

**THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT**  
*The Church God Built*  
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**Spring Meeting Devotional, Tuesday, April 10, 2018**

It is grace that will take this church through. There's one thing unites the liberals and conservatives. The ultra-left and the ultra-right are united in this: criticizing the church. But we know this, God looks beyond this church's faults, of which it has many, and He sees its need. He will impart to it His Spirit and the church will triumph at last. Two messages: The first focus is on the church and its survival. The second focus is on the individual and its survival. The theme of both messages is the same: God's grace will take us through.

Let's pray together. Father, we have been stirred by the short devotional in John 7 on belief. We've been led to our knees and as we've been led in prayer, and Charles has inspired us with his music. Now focus us on the text of Scripture, I pray. Grant to us confidence in your church. In Christ's name. Amen.

Swan Quarter, North Carolina is a little village on the shore of the North Carolina coast. It has a population of maybe 324 - a good little tiny coastal town. In the late 19th century, there was a small Christian congregation in that city. And the Christian church had no place to meet so they spent a number of years raising money to purchase a plot of land from a man by the name Mr. Sam Sadler. Sam Sadler owned the prime piece of property in the middle of that little village of Swan Quarter, North Carolina. And when they approached him, he refused to sell the land. He wasn't necessarily a religious man and he said, "Nothing doing. I am not selling my property to a church and to a religious congregation. Not at all." And so they settled for a much lower piece of land, his land was fairly high, they settled for a much lower piece of land closer to the shore.

On September 16, 1876, the night of the church dedication, a hurricane came through Swan Quarter. The winds pounded that little church building. Flood waters rushed in. Five feet of water swept the little building off its pilings and the eyewitnesses said it began to float down Main Street. The winds pushed that little building until it took a right turn right towards Mr. Sadler's land. The winds pushed it further until it ended upon Mr. Sadler's property. If you visited Swan Quarter, North Carolina today, you would see on the back of the larger Methodist church, this smaller church which, of course, by now has been remodeled, and it's called "The Church that Providence Built," because when it settled on Sadler's land, Sadler said, "I cannot fight against your God. The land is yours."

The church, battered and bruised by storms, will, one day, triumph for the kingdom of God.

Throughout the centuries, God's church has faced setbacks but never defeat.

It has faced challenges, but has never been forsaken.

It has faced obstacles, but has never been overcome.

God's church, through the centuries, has triumphed over the powers of hell.

The Egyptians could not defeat God's truth in the days of Moses.

The Babylonians could not crush God's truth in the days of Daniel.

The Persians could not obliterate God's truth in the days of Esther.

The Romans could not destroy God's truth in the days of Paul.

And Satan and all the angels of hell cannot destroy God's truth today.

God's church, as enfeebled and defective and weak as it is, will one day rise to its destiny. And one day, filled with God's grace, armed by God's Spirit, it will rise in the face of ridicule, slander, oppression, and persecution. The people of God, the plan of God, the purpose of God will triumph. We live in a time when there is cynicism. Cynicism against all institutions, cynicism against all organization. We are shot at from the left and attacked from the right, but the incredible good news is that Jesus will be triumphant. The incredible good news is that grace will triumph. The incredible good news is, as James Russell Lowe puts it, "Truth forever on the scaffold. Wrong forever on the throne." Yet that scaffold sways the future. And behind the dim unknown stand of God keeping watch above His own. God still has His eyes on the church."

In Matthew of the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter. If you have your Bibles, please turn to Matthew the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter. You may have it on the scrolls in the ancient text like I do. You may have it on the iPad. You may have it on your iPhone and I know if you have your iPhone, you're looking at the text and you're not texting. Mathew the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter, we look there at verses 13 and onward and we start in Chapter 16 with verse 13 we'll go back and pick up the context of the passage itself. In Matthew chapter 16 verse 13, "When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?'" Now, His disciples must have been surprised. Caesarea Philippi is north...it is north in Galilee. Galilee is in the northern part of Palestine or Israel. But when you go to Caesarea Philippi, you go much, much further north. And the disciples must have been surprised when Jesus left Capernaum and headed toward Caesarea Philippi and wandered over mountain pathways. They traversed over lush Galilean valleys. They forded streams. They slowly made their way northward. They walked mile after mile after mile. They must have wondered, why is Jesus taking us to this spot? Why not Capernaum? Why not Nazareth? Why not Jerusalem? Why not Bethlehem? Why not Jericho? They must have wondered why Jesus was taking them here. In their nine-hour walking journey from Capernaum to Caesarea Philippi, they noticed shrines and idols and images to the pagan gods. Finally, they arrived at Caesarea Philippi. Now Caesarea Philippi's discussion that Jesus had and this is where Jesus had one of the most significant discussions that Jesus ever had with His disciples. It's at the heart of the controversy between good and evil. It's at the very center of New Testament Christianity and if you don't get the lessons that Jesus taught at this point, very little else in Christian faith will matter. Now first we need to understand why Jesus chose Caesarea Philippi. There are four basic reasons.

First, Caesarea Philippi was the center of the worship of the Greek god Pan. Now Pan was the god of shepherds and hunters, of the and meadows and farms and his presence arose panic and fear in all those people who lived in those small villages. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He brings peace to His flock, not panic. Now one of the reasons He put Himself here is that Jesus wanted to set Himself against the backdrop of all idolatry. He wanted to set Himself against the backdrop of all false religions. He wanted to set Himself against the backdrop and in the context of the Greek mythology and point out that it was not falsehood, it was not Greek mythology that would change the world. It was the church armed with the Spirit of Christ preaching the message of Christ that would change the world. Now this place was so striking that Alexander the Great and the Greeks built a sanctuary here and the natural features really impressed the Greeks and they believed that this place was the dwelling place of the gods. And there was a deep, deep spring here and as you look down into that spring and if you visit Caesarea Philippi today it seems like it's an endless cavern and the Greeks called it the "Gates of Hell." Jesus put Himself against that backdrop of myth and superstition and said that's not going to change the world, but My church that I am building, although the gates of hell challenge it, will not prevail. Jesus, the all-powerful, triumphant Christ, the Good Shepherd, the Fountain of Living Water came to this out-of-the-way place to reveal that He was the Living Christ and the gates of hell could not prevail.

Now there's a second thing about Caesarea Philippi that's significant. Caesarea Philippi was the center of Greek philosophy. At this time, the teachings of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle seriously impacted the Roman world and the more educated Greeks believed that only through the development of the mind and through a right understanding could the world be changed. They had an emphasis on philosophy, an emphasis on education, an emphasis on knowledge and so Jesus sets Himself against the background of Greek philosophy to reveal that philosophy and education will not change the world, that it's the church armed with the Spirit of God that's going to go out and reach the world. Now Caesarea Philippi was also the center of Roman military might. The very name Caesarea Philippi speaks of the Roman Caesars. The city was a strong Roman military outpost founded by one of Herod's sons, Philip. Herod was a ruthless egomaniac. He became jealous of his wife and had her murdered. He murdered two of his own sons. And when Herod died, he had thousands of people slain for one reason: he wanted someone to mourn his death. The Romans dominated the first century world largely by military might. Jesus came to Caesarea to announce that might and power and armies were not the most powerful force in the world, the gospel was and so Jesus chose to make this place a significant point. Christ filling the lives of His followers would go out and change the world. It was not idolatry that would change the world. It was not philosophy that would change the world. It was not military might that would change the world. It was the church of the living Christ that would change the world.

Now Caesarea was also the center of formal religion. There's still another reason why Jesus came here. The first century historian Josephus tells us that this area was the headwaters of the Jordan. The Jews believed that the springs of Judaism and all that it stood for flowed from here. Now Ellen White makes this interesting observation in *Acts of the Apostles*, page 15: "Priests and rulers became fixed in a rut of ceremonialism. They were satisfied with a legal religion and it was impossible for them to give up this for the truths of heaven." Now Jesus chose this place specifically to reveal that formal religion, that ritual, that ceremony would never change the

world. The great philosophies of the world met here at Caesarea Philippi. And Jesus set Himself against the backdrop of idolatry to show the people that the idols they were worshiping were powerless. Jesus was making a statement for every generation. That statement comes echoing and re-echoing down the corridors of time and speaks to us here in this place now. The message is old but it is ever true. The message was given in the first century, but it speaks to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The message was given in another time and another place, but it is relevant to this generation, to this church, to this meeting, at this time, in this place. Jesus was making a statement that Greek philosophy is not going to change the world; that education is not going to change the world; that military might is not going to change the world, and some kind formal religion is not going to change the world. But in the midst of the great world systems, Jesus said as we go back to the text, Matthew Chapter 16:13, Jesus is pointing out in this passage that men and women who come to the living Christ are changed. Men and women who come to the living Christ are transformed. And when they come to the living Christ, He fills their lives with His Spirit and Jesus is saying in this passage that He is going to build His church; that the church is not some bureaucratic institution; the church is not some merely institution with administrative trivia, not trivia, administrative “good stuff,” but not the best stuff, I’m sorry Mr. President, I’m a preacher. Matthew 16:13, I’m going to stick with the text, I’m safer there. When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am.’

Vs. 14: “They said, ‘Some say you are John the Baptist, some say you are Elijah, and others Jeremiah, one of the prophets.’”

Vs. 15 “But He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ That’s the question that comes home to every heart. Authentic faith always demands a personal response. My position will not keep me from being shaken out of the church in the last days. My position will not enable me to be filled with the Spirit and used of God as a world changer. My title does not qualify me to be a world changer. My degrees do not qualify me to be a world changer. My education does not qualify me to be a world changer. The number of people I command on my staff does not qualify me to be a world changer. The number of credit cards in my wallet certainly do not qualify me in any way to be a world changer. If you saw my wallet you’d know it. There is only one thing that qualifies you to be a world changer and that is to know the living Christ and to be changed by His grace and charmed by His love and empowered by His Spirit. The power of New Testament Christianity was the Person of Jesus Christ, and when these early believers came to Christ, their lives were changed so they could change the world. In the book *Steps to Christ*, page 70, I read this marvelous statement, “Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Christ in His self-denial, Christ in His humiliation, Christ in His purity and holiness, Christ in His matchless love – this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed in His likeness.”

Jesus is developing a group of people who are passionate about Him, their hearts are broken for Him. The world has yet to see, as Dwight L. Moody says, “that man that woman who is totally consecrated to God, armed with the Spirit to go out to change the world.” God is appealing to

His church not to be so interested in the important administrative principles that it misses the heart-broken passion to know the living Christ, to proclaim the truth of His Word to a dying generation and to prepare the world for a coming of Jesus. Jesus says in Matthew Chapter 16:15, "But whom do you say that I am?" and Peter says in verse 16, "You are he the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus says, "Peter, you've got it! That's what the church is all about! Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father which is in heaven." Anytime we come to the living Christ, it is because the Spirit draws us. Anytime our hearts are revived by Christ, it is because the Spirit moves us. Anytime we have changes in our lives and we give up long-cherished habit patterns, the shackles of lust are broken in our mind, and the shackles of selfishness are gone, and the bonds that hold us are broken. When we come to Christ, He changes all that. We are filled with His grace and charmed by His love and amazed by His goodness. And Jesus said in verse 18, "And I say to you, Peter, upon this rock, upon this declaration that I am the living Christ. Upon this solid foundation I am the Christ. Upon the truth of My Word, I want to build my church. The church is not some bureaucratic institution, it is built by Christ. Jesus says I will build my church. Jesus has been building His church down through the ages. He says the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Will the gates of hell prevail against God's church? Will God's church be broken up? Will it be fragmented? Some people and even some "scholars" look at the church and say the church doesn't have very much future. My simple response to that is Matthew 16:18, "The gates of hell will not prevail against God's church." Some believe that philosophy will change the world. Others believe that military might will change the world. Others have the idea that some kind of formal religion's going to change the world. But what I say to you is this that the church of Jesus Christ filled with the Holy Spirit, armed with the Word of God will triumph over the principalities and powers of hell. Now Ellen White puts it this way in a number of places, 2 *Selected Messages*, page 384, *Testimonies*, page 89, she says the church may appear as if it is about to fall. Now my brothers and sisters, we are going to go into a crisis in the future, there is no question about that. We're going to be attacked from the left. They're going to rip us apart. They will try to undergird Adventism and its uniqueness. Every single doctrine of this church is based on the living Christ. Where is the Sabbath if you don't have Christ? Where is the sanctuary if you don't have Christ? Where is the state of the dead if you don't have Christ? Where is the health message if you don't have Christ? They're all the dry bones of Gilboa. But with Christ, the Sabbath is alive, rich and full. With Christ, is the resurrection of the dead. We don't leave them in the grave and say the dead don't know anything. We don't want to leave them there, we want to get them resurrected through Christ who is the living Christ. What's the health message all about? It's a body created by Christ and its honoring Christ. What's the sanctuary all about? It's Christ. You see, we're going to be attacked from the left trying to remake Adventism into some kind of generic religious warm fuzzies of loving Jesus but don't worry about any prophetic truths. And no matter how conservative you are, there's always somebody who's ten times more conservative who's going to shoot at you. So if you're not attacked by the left, you're certainly going to be torn apart by the right. And if your religion makes you more angry, there's something wrong with your religion. And if your religion makes you so tolerant that you accept sin, there's something wrong with your religion. We don't want to be left, we don't want to be right, we want to be at the center of Jesus.

There are those who master in criticizing the church. They emphasize its failures. They point their finger at its sins. They publish their diatribes against its glaring faults. They major in its

mistakes. Church leadership acknowledges that the church is not perfect. In some areas the high and holy standards of Jesus have been compromised. In many areas we could do much, much, much better. It is the responsibility of leadership to lift the vision of our people to see the ideal that Christ has for this church and never be content where we are. Jesus is always leading us to more. We acknowledge that the church is far from what Jesus wants it to be, but it is still the bride of Christ.

Jesus says in Ephesians 5 through the apostle Paul, “Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.” Gentleman, is your wife perfect? (Don’t raise your hand right away.) Let me ask you this question, if somebody wrote a book about all the faults of your wife, would you read it? The church is the bride of Christ and I’m not interested in reading all the criticism from the ultra-left and the ultra-right about the bride of Jesus. Do you think it makes Jesus very happy when we criticize His bride? How would you feel? Wouldn’t you rise to the defense of your bride? Let’s look at our passage in Ephesians 5, Jesus is building His church. Our passage in Ephesians chapter 5 is quite a remarkable passage because it tells us three things about Jesus and His church. Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands love your wives just as Christ loves the church.” The first thing that it tells me very simply, Christ loves His church. Isn’t that incredibly good news? He’s building His church, and as He builds the church, in spite of its weaknesses, in spite of its frailties, in spite of its mistakes, Jesus loves His church. To me that’s incredibly good news.

Second thing about Jesus and the church is that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. He loves His church and what’s He going to do with His church? Is He going to cast it off? Is the church going to be broken up and fragmented? Not at all! He’s going to sanctify and cleanse His church. Isn’t that incredibly good news? And notice the last thing about the church that Jesus says in Ephesians 5:26, “that he might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing...” The future of the church is not grim! The future of the church is positive. Jesus loves His church. Jesus will sanctify His church and He will present His church without any spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

In *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 15, Ellen White states this, “Dear Brethren (and Sisters, all of us) of the General Conference: I testify (and when the Gift of Prophecy testifies, we listen) to my brothers and sisters that the church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows His supreme regard.”

Is the church enfeebled – what does that mean, what’s “enfeebled” mean: lacking spiritual power at times... Yes!

Is the church defective – Yes! It’s complacent, apathetic, compromising... Yes!

But has Christ cast off His church – Never! It’s the object of His supreme regard.

Let’s look briefly at three passages of scripture in the New Testament that use the illustration of the church and God building His church to crystalize in our minds God’s desire for His church. The first imagery of the church we get of the church is in I Peter 2. There the church is likened to the temple of God and you’ll notice that Peter goes back to Matthew 16 and uses very similar language and we find it in I Peter 2 and again you have this idea of building, construction. One

thing about buildings is buildings don't come already built, they have to be built. So Christ through the centuries has been building a temple of truth and Seventh-day Adventists, in the living in the climax of earth's history, have the light of truth of the ages shining upon them. We read in I Peter 2:4, "Coming to Him as to a living stone. Rejected by men but chosen by God and precious, you also, are living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Therefore, it is also contained in scripture, behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone."

There are two things about this passage that fascinate me. The first is this: stones don't come polished, refined, and cut to fall in their place. They need some chiseling; they need some working off the rough places; they need some refining. Jesus says to you and me, you're stones in the temple of truth, but I've got a work to do in your life. If you're going to properly reflect my grace and love; if you're going to be a world changer; before I can do something through you, I need to do something to you. Before I can do something with you, I need to do something for you. You've got some rough edges there, Mark Finley. I've got to do some chiseling there. Lord, I don't like to be whacked with a hammer. Lord, I don't like that chiseling business. Lord, chisel the guy next to me. Chisel Elder Wilson a little bit, Lord, because he really needs it. Chisel that guy next to me. Don't chisel me, Lord. No, please Lord, don't chisel me.

Do you find yourself at times being bitten with the malignancy of criticism? Do you find yourself at times thinking thoughts that if you were honest, they would be arrogant and proud? Do you find yourself at times substituting busyness for devotion and substituting what you do for Christ as righteousness rather than a living experience with Christ? Does your position overshadow your being a Christian? As we meditate, God's chiseling us, God's chiseling us, God's chiseling us. I like what Ellen White wrote in *4th Testimonies*, page 281, "God has been testing and proving you. Have you borne the test? You need to be cleaned and polished to have the rough and jagged points of your character removed that you might be refined for the kingdom." That's just genetics! That stuff's just genetics, Lord. Sure, I lose my cool a little bit, but you should have seen my grandfather. Sure I'm a little impatient, but my mother, if you would have seen my mother... Jesus said, "Look, I want to do some refining. I want to do some refining." When you study 1 Peter 2, you come to two conclusions:

1. The church does not come with stones fully polished. God is at work through His grace and by His power to build a temple of truth in which men and women reveal the glory of His character and the majesty of His love. But there is a second thing about that passage:
2. No temple of truth is built with one stone. Every stone is placed upon another stone. Jesus Christ is the foundation. The disciples are built upon that. Early Christians facing persecution, being torn apart by lions, being burned at the stake are stones in the temple of truth. Faithful men and women down through the ages, persecuted, tried, oppressed, have held the truth of God's Word high. The Reformers, the Waldensians, Luther, and the great reformers of their day have the moral courage to stand for the truth of God's Word. They were all part of this temple of truth. And the light of the ages is shining on 21<sup>st</sup> century Adventism today. We are called as heirs of the Reformation, built upon the very foundation of those who have gone before. We cannot disappoint the faithful men and women who have died for truth by being so lackadaisical that we compromise it. The generations in ages past call to this generation. Centuries of fierce persecution followed the establishment of the Christian church. Christ has never lacked men and

women who counted the work of building God's temple dearer than life itself. The enemy of righteousness left nothing undone in its effort to stop the work of the builders. But here is a great lesson from 1 Peter: we have a glorious heritage.

There is a second illustration of the church. The first is the temple of God, the second is the body of Christ. Take your Bible, please, and look at 1 Corinthians 12. 1 Corinthians 12. As I was pondering on this passage recently, the marvel of study in Scripture is that God illuminates your mind with thoughts you have never thought before. One of the amazing things to me proving that the Bible is inspired is that you study it year after year. You can probe the same passage and you can miss something about that passage. 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13, "For as the body is one member and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." Now notice verse 27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." Now notice, Paul says the church is the body of Christ. Come with me to Calvary's mountain. Come with me to Golgotha's cross. There the body of Christ hangs. Nails are driven through His hands and blood runs down His wrist. A crown of thorns is upon His head and blood runs down His face. Judas has betrayed Him. Peter has denied Him. The Jewish leaders have forsaken Him. The Romans have crucified Him. It is dark, dark Friday. The flowers bow their heads. The sun does not shine. The birds do not sing. The thunder crashes. The lightning flashes. It is dark, dark Friday and they take His bloody and bruised body off the cross. If you and I had stood there in the crowd that day, what would we have thought? Christianity is over! It's dead! It has absolutely no future at all. The church is the body of Christ. Bruised. Battered. Bloodied. Denied by friends. Ridiculed, at times, by enemies. But, thank God! Sunday morning is coming! Christ is resurrected! He's alive! He comes out of the tomb and the church goes forth to triumph! So His church the body of Christ, oppressed and battered. She will one day rise to her destiny. She will one day be resurrected by the power of the Spirit. She will one day, to the glory of God, filled with the Spirit go out and proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Lesson 2. From the images of the church, sometimes the church will appear to be beaten down. Sometimes the church will appear to be defeated. Sometimes the church will nearly be destroyed. You may be in a part of the world where the life flickers dimly and you work year and year after year. Battered, bruised, bloodied, persecuted, defeated, forsaken in YOUR land. The church can arise to its destiny. The light will shine there once again to the glory of God. Ephesians 2: The family of God. The temple of God. The body of Christ. We are looking again at the building symbol. Verse 19: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." You see Christ, family, His church. Here you have the illustration of the family of God. The family's not going to be fractured. It's not going to be broken up. It's not going to be irreparably damaged. God's family, His church, is in His hand and it is going to triumph at last.

Lesson #3: Christ is going to hold His family in His hand and He's never going to let it go. He's going to take it by the hand and lead it to the kingdom. Enfeebled and defective as the church may be, it's the object of Christ's regard. It's not to be broken up, disintegrated. It will not fragment or fall apart. It will rise to its destiny and triumph at last. It will be the force over the powers of hell and the world will be filled with the glory of God. Christ's church will triumph



and the only question we have is this: will we triumph with it? Will we allow God's refining hand to hammer and chisel us, to prepare us to glorious stones in His temple of truth? Will we use our God-given gifts and every fiber of our being to build up the church and not tear it down? Will we cherish and love the bride of Christ as Jesus loves her? God's truth is marching on. In spite of obstacles, opposition, and persecution, God is working in marvelous ways around the world to build His kingdom. The idols of this world are powerless to change the world. Education may uplift the standard of living, but without the living Christ, it is powerless to change the world. Military might and powerful armies may beat us into submission, but they are powerless to change the world. Formal religion with all its manmade rules and legalistic traditions is powerless to change the world. But the living Christ enshrined in the hearts of God's people is the most powerful change agent in the universe. The church committed to Christ is God's agent to change the world. If you want to be a part of something bigger, larger, greater, grander than ourselves, when we declare Jesus, "Jesus, You are greater, larger than our every need. And Jesus, I declare, that You're the Son of God. Come and build your temple of truth in me. Come and chisel me. Come and place me exactly where You want me to be in that temple. With the men and women down through the ages who have been so faithful to You, God I have needs, but Your grace is greater than all my needs. The church has needs, but God's grace is greater than all our needs. In Christ, by Christ, through Christ, because of Christ, you and I will prevail because His grace is greater than all our needs. The church will triumph gloriously in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Father in heaven, You are building Your church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. As enfeebled and as defective as the church may be, it is the object of Christ's supreme regard. Your grace is greater than our failures. Your grace is greater than our needs. Your grace is greater than all of the obstacles the church faces. And Father, as leaders, we, too, are weak as the church is weak. We, too, are feeble as the church is feeble because we are the church. And Lord, we need polishing, refining. Thank You that Your grace is greater than our needs. That Your grace is greater than any challenges we may personally face. Send us from this place this morning knowing that You will take us from the crises ahead through Your grace and send us from this place this morning rejoicing in humility that your church will triumph and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. In Jesus' name, Amen.