul did. After recalling his sordid past and his glorious salvation by grace, his soul got happy even while he wrote to Timothy, and he just had to stop and exclaim the greatness of God (verse 17). “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

You may be thinking, “I never have thoughts like that in my prayer time or in worship”. Well, friends, there is one of two problems. First of all, you may not be saved. You have never come face to face with your lost condition, seeing yourself as a hopeless sinner. And even if you have, you’ve never responded to the call of the Holy Spirit, turned from your sins, and trusted Jesus alone to be your Savior and Lord. And you need to be saved today.

But you may be saved, and you still don’t have the love for Jesus in your heart that Paul speaks about. Beloved, if that is you, you need to turn once more from your sins and run back to Jesus, just like the prodigal son. You need to cry out to Jesus for forgiveness and receive His cleansing and rejoice in His grace once more. For that’s what He has called all of us to do. Now, from time to time you may be like many believers and suffer from depression. You feel so bad, and it is not because of your sin. But beloved, even in those awful, depressed times, when your sins are confessed and you are seeking God with all of your heart, He will still come to you in your darkest hour and whisper in your soul, “My grace is sufficient for you!” God will never let you get so far down that His grace will not pick you back up! So tie a knot and hang on to God’s grace in the bad times, and when He delivers you, exclaim His grace”.

And beloved, never forget this, all of God’s chilun’ are to exclaim the grace of God! Exclaiming God’s grace is not a preacher thing, it is not a missionary thing, and it is not a deacon thing. It is a Christian thing!! And beloved, if you and I will all live so close to Jesus that we will rejoice in His grace every day, I’ll tell you, we will be a

church that pleases Him! And we will be a church that draws sinners like bees to a honeycomb.

Now I want to show you something that is exciting to me. Turn in your Bibles, please, to John 1. Beloved, God has never made the Christian life a complicated thing. God has put the cookies down on the bottom shelf so everyone could reach them. We have seen thus far that God's church has been commissioned to **exalt His Word** and to **exclaim His grace**. And look now to where John tells us that we will find these things most clearly. Look at John 1:14. Now look at verse 18. Beloved, the grace of God and the word of God, which is the truth of God, is most fully revealed in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. For John writes, Jesus is full grace and truth. And He is what the church is to be proclaiming to the world. And one irrefutable evidence of a church that is exalting God's Word and is exclaiming God's grace is if through all of its preaching and teaching and worship it is proclaiming God's Son.

About two years ago or so our church adopted a purpose statement. A purpose statement is what you are all about, your reason for existence. And our purpose statement is at the bottom of our bulletin. "Preaching Christ and building His church". It is a good statement. I cannot think of a better one, and I'm so thankful that we adopted it. But if we could have two purpose statements, I can think of another one that I like just as much. And that is, "A place of grace and truth". What a great purpose for any church! A place that exclaims the grace of God through Jesus and a place that demonstrates the grace of God through Jesus. And a place that exalts the truth of God by using it to point people to Jesus, Who is truth. Oh, may we truly be able to proclaim to broken, dying souls, "Come to Grant's Creek and find grace and truth", for that's what they found when they came to Jesus.

We must quickly look at one more task of the church. We are to **exalt God's Word** and to **exclaim God's grace**, but we are also to **encounter God's enemies**. Look again at verse 18-19a. Beloved, much of what we've talked about this morning takes place right here within the walls of the church. And how critical it is that we do these things right here!!! But please don't miss this. What we do in the church is only a means to an end. We are here to build up one another, but if all we ever do is leave here every Sunday renewed in our love for Jesus and truly loving and ministering to one another, we have failed!! We have failed unless we take the truth and love of Jesus out into a hostile world and capture souls who are lost, dying, and headed to their destruction.

Most of us are football fans, and so you can relate to what I'm about to say. Before the start of most every offensive play, what do most teams still do? They huddle. They get instructions about how they are going to try to advance the ball into enemy territory and eventually whip the enemy by scoring a touchdown. And good teams break huddle, run their plays, and eventually score. They will run some good

plays, some bad plays, they may have to punt occasionally, but they keep on keeping on and score touchdowns and they win.

Now beloved, the analogy is not perfect, but do you know what we are doing here this morning, and every time we come into the walls of our church? We are having a holy huddle. We are making our plans to advance the gospel into enemy territory. And we are encouraging one another to give our best. But do you know what most churches wind up doing? I'll tell you. They never break huddle! They huddle, and huddle, and huddle all day. But they never come up to the line of scrimmage to knock heads with the enemy. And they are perennial losers.

But here's the saddest part of it all. God the Father is their coach, and He has the perfect game plan, and He's equipped them with everything they need to play the game. All the skills, speed, and size, for they are all equipped with the Holy Spirit. And He's standing on the sidelines crying out to them, "Get out of the huddle and play ball! You know what to do. You've got them outmanned. What are you waiting for?" And their quarterback and captain is 1000% better than Cam Newton. He is Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And He calls the play and says, "Break", but they just stand there. Oh, if they would only break huddle. They would never lose.

Well, beloved, I've shared with you the calling of the church. To **exalt God's Word**, to **exclaim God's grace**, and to **encounter God's enemies**. And as we close today I want to go back to one of them, I want to exclaim to you God's grace. Maybe God has spoken to your heart this morning about an issue in your life. You may not know if you died today where you would spend eternity. I want you to know, God's grace is sufficient for you. Come to Jesus and you will know in your heart His awesome, amazing grace. Maybe there is a need in your life as a believer. Come to Jesus! His grace is sufficient for you. Come, be delivered, and glorify His name.