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Go to Matthew 22 if you would and I was just reminiscing with John Mark about the first time you and I met. I was preaching in Pensacola and this college guy called me and was burdened about sound doctrine and a biblically healthy church and wanted to do something along that line and actually had been sort of thrown away by the pastors that he had know and the area sort of because they didn't believe in reformed theology and man, John Mark has stayed the course and grown and pastored and preached and what a good report. What a blessing.

I'm going to purpose to give you something of a systematic overview of the truth of Spirit empowered preaching and not as one who has apprehended but as a fellow sojourner who is still learning and repenting and hopefully growing to be a more effective preacher. I hope and trust that God has given me some things that will be helpful and maybe some of these nuggets, I'm afraid at times you may feel like you're getting a drink out of a fire hydrant as I share this but nevertheless hopefully there will be some things that help you and most importantly affirm what you know, but you need to stand more strongly in what you know.

Matthew 22 is an interesting passage of Scripture. I just want to use it as a foundation stone and by the way, if you're not very familiar with this, this is not my mainstay. I spent almost five years preaching through Hebrews and about 2 ½ through Ephesians, about 2 ½ through Hosea, about 4 or 5 years in Isaiah and that's what we do, verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter. But I can't get all out that I want to get out and do that for this application but I do want to use this text, Matthew 22, beginning in verse 23,

"On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, asking, 'Teacher, Moses said, "If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother." Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her.'"

So this is the principle of the kinsmen redeemer and they think they trapped Jesus in this little quiz here in effect that they are giving him. Verse 29,

"But Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.'"

Those always go together: understanding the Scriptures and knowing the power of God. I. in my outline is: Spirit empowered preaching is true preaching. Spirit empowered preaching is true preaching. The Scriptures simply know no other kind of preaching other than Spirit empowered preaching. We preach God's word. We preach God's gospel. Paul said in Galatians 1:11 that the gospel he preached was not according to man. And God, of course, is the God of all power and all authority who would not say a preaching ministry devoid of divine power is one devoid of God. A preaching ministry devoid of divine power is a misrepresentation of the God we're trying to proclaim. Romans 1:16, Paul simply said, "The gospel is the power of God into salvation." Now can we be said to be preaching if the power of God is not saving the lost in our ministries? In Acts 1:8, "The Spirit must come first," Jesus said, "And after the Spirit comes then you should be my witnesses." Acts 4:33, the apostles' preaching is accompanied by great power. Let me just be careful and give a little balance here, I will say this a little more later that there are seasons when God unusually manifests his power and seasons when he does not. You don't measure yourself by those seasons all the time in your week-to-week preaching. 1 Thessalonians 1:4, "The Spirit proves the gospel," if you will, or "through the gospel the Spirit transforms the lives of the hearers and proves their election." 1 Thessalonians 1:5, Paul's gospel he said came, "not only in word but in power which resulted in the full conviction of the truth in the hearts of all of those who believed."

That is something of a summary of his overall preaching and teaching ministry. Colossians 1:28-29, Paul talks about that he proclaimed him, "Admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom that he might present every man complete in Christ," then he says, "And I do this according to his power which mightily works within me." Here would be a summary point to this first point, Mark 1:22, "They were amazed at his teaching for he was teaching them as one having authority and not as the scribes." Carnal preaching amuses, Spirit empowered preaching amazes. So, let's not get in our minds any notion that if we just dot the i's and cross the t's of effective exposition that we have done our job. It must also be spiritually empowered. The Scripture knows no other kind of preaching than spiritually empowered preaching.

II. The Spirit empowers sound preaching. Sound preaching. You and I live in a day and Doctor M. pointed this out, we're grieved about it every day of our ministries in which there is so much unsound preaching in the professing church and it's been a problem since the first century. I used to think that this day was just so unusual and so unique. I don't think that's true at all. I think in every age there has been an onslaught of false preaching and false preachers. 2 Peter 3:16, Peter referring to Paul's teachings and he says, "Many men are distorting," twisting Paul's teaching, "as they do the rest of the Scriptures." It was just a pattern; they just had it as their *modus operandi*, if you would, to use the Bible but twist it. And that just frustrates me severely to see men use the Bible but not preach the word. There is a vast difference between the two. They distort they twist. Colossians 2:23 in the context of the Judaizers who would bring legalism into the gospel

and, by the way, when you bring anything into the gospel, you lose the gospel. When these legalists brought these laws to add to the gospel Paul says, "These things have the appearance of wisdom but are no guard against fleshly indulgence." It can look good but still be false preaching. 1 Timothy 4:1 talks about the doctrines of demons. No wonder Paul as he trained Timothy, this was in 1 Timothy 1:3 he said, "Timothy, I'm going to instruct you or you've got to rather instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrine. You have to be constantly on the guard to make sure the teachers in association with you are sound preachers."

So in like vein, in like spirit, he says in 1 Timothy 4:6, "I want you, Timothy, to be constantly nourished on the words of the faith and sound doctrine." Just studying over this, I ran across a phrase that Paul uses and is addressed to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, and then firstly to Timothy. You know what that phrase is? The same four words he gives to those three churches and Timothy, "I am not lying." I thought that was interesting, "I am not lying." I'm like, "Paul, why do you have to say, 'I am not lying?'" He's saying, "I am not lying," because so prevalent was the false and unsound preachers who constantly undermined Paul's doctrine and Paul's personal character that he had to say to them, "Listen to me, I'm actually telling the truth." There is just so much unsound preaching around.

So we need to heed the clear biblical command to make sure you are preaching in a sound way. Now, here is a sub thought there, sound preaching requires sound preparation. Sound preaching requires sound preparation. Again, I'm just going to throw a flood of verses at you because I want you to know how thoroughly this is laid out in the text. 2 Timothy 2:15, we are told to "handle accurately the word of truth." Literally that means "to cut it straight." Now, if you're going to handle accurately the word of truth as you prepare and preach to your people, that means you are going to have to spend some time on it. Sound preaching requires sound preparation. 2 Timothy 1:13-14, Paul says to, "Guard the sound words, guard this treasure that has been entrusted to you." The activity of guarding and protecting and making sure you're grounded in sound doctrine means you are going to have to spend some time in preparation. 2 Timothy 4:13, "Give attention to public reading and exhortation and to teaching." That speaks of preparation. 2 Timothy 4:15, Paul tells Timothy, "Take pains in these, even be absorbed in them." I think John MacArthur says that phrase where Timothy as he is preparing for his public preaching and teaching ministry, if he is to take pains and to be absorbed it means he is to labor to the point of exhaustion in his preaching ministry.

I don't have this in my notes and that is dangerous because I have too many notes already, but it was a long journey here at Grace Life Church of the Shoals for me to be the preaching pastor and yet exhort and teach the people to leave me alone to do what God called me to do. It was a tough journey. I mean, people would get, they would misunderstand, I was called cold hearted, I was called uncaring, I was called unloving, you weren't there at the hospital and on and on we can go, but now through the years, the church has so profited from allowing me to study, if you talk to 90% of my people and that's not an exaggerated percentage, and you ask them, "What is Jeff's job," they'll say, "We want him to study and preach the word." Somebody else will do other things but

brothers, I'm telling you, it took years to get there and lots of hurt feelings and lots of misunderstandings and quite honestly, Doctor M., lots of people leaving. It was tough and I just want to be as transparent as I can be: I messed up a lot. My spirit wasn't always right, I was not as humble or as gracious as I should have been and I had to do a lot of repenting on this journey too but yet my point was right. If you're going to labor to the point of exhaustion in your preparation, you must say no to many, many good things and to many, many good people who don't understand what God called you to do.

Paul continued to exhort Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:16, he says, "As you do these things," this laboring to the point of exhaustion and this public ministry of the word. "you will," now listen to this, "you will ensure salvation for yourself and for your hearer." Wow. That is powerful. What is it that will ensure that God will bring salvation to those who hear our message? It is the pastor who is properly preparing for the pulpit. That is what the word says. The proper preparation and preaching of the word of God is the primary means God uses in the salvation of sinners and if we do not put energy into preparing for the pulpit, we should not expect divine energy to accompany the preaching from the pulpit.

Now, two sub points to that. Very quickly, certainly don't have time to deal with this, Brother David Miller is I think is as good as it gets at helping buys grasp this process and that is to prepare the text in your preparation. I will just mention the words, you must interpret the text grammatically. I am a very poor Greek and Hebrew student, very poor, but I did learn enough in seminary to use the helps and the men who are brilliant and trustworthy in the Greek and Hebrew. And I always spend quality time making sure my interpretation of the text is in flow with the Greek and Hebrew grammar.

Then of course, in the terms of the texts, contextually. As you're preaching that text, it must be in the flow of what the author was saying in the preceding and in the following verses.

Then culturally and historically. God used men out of their own time and we must understand what are they thinking? What have they been through? What does the text tell you about their culture and about their setting? Even about their own growth as you study the life of the Apostle Peter and some of the things he says and teaches. Where is he at that point in his understanding and grasping of the mission in the person of Christ? Interpret it culturally and historically and then interpret it systematically. I keep two or three systematic theologies on the shelf and as I am studying, if I come across one of the great doctrines of the Scripture sometimes I'm just a little foggy and I like to pull out Pendleton and I'll just flip over to the chapter where Pendelton...it is just a great systematic theology for a quick reference for sermon preaching and I'll just say, "What does Pendleton say again about substitutionary atonement? What does he say about justification?" You can't take that one isolated text and interpret it out of harmony of what the balance of what the Scripture teaches on that doctrine.

And then lastly and, brothers, this is so needed in our churches: you must interpret that text spiritually. Here is what I mean by that: you are God's shepherd for that church and

when you know these other things are lining up grammatically, contextually, culturally, historically and systematically then the Spirit of God can give you practical applications – listen – for your church from that text. Don't just give them the raw cold data, give them something for them from the text. Where is Satan working? Where is he weakening? Where is there misunderstanding? Where has the enemy brought distortions and lies? Take the word of God, give them an application from that text in it's proper expositional understanding. Those are both very true. Amen? That's all I can say there. Prepare the text.

In your preparation also prepare your heart. Prepare your heart. Jeremiah 3:15, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you on knowledge and understanding." Our hearts during our study must be continually glory of God focused, God centered. We must prepare for God's pleasure. We must prepare for God's purpose and we must prepare in God's power. The preparation time must be a continual communion of God centered praying. A prayerful spirit of repentance and dependence must abide in our hearts as we both prepare the sermon and then preach the sermon. Let me just say a word about that: brothers, as you are preparing it just seems to help me, I wish I could tell you I was great at this but it is a pattern, you just have to raise your hand toward heaven and say, "Oh God, make this real in me first. Make this true in me first." If that spirit of repentance and dependence isn't there, you are not going to see God's power when you get to the sacred desk before your people. Human pride is the great power killer of the pulpit. God is opposed to the proud but he gives grace to the humble. Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before the fall." One sure way to have your words fall as wet washcloths on the steps before the pulpit is to enter the sacred arena confident in your human abilities. Paul did not say "study to show yourself a great theologian"; he did not say "study to show yourself a great orator"; he did not say "study to show yourself an entertainer and an amusing communicator"; he did not say "study to show yourself a skilled alliterator of outlines"; but he said "study to show yourselves approved of God." Now, don't misunderstand me: be who you are. Some humor comes out and I love alliteration. I'm not saying that's wrong but that's not our main quest. That is not our main passion. Our main quest and our main passion is to have a heart for God. Literally to have God's heart. Now, what is on God's heart? It is very simple, his own glory. That is on God's heart. It's all about the glory of God and our hearts must be consumed with, "Oh God, while I'm preparing," and "Oh God, when I am preaching, folks must be enamored with you. They must see you. They must treasure you. They must joy in you." We must trust not in our study though that is essential but trust in the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will accompany sound preaching which requires sound preparation.

Next, III. Spirit empowered preaching must be sought in faith. It must be sought in faith. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus said, "The Father desires to give good gifts to all who ask." He desires to give good gifts to all who ask. Now the context is there about how evil men will give good gifts to their children and how much more would the heavenly Father give good gifts to his own children if we would ask for them. We need to have faith that God will bless our preaching. We need to have confidence that God uses ordinary vessels to do supernatural things. We "have this treasure in earthen vessels," the Scripture says. I like, I think it's Howard Hendricks interpretation, he says, "We have this treasure in

ordinary peanut butter jars," that is what we are. "But our confidence in faith is that God is going to use us. Faith is a resolute trust. Our faith in God is a resolute abandonment of all others to look only and exclusively to him. The preacher's reliance on the Holy Spirit must have no rivals. When we are studying and when we ascend to the pulpit, we consider ourselves as shipwrecked on God and stranded on omnipotence." It is up to you. That is Dr. Havner's quote.

If you will, look at another text right quick with me. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. One of the troubles in taking a topic like this and giving yourself 40 minutes and I always lose track of my time so I don't know how long I have gone or how long I am going but it is that there is, what are you going to leave out and I just thought that this text can't be left out. We have got to look at this a little bit, 1 Corinthians 2:1, Paul says to the church at Corinth, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." A.T. Robertson said that the Corinthians put a premiere on false rhetoric and thin thinking. They were greatly enamored with the eloquence, the style, the word smith abilities, if you will, of all of their philosophers and teachers of their day so Paul says, "I came to you and just decided not to do any of the culturally relevant things you are used to. I purpose not to do that." Superiority of speech or wisdom, he says, "I didn't look to any of that. No lofty scholar or had excellence of rhetoric in my preaching." He said, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

Verse 3, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling," I have seen some guys explain that a way like he was not really weak and in fear but I think it means what it means. He was a mess. You know why I think it means what it means? I guess it's not the eisegesis but I have been there, I have done it at this very pulpit full of weakness and fear and much trembling and I did not perform very well and if God didn't use me, nothing was going to happen. If you know what Paul had been through, you would probably understand why he is full of weakness and fear and much trembling.

Now, look at verse 4, "and my message and my preaching were not," again, "not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ." I love those two words. He said, "I didn't come in persuasion, I came in demonstration." Paul wasn't just trying to persuade men's mind, "Be in balance," we do try to persuade men's minds but he is saying, "That wasn't what I was really looking for or trusting in to win you the Christ." Paul wasn't primarily about persuading men's minds though we must do that, he wanted to be used of God to transform men's lives. Something he could not do. He could persuade minds but only God can change hearts. He said, "Look at my ministry. I had some persuasiveness perhaps but not like your great orators and philosophers of Corinth. I chose not even to get in their arena. I might can persuade of mind but look what this gospel did, it changed your life." God is about that kind of work.

So Paul in this setting avoided the cultural allurements of his day because he was about demonstrating what God can do, not what man can do. I think the Apostle Paul would be dismayed at the things being done today to dress up the worship service and make the gospel relevant. I love his statement that he makes to the Corinthians, he says, "You're

my letter known and read of all men." Some very, I guess, brothers of deep faith have asked me through the years, "Why don't you do some writing?" First of all, it's the truth I am just not a writer. I am just not good at things like that. But I had it in my heart 30 years ago that instead of teaching about it or writing about it, why don't we just illustrate it. Why don't we just be it? And that is what Paul is saying, "You're my letter. You want to see the reality of my doctrine and my gospel? Look at the people I pastor." That is what Paul was saying, the demonstration of the power of the gospel.

Colossians 4:3, Paul evokes the Colossians to pray that he would find an open door for the word. So here Paul is, he has talked to Corinthians here, he has explained to them again, "I had to have total confidence in God's faith or God's empowerment of my message." His faith was in God working through his message, not in his human skill, ability, persuasiveness etc. Then he talks to the Colossians and says, "Would you also in faith go to God and ask for an open door for the gospel?" An open door for the word is the literal translation. And I believe when he asked him to join him in this faith prayer, I believe this included asking for the Spirit's empowerment on the preaching so that men's hearts would be open. I think that is the main open door he is talking about. Men's hearts would be open. Like Lydia in Acts 16:14, "The Lord opened her heart." Brothers and sisters, we've got to go to the pulpit absolutely convinced God's gospel is going to change somebody today. Convinced of it. In faith. Not in us but in God and his gospel.

Some of us need to reevaluate some of the cool and clever things we are doing in our worship service. Notice the word "reevaluate." I didn't just slam you and throw you under the bus. Reevaluate and what we need to do is focus on what you may not have: the Spirit's power. You may be clever but do you have the Spirit's power? You may be creative but do you have the Spirit's power? Dr. M, you might remember the name Reginald Barnard. He taught in America years ago. Dr. Barnard went to Spurgeon's college in England. He didn't say much but, man, when he said stuff,, I heard him, this is a long time ago and I am just trying to work through all of the stuff. I wasn't raised Southern Baptist, I became Southern Baptist because I heard the word then I saw all of this stuff going on and I didn't know how to evaluate the stuff I was seeing. There was a lot about personalities and creativities and dramas and stuff. Not all of that is bad but it was troubling to me. And he said something I have never forgotten, Dr. Barnard said "Brothers, you cannot say I'm clever and Jesus is Lord." Think about that. Is your faith in the gospel or in your cleverness and your creativity to do church? We must seek in faith the company of the Spirit's power in our preaching.

Now brothers, it's mysterious. I guess you could say it's mystical and Spirit empowerment is badly misunderstood today. Someone asked a black preacher one day, "Do you know what it means to preach under the unction?" He say, "I'm not sure I know when it is but I think I know when it ain't." I don't find any formulas in the Bible for spiritual power so I would exhort you to avoid all tendencies towards superstition. If I jump through these hoops, or chant this mantra, whatever, then the Spirit is going to help me. I know Spurgeon had the habit and it is my habit after I read it about him, that very step he takes to the pulpit he says, "I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Holy Ghost. I believe in

the Holy Ghost." But don't look for some formula, something like Simon the magician who sought that he could do something and purchase the power of God.

There must be faith though, without faith it is impossible to please God. The pastor if he is to be convincing, the pastor must be convinced. What did Dr. M. just tell us? You preach that gospel even though it is not in the human sense logical, even though it is offensive and even though humanly it's not going to work but God. Your confidence must be in God and his truth and once you begin to see a flow of people responding, it's worse than a heroin addiction. You just can't get away from thundering the gospel and seeing what else God is going to do with it. Who else he is going to change to glorify his name. But here is the question for the preachers out there today and for many of you lay leaders who need to support you pastors, do you really believe this? Are you in faith, pastor, as you prepare and preach? Are you expectantly believing God to demonstrate the power of the gospel in the lives of the hearers?

I have shared this with you before but I am going to share it again. Spurgeon was asked one day by one of his pastors in London why he wasn't seeing hardly any fruit of his preaching. He wasn't seeing many converts at all and Spurgeon said, "Well, you don't expect God to save someone every time you preach?" And the man said, "Well, certainly not," and Spurgeon said, "Well, that's why you don't see any." That's one of those little nuggets that changed my ministry. Guys, we have to drive a stake in the ground, chain ourselves to it and say, "If God doesn't bless it, we are sunk." Be done with filling your church with unregenerate ghosts that you reached. Let's let God build his church.

There are a lot of things being added to our worship services and our preaching times that are suspicious to me. There are just a lot of trappings that we are putting in the congregational worship today that looks a lot like the stuff that the world would use to entertain and amuse people. Here is what I want to get at with this: could it be that churches and pastors are doing this? I mean, really, when you get to the bottom line issue, could it be that we are doing that because they are not convinced God will build his church through the preaching of the gospel? Is that not the bottom line issue? So my focus isn't on the stuff and which stuff is okay and which stuff isn't. My focus is on what do you believe? Are you convinced of what God can do? Here is what happens, once God starts doing it with the gospel, you get freed up. You don't have to be clever, cute, creative or whatever anymore. You just preach the text and the power of the Spirit.

I am naturally good at organizing, administrating, casting a vision, implementing the strategy, getting it done to a fault. Ask my people, I almost killed them. And God had to deeply wound me years ago. He had to show me that though those things to be a visionary, to strategize, to organize, administrate, to achieve the task, that is not wrong, he showed me that though you have an expositional pulpit and you're praying and you're studying, in your heart you're not depending on my gospel. You're depending more on your structures and strategies and organizations. Not that they are wrong, I was just out of balance and God brought me to that point where through divisions and splits, today we have about 600 active members that have left us over the last 15 or so years. I don't know if they were 600 active believers but they were members. And through those things God

wounded me to the point, here is where God had to get Jeff Noblit. I simply didn't have the energy to do anything but preach. That's all that was left. That was it. It's been interesting. That has been years and now that I got that right in my heart that God's empowering of preaching will build his church primarily, now he's letting me take back all the hard work that we have done in every member ministry in small groups. You can't work harder at that than we worked at it, by the way. But he has let me have that back in our personalized strategic approach to world missions and the things that we put in place in biblical counseling and church discipline and meaningful membership and on and on and on we could go. Now he has let me bring that back and share it with others once he got me right to make the pulpit the preeminent means of God's work to build God's church.

Well, that's my story and hopefully my story will help you not to make the same mistake. I remember those days when I was wrestling and struggling because so many of the men that I looked to were very creative, strong, gifted personalities, had gifts that I didn't have. And I didn't really know what worked and what didn't work and I would just throw myself back on my study and throw myself back on my preaching and I would just pray that Scripture prayer, "God, I pray, help thou my unbelief. I believe, help my unbelief." And he would send me one and he would send another one and they would say, "Pastor, I fell so wrong about my sin. I feel so deeply crushed by my wretchedness before a Holy God." I thought, "I'm not used to hearing that," and then another and then another one and you can ask our elders and our staff, a week doesn't go by that we don't get at least one report of someone broken, someone crushed in conviction, someone coming to joyous trust in Jesus Christ. We put some time in that, by the way, but I think it only happened as I began to expect God to do it.

Well, what am I on? Number III? Are any of you taking notes? This is number IV coming up? I do my outline last, I really do. I study and write and study and then I pen the outline at the very end and I do that all the time. I don't know if that is a healthy way to prepare a sermon but that is the way I do it. Number IV and I've got to hurry, the Spirit empowers sovereignly and seasonally. The Spirit empowers sovereignly and seasonally. Our God seems to be a seasonal God. He gave the Jews the year of Jubilee. Every so many years they would let the ground lay fallow and property rights would go back to original tribes and loans were forgiven and just it was a different day. We all love 2 Samuel 5:24, "And it shall be when you hear," I'm going to use the King James Version, "when you hear the sound of a going in the top of the mulberry trees, then you should prepare yourself for battle." You don't hear a sound of the going in a top of the mulberry trees every Saturday night. It comes at times but it goes at times. You've got to accept that. We are not home yet. When God is ready to move, then we need to get ready and go to battle. Jesus said in Luke 24:49, "And behold I am sending forth the promise of my Father upon you but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." He said the power comes first, then you go out in ministry. But the Spirit empowers sovereignly and seasonally.

Now, this is not our specific instruction. We're not the original apostles waiting for the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. I know that. I know the context there. But it

does teach us that there are seasons when the Spirit comes in refreshings and there are seasons when he just doesn't come in the same way. Now, our job is to study and pray and preach "in season and out of season." Amen? But accept the seasons. Don't feel like when it's all over, I've got to quit, I'm a failure if it is not being blessed right now. Accept that the Spirit will move sovereignly and seasonally. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians that he was going to stay on in Ephesus because a great and effectual door for ministry had opened to him. A great and effectual door for ministry had opened but he also said to the Ephesian elders, "I wept here and exhorted you for three years," indicating there was a long season where there wasn't necessary a great and effectual door but finally God opened a door. One of the things we need to help our reformed brothers grasp today, especially the younger guys is, get over this four, five, six, seven, ten year ministry when you are going to have it all right. You may go seven years before God breathes on it. You might be on your fifteenth year before you even have a good decent level of spiritual maturity in the body of Christ. Always be faithful though but accept the seasons. That ought to help you, that helps me.

Lastly, V, Spirit empowered fruit. What does the fruit look like? If we are preaching God's word, God's way and under God's power, what kind of fruit are we looking for? Well, let me first of all talk about what we don't need to look for. Don't measure your success, don't measure your results by carnal measure. Do not use a carnal measure. I'll just throw out three things, maybe there is eight, these may not be the main ones but this just came to my heart. Don't measure whether or not the Spirit is moving by your pulpit style. "Well, if I run around and scream like Jeff Noblit, I am in the Spirit." That is not true. I find nothing in Scripture that says when the Spirit is on the pastor he has a certain demeanor or certain style. Paul said, "My ministry changed the life's in Corinth and I wasn't there in any kind of persuasive words of men's wisdom. No superiority of speech. As a matter of fact, I was with you in weakness, fear and much trembling." According to a lot of definitions of powerful pulpits, Paul would have been powerless but he wasn't. The Spirit mightily used him. Johnathan Edwards we're told, read his manuscript, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in somewhat of a monotone fashion and people would lay in their pews crying out to God for mercy. So don't get in your minds some subjective definition of personality and style in the pulpit as to whether or not the Spirit is empowering your preaching. Just be what you are. Don't put on something you saw.

So be careful about having a certain pulpit style. I think that could be a carnal measurement. The second would be: immediate results. Gotta see immediate results. Now, let me say this, God may do that but that is not typical. Johnathan Edwards and his writings helped me greatly as I was wrestling with these things early in my ministry and he talked about when there was an unusual outpouring of the Spirit of God, you can discern whether a convert is genuine much more quickly than most time. But he said most of the time that's a rare thing, most of the time it takes a season to discern those things. Be careful about measuring much on immediate results.

One example comes to my mind. I mean, we've had evangelists come through here. I got everybody saved so many times here in the first few years. Good night, and I don't want to call their names but you know some of them and one of them, you know, after the third

evangelist did wheat and the tares I thought, "I'm done with that. We have done all of that." I was standing down here at the aisle and the preacher had preached and a guy literally came out of the pew, he ran down the aisle, crocodile tears coming down his face and he said, "I'm a tare and I know it! I'm a tare and I know it!" We prayed together and he said he was gloriously saved. Two weeks later he leaves his wife and I have never seen him again. Be careful with immediate results. Jesus said, "Go and bear fruit that remains"

Immediate results can often be a carnal measurement. Numbers, that would be the third carnal measurement I would caution you about, numbers. Good night, you go to these conferences or conventions. "How many have you baptized? What is your membership? What is the percentage of growth? What are your offerings?" Now look brothers, we ought to be imploring God and hoping for growth. Amen? Be balanced here, there are some brethren out there think if they are small and they're dying, they're godly. No, you are not. But be careful with pinning on yourselves this stuff, this carnal measure.

I just want to throw this out for consideration. 1 John 4:3 tells us "the Spirit of the antichrist is already in the world." In 2 Thessalonians 2:9. the antichrist is characterized by one who produces false wonders. False or lying wonders is the word "pseudo." Now, let's be balanced, every true church and mature ministry will have some false fruit. Jesus had Jesus Ischariot, one out of twelve. You're going to have some too. Even with your best efforts, you are going to have some but brothers that is very different than a person whose whole organized system is to build a pseudo-Christian system. That's the spirit of the antichrist and when a genuine pastor, a God called pastor, finds false truth, it breaks his heart. He didn't try to cultivate it and encourage it. So be careful with seeing all these thing happening in these other churches and saying, "Well, I am not successful." You know, the church down the road is going and going. The pastor barely preaches the gospel if he's teaching it at all. He baptizes every 3 ½ year old and up who can mimic half of a so-called "sinners prayer." Their membership roll has hundreds and thousands on it perhaps that never attend. They never attempt any measure of biblical church discipline or accountability. They have Sunday school teachers who are known drinkers and gamblers. Fornicators and adulterers are active in their ministries and they seem to be prospering. Brother, but you remember that the antichrist spirit is always active and working. He has a limited time to advance his kingdom. But you keep preaching the whole counsel of God; you keep requiring converts to look like true believers before you will baptize them; you keep practicing compassionate church discipline. You keep thundering the true gospel until one day there comes a going in the top of the mulberry trees and God moves seasonally and blesses and gives you that kind of fruit. Listen, that remains and a man like Al M. comes and preaches on the doctrine of election and your people joy in it, not are troubled by it. So, beware of looking at these other ministries. They are very likely, in many of them at least, you are looking at a pseudo-gospel with pseudo-converts, a pseudo-membership, a pseudo- love and it is a pseudo-church. It is all false. It is lying wonders. Don't judge yourself by their numbers for their numbers don't count, they're pseudo- numbers.

By the way, if men are lost, ungodly, the enemies of God, sinners and dead and we could use other terms but those are biblical terms that describe men before they are saved, then all the efforts of human talent of speech and persuasion and all the force of human passion and energy are impotent to change them. Divine power must accompany the preached word if lost, ungodly enemies who are sinners and who are dead are going to be found, made Godly, become the friends of God and made alive. Spurgeon as only Spurgeon could say it said, "I shall not attempt to teach a tiger the virtues of vegetarianism but I shall as hopefully attempt that task as I would try to convince an unregenerate man of the truth concerning sin, righteousness and the judgment of God. It takes divine power to do that."

Back to my original text that I looked to and then jumped off of, Matthew 22:29, "Jesus answered and said to them, you don't understand the Scriptures or the power of God. They always must be together." Could we not say the Scriptures have no affect apart from the Holy Spirit's empowerment? Is that not the truth? No good, godly effect. And the Holy Spirit - listen to me - never works outside of or apart from the Scriptures. In Romans 10:13-14, Paul says, "For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" Now, the New American Standard leaves out the little word "of" before "him" so it's worded this way, "How will they believe in him whom they have not heard?" Not "of whom," not that they have heard about him, it is "whom they have not heard." I believe that is the best translation. The point is: when we preach the word in the power of the Spirit, they hear him. They don't just hear about him, they hear him. How will they believe in him whom, not of whom, whom they have not heard? Brothers, you want to know when you fold your Bibles and walk out that door, my people have heard the voice of God.

In the final analysis, what will that fruit look like in your church, pastor? What is a good honest evaluation? Can I just maybe go a little further than perhaps I should and it won't be that you close the nursery down and become family integrated. That's not the fruit we are looking for. That is okay if some guys do that, it's not okay if they do it here, I want your babies in the nursery. The best thing you can do for a young momma who is struggling and fighting and wrestling is let her hear the word of God preached for an hour without interruption. Some of the goofy stuff we do to claim we are spiritual. It won't be because you become home school only. I love home schoolers but you can mess up home schooling too. Have you understood that it is not a style of education that regenerates your children's hearts? It's the gospel that regenerates your children's hearts. What is the fruit? Here is the fruit: your people will know him, they will love him, they will treasure him, they will be humbled before him, they will gladly serve him in their local churches, they will gladly deny themselves to help their brothers and sisters in those local churches, they will give generously and joyously to those local churches who are on missions for him. They are just becoming people who are all about him.

Here is what I have found, I love this, your people will grow to need you less. Pastor, they will grow to need you less because they will have found more of Christ. Now, they

will love you more for it but they will need you less because they have found Christ through your preaching. Let's strive to keep learning and growing and being Spirit empowered preachers.

Let us pray together.