

## Twenty Years of God's Faithfulness to GRBC

Call to Worship: Lamentations 3:22-24

1st Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1-4:5

2nd Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:1-12

Hymn #26- *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*

Hymn #27- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Hymn #50- *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

### **Introduction:**

Sometimes, particularly among those of you who are creative, you put together a scrapbook, so as to commemorate special events and times in your life. Maybe, you went on a nice vacation to a sunny island somewhere, and of course, took many pictures, which you later organized in a creative scrapbook, that had a "beach theme," decorating the whole of the book. Or, perhaps you had a landmark birthday party, which you commemorated with a scrapbook, themed with pages covered with confetti, presents, balloons... etc. Years down the road, such scrapbooks can often provide great moments of nostalgia, and profitable times of reflection.

Most of you know that January 1, 2015, marks twenty years since Calvary Baptist Church of Amityville and First Baptist Church of Merrick, officially merged and constituted to become Grace Reformed Baptist Church of Long Island. We might try to imagine what the scrapbook would look like, if one were put together, representing the entire duration of the life of GRBC. I was baptized in September of 1996, and brought into membership, shortly thereafter, and so, my entire walk with the Lord, pretty much lines right up with the history of GRBC, less some two years. Virtually, all of my new life memories, center on this church. And so, as I reflect; as I put together my own mental scrapbook, as it were, I could easily see such a variety of pages, spanning the whole of the book.

Some pages are very bright, exciting, energetic and almost heavenly. Others are very dark, fearful and hardly clinging to the book. Some are very clean and crisp and full of many bright colors. Others are torn and wrinkled, and soaked with dry tears. Many faces are dispersed throughout the book, so many new ones here and there, some provoking joy, others provoking sorrow, some humor and some sobriety. Some pages are very bland, somewhat redundant and status quo, and others seem to thrive with excitement, creating a sense of hunger to see the pages that follow. And as I work through the whole of the book, I try to find one theme, any theme,

which runs consistent throughout the book; any strand or thread that somehow could possibly link, what would otherwise seem to be a book that could never hold together, and I only find one. I only find one theme that could possibly keep such a compilation of distinction and extreme variety together; one theme that could ever have kept this book from coming apart or spiraling off into several smaller books. And that theme is the faithfulness of God! That theme is the theme of the Lamb, who walks among the lampstands, trimming the wicks and refueling the lamps with regular, ongoing oil. Brethren, I look at our scrapbook, and I say, that there is absolutely, beyond the shadow of any doubt, no other explanation for why this lampstand still burns, other than, the incomprehensible and mysterious grace, mercy and faithfulness of God! Great is His faithfulness, and therefore, we are not consumed!

This morning, we celebrate, not twenty years of *GRCB's* faithfulness, not anything to our own personal accreditation. Anyone, who has been here long enough, knows that that would be a dishonest and fallacious celebration. No, this morning, we celebrate that which is entirely true, namely, that we continue to exist and press on, because God is faithful. We celebrate God's faithfulness and commitment to us, for the last twenty years, pleading for new and fresh grace, for the years ahead, even until the return of Christ, should God be pleased to endure with us.

And as we celebrate God's goodness, I want to emphasize three critical realities that must be present, if we are to continue to anticipate, in any sense, the continued blessing of God, upon our church.

### **I. There *must* be Biblical, God Centered, Preaching**

From the standpoint of the eldership, there must be Biblical, God centered preaching, if we are to anticipate God's blessing upon our church. One of the sure ways to kill this church is to cater to the feel good, fluffy, man-centered preaching, which sadly, permeates much of evangelical Christianity today.

In our first Scripture reading, we read a portion of Paul's letter to Timothy, which describes the kind and quality of preaching, which God calls for, unto the blessing and growth of His church. Keeping in mind that the Apostle is nearing his immanent death, and recognizing the sense of urgency throughout the entire context of the letter, it is critical that we do not

deemphasize the importance of all that Paul states, concerning the preaching of the Word, in the last two chapters of the letter. I am sure that both sweat and tears, fell upon the original document, when Paul penned it.

And why does Paul end his letter to his protege, Timothy, with such a fervent concentration on the faithful preaching of the Word of God? He tells us in Chapter 4:3, "For ("Timothy, I am urging you in this direction because... for...") the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ("the time will come when people will not be willing to embrace the life changing truth of God's Word") but according to their own desires ("that which will appease and comfort them; that which will not make them uneasy; that which will not warn or convict or rebuke"), because they have itching ears ("ears that wish to hear only what they want to here; only that which leaves them comfortable and happy"), they will heap up teachers for themselves ("teachers, who like the false profits of old, speak peace when there is no peace; preachers, who speak nothing by way of conviction; nothing that convicts the conscience unto profitable change, but only that which leaves them comfortable where they are"); and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you ("Timothy") be watchful in all things, endure afflictions ("don't let anything shake you from being steadfast and faithful, rightly dividing the Word of God, even unto your own hurt"), do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." Such is the urgency of the matter! Such is the fervent charge to preachers of all ages, in the face of so many threats, and calls to compromise.

And how does Paul describe the preaching ministry, just prior to this sad description of what will happen, and what has happened, and what predominantly happens in our day, brethren? First, at the end of Chapter 3, he reveals the critical place of true doctrine, as a means of salvation and sanctification (What you believe always affects how you live). It is Scripture, and Scripture alone, which is God-breathed, and therefore, it is the proper and right exposition of Scripture, which is profitable for doctrine (for teaching), for reproof (for exposing our wrongs and remaining flaws), for correction (teaching us how to correct those remaining sinful flaws, in accordance with God's design for us), and for an overall instruction in righteousness. Scripture provides us with every necessary tool, unto a pursuit of godliness, in accordance with God's design in our salvation, which is to produce holiness and Christ-likeness in us; which is to make

us fit for heaven, and "light emitting" examples of God's holiness and love, on earth. And so, the man of God; the preacher; teacher, is entirely equipped for *every* good work, when he is equipped with all that is contained in the Scriptures. Nothing more or less is needed, and therefore, how the man of God handles the Word of God, is absolutely critical! And how should he handle it? What ought to be the quality of the preaching, preached by the man of God?

Paul states in Chapter 4:1-2, just prior to the warning that we have already considered in verse 3, about those who will not endure sound doctrine, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ (before the highest authorities in existence), who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom (to whom, we must all give account, and most of all, those who are entrusted with the ministry of leading the people of God): Preach the Word! Preach the whole Word; the whole counsel of God, leaving nothing out; adding none of your own fancies and creative imaginations! Be ready in season and out of season (at all times, be ready). Convince (Convict with a sense of fervency; if you don't believe what you are preaching, and if you don't preach it like you believe it, then don't dare step in that pulpit), rebuke (Expose wrongs, bring the sin of the people to light; don't sugar coat, don't beat around the bush, but bring the Word of God faithfully, clearly, specifically and directly to the consciences of the people), exhort (motivate onward, encourage, push forward with your exposition, bringing the Word of God to bear, relevantly, to the minds and hearts, of the flock, over whom, Christ has designated and delegated you as an overseer), with all longsuffering and teaching (with patience, being willing to endure, with self-control and a long fuse, in it for the long run, faithful to Christ!).

Brethren, such ought to be the quality of the ministry of the Word, and by God, let Pastor Doug and Bob and I, never step foot in the pulpit again, if we should ever forsake this Biblical model. But, see again in these qualitative words, "convince/convict, rebuke, exhort"; see in these descriptive words, defining the quality of our preaching, a real sense of "called for discomfort," brethren. These are not words that convey the ideas of ease, complacency, status quo, are they? No, they are mission words; words aimed to cut -- graciously, but to cut and chisel nonetheless. And it is so tempting to walk away from such preaching, when there are so, so, many out there, who will give you only what your ears naturally wish to hear. There are no small amount of ear ticklers out there. But ear tickling doesn't produce growth and change. Ear tickling doesn't

strengthen perseverance and endurance and the ability to endure inevitable, painful and difficult trials. Ear tickling doesn't drive you away from yourself (it doesn't break you), so that you might be more dependent upon, and confident in Christ and His strength! Ear tickling doesn't make you weak, so that you will be strong in Christ!

Brethren, there ought to be a balance in the preaching ministry, and preachers; we, are prone toward stepping over the line, on either side of the balance, which is why it is helpful to come to all of the service, to hear from different preachers. But know this for certain, if you are never uncomfortable under the preaching of the Word; if you are never convicted and driven to repentance and a renewed confidence in Christ; if you are never uneasy, then I want to suggest to you that, either you are not listening, or you are not under the quality of preaching, described here by the Apostle Paul. And so, the preaching must be Biblical.

And it must be God-centered. There are thousands upon thousands of applications in Scripture, but the general message must be God-centered and Christ exalting, because the whole of Scripture presents us with an all sovereign God, who is justly and firstly concerned about His glory, which is of paramount importance, as He reveals and unfolds His unchangeable will, in accordance with His glorious purposes. This Book is first and foremost about God, and not us. And it is about God, exalting His Son, Jesus Christ, in the redemption of fallen man, unto the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. That theme must permeate the whole of the preaching ministry, and preachers must avoid allowing the necessary focus on the parts of the whole, to lose the whole, among the parts. Biblical, God-centered preaching is necessary, for any church, which will sustain God's blessing. If this is gone, the lamp is out.

## **II. There must be a Preserved Unity in the Body**

Two cannot walk together, unless they are agreed. A body cannot function properly, without cooperating parts, each functioning according to their design for the body. A single strand will be easily broken, but a solid rope; a band of single strands; a cable of wires, can hold and pull tremendous weight. Show me a church that is tightly knit; a church like the scales of an alligator's body (one overlapping the other), and I will show you a church that bears the marks of God's blessing.

We were never meant to be alone, in our walk with the Lord. We are co-dependent, in the sense, that God graces us to finish the race, by "means of grace," that are mostly attached to our fellowship with other Christians. We just read in Ecclesiastes 4, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor ("working together, they get more done, and are able to assist each other, especially in the face of opposition"). For, if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm (they can share body heat); but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him."

Obviously, there are many practical, physical principles that can be taken from these verses, but consider the spiritual as well. How hard it is to survive spiritually, against the great opposition of spiritual Canaanites and Philistines, when you are seeking to build the wall of Jerusalem on your own. How much easier it is to run with two legs than one; to see with two eyes than one; to hear with two ears than one; to breathe with two lungs than one, to function with all body parts, rather than be without any single part. Cooperative unity, for the one great cause of glorifying Christ, in the building of His church, is invaluable! It is as the anointing oil, pouring down the beard of Aaron. So critical is this unity, to the life of the church, that the Apostle Paul calls us, as a first order of business in Ephesians 4, to do all that it takes to preserve it, in the bond of peace, laying aside all natural, fleshly hindrances. It is a unity that must be preserved, because, like milk, if left out too long; if left unwatched and uncared for, it will spoil at anytime, and mar the glorious revelation of Christ in our midst, in the process.

And this unity must be a union in:

1- Love. Outward looking, self-sacrificial love; consideration of the needs and welfare (physical and spiritual) of one another, until we all come to the perfect man in Christ. Like a unit of soldiers, each dependent upon the other; each looking out for the other; each willing to die for the other, until the mission is complete!

2- Fellowship. A commitment to be together as much as possible, with the desire to encourage, exhort, rebuke; in short, to do all to edify and build this body unto completion.

3- Doctrine. A striving after unified doctrine, embracing the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, striving to lay hold of, absorb, and live out of, "whatsoever things He has commanded us." [Note: The importance of greeting one another]

An unequal yoke will never get the field plowed. A single strand will break, even under minimal pressure. But, a united cord of individual strands, will carry and pull the Titanic!

And so, the blessing of God is upon a people, who are fervently committed to unity; unity in one body, in one love, in one fellowship, in one doctrine, unto the glorification of one God, by Jesus Christ! [III: Auto-immune diseases; attacking your own defenses]

### **III. Christ *must* be at the Center of this Church**

The church exists by, through and for Christ, and if He is lost, behind the guise of so-called "religion," she has died, or even worse, she has become a zombie for the enemy, an antichrist, contending with God and His true Gospel!

Two are better than one, but verse 12 of Ecclesiastes 4, teaches us that "a three fold cord is not quickly broken." Indeed, if Christ is that third strand, we are unbreakable! And so, if the steel thread of Christ, is interwoven throughout the entire life of the church; the ministries, the preaching, the fellowship, the unity... etc, then we can be certain that the church will stand! If the house is built upon the rock, then even wind and wave and storm and every other means of destruction, which comes against it, will never move it! "On Christ the solid Rock we stand, all other ground is sinking sand!"

This therefore is the most critical; indeed the very foundation of all other critical aspects of church life. We must constantly guard our commitment to, our fellowship in, our focus on, and our constant dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are to survive. At the individual level, brethren; at the sustaining of our health as individual members of the body, and at the corporate level, at the sustaining of our walking together heavenward as one body, we must maintain, constant, ongoing fellowship and communion with Christ! Morality without Christ is legalism at best, and liberty without Christ is antinomianism at best. Christ gives us the constant balance of fervently pursuing holiness, while swimming in an ocean of joy and peace and freedom! His cross is the motivation for our peace, and for every righteous pursuit, we strive

toward, in the putting to death, that which is still fleshly and ungodly in these bodies. And so, we must strive to protect and preserve the Christ-centeredness of this church, if we are to be certain that the blessing of God is upon us.

### **Conclusion**

Biblical, God-centered preaching; preserved unity in love, and a Christ-centered foundation, are themselves, a three-fold cord that will not be broken. Where these are preserved, the blessing of God will remain.

Now brethren, thanks be unto God, that in spite of our shortcomings in all of these areas, God has remained gracious, merciful and faithful. He has brought us back; He has shaken us up, when we have veered off in any other direction. But, let us not take His grace for granted. Let us strive on our part, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and to faithfully finish the race that lies before us. May it never be etched in the spiritual doors of this body, "Ichabod," the glory of the Lord has departed!

What will 2015 look like? Another year has swooped by, but what is in store for the one, which is in front of us? Only God knows. But, if we are slacking, if we are toying with sin, then let us repent, and return to our first love, and do the things that we have done at the beginning. Our end is one year closer. How will GRBC finish? How will you finish? Endeavor to hear the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

To the unsaved...

Amen!!!

**The Lord's Supper!!!**