

A Pattern for Doing Church (Part 2)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 March 2022

Preacher: Dr. Ralph Carter

[0 : 0 0] Well, if you have your Bibles, look with me to Acts chapter 2, and we're going to look at verses 41 through 47, continuing the message we began last week, finishing it up today.

And for those of you who couldn't be here last week, let me just go back and play a little bit of catch-up for just three or four minutes to bring us all up to speed. Here's what we saw last week.

Jesus has come, lived, died on the cross. Three days later, He's risen from the dead. He, 40 days after that, ascends into the heavens.

Before He does, He commissions His church to take the gospel into the world. He gives them instruction. He's seen them in Judea. He's seen them down in Galilee. He tells them to go back to Jerusalem.

He goes back with them. And there He tells them to remain in Jerusalem because in a few more days, the Holy Spirit of God is going to come. And so they meet together in the upper room where they had observed the Last Supper, and they begin to pray.

[0 : 5 8] There's not just the 12. There are 120 in number. They replace Judas as the 12th apostle, and then they begin to pray. And they pray for 10 days until Pentecost comes, 10 days following His ascension into the heavens.

At Pentecost, it's a wild, wild time. They are praying, and suddenly there's the sound of a rushing mighty wind. We likened it last week to that of the sound of a tornado, if you've ever been through one of those.

There's no wind. There's just noise. It brings out the people of the city, and even those who are in this room and they're praying, they suddenly experience the coming of the Spirit who descends in the likeness of a giant tongue of fire.

The tongue of fire divides into many cloven tongues of fire and rests upon the heads of believers, and the 120 believers are instantaneously baptized and dwelt of the Spirit of God.

They go out into the streets of Jerusalem. A crowd is gathering, people from all over the world, not just the residents of Jerusalem, but those who have come for the Passover and those who have stayed for Pentecost, and they begin to listen as these believers begin to prophesy and say things in languages they've never studied.

[2 : 1 9] Some skeptics in the crowd begin to say, hey, these men are drunk with wine. Peter defends them, says, no, it's early in the morning. That's not the case. What is happening here is what was predicted by the prophet Joel when he said young men would dream dreams and old men and old women would prophesy this is of God.

And then he goes to the Psalms and he begins showing them that Jesus was the Christ. Preaches a powerful message and basically in the end says this, All of you here today are witnesses of what I'm telling you that we have rejected God's Son, and many of you here in this crowd have personally had a hand in putting him to death.

You're responsible for killing the Messiah. But we all know, we cannot deny, that God raised him three days later from the dead. But the Spirit of God fell on those who were listening and many were pricked in their heart, the Scripture says, to their very soul.

They came rushing to Peter and said, Peter, what can we do to be made right with God? And Peter looked at them boldly and said, you need to repent of your sin, repent of what you've done.

You need to repent of all your sin. You need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you really mean business with God, come and receive the mark of a believer, which is baptism.

[3 : 43] Three thousand that day. Are you ready for that? Three thousand that day came and became a part of this assembly. It says they were added to the church.

It doesn't mean they were added to some role. We talked about that last week. It means they were adopted into the family of God there in Jerusalem.

Now, here's the million-dollar question, the one that we're attempting to answer in this two-part sermon. And that is, where do we go from here? You're one of those 120 and 3,000 come forward.

What do we do now? In the past, we've had Jesus at our side. Now, His Spirit is in us through the Holy Spirit, but it's near them. And they're seeking to learn how to follow Him.

Where do we go from here? Nine things they did. Four of them we pointed out last week. I want to point out an additional five today. For those of you who weren't here, let me just hurriedly run through what those first four were.

[4 : 41] Right out of the gate, they baptized all those who followed Christ. And I want to tell you, they baptized them by immersion, I believe.

The word means to die, to dip into something. I think they took them to a local river, and there they baptized them just as Jesus had earlier been baptized.

I want to tell you, I think Baptists ought to be unapologetic about how we choose to baptize. I hope we will never give in to the thinking, well, it's just a symbol.

The means of baptism, the method of baptism doesn't matter. Because in my estimation, it does. Is it a difference of having heaven and hell? Of course not. But it is significant because the way we baptize by immersion clearly sends a message to those who observe.

That's the reason I believe, likewise, in public baptism the way they practiced it then. Here's what happens. It says, when a person is baptized, they're demonstrating outwardly, we believe in the death, burial, and subsequent resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

[5 : 46] As we carry a person on the water and bring them up out of the water. It also says, this person being baptized has died to their sin. They no longer exist. They are a new creature in Christ.

It also says, just as Jesus was baptized of John, I choose to be his disciple. I want to follow in his example. So, they immediately baptized those 3,000 who came and became a part of the church.

Second thing they did was this. They began to disciple those who were new to the faith. You got 120 people who have walked with Jesus during his earthly ministry.

3,000 who just become believers. They couldn't just turn these folk loose on their own, send them back to their native lands without knowing more about Jesus. And so, they began to meet on a daily basis.

And they talked to them about all that Jesus did. All that Jesus said. All the correcting that Jesus ever did with his disciples. They immersed them in the teaching of Jesus.

[6 : 54] They disciplined them. Thirdly, they worked hard to build a strong partnership. That word fellowship that we use so often, I'm afraid that we have equated that with cookies and ice cream and Cokes in a time of what we call fellowship.

The Greek word was the word koinonia. It means they literally became partners. That's why I know when it says they added them, they didn't think of themselves as having just joined a religious club.

We're a part of this religious institution that is meeting here in the heart of Jerusalem. That's not how they thought. They thought we're embracing a new way of thinking. We're embracing the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is the common denominator among all of us, is we share faith in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. They literally became partners. A fourth thing they did was this.

They partnered together in prayer. And listen, as they prayed, I mean God did bona fide miracles. Now, you listen to a lot of folk, including preachers, I'm sad to say, talk about miracles today.

[8 : 06] And they used that word so loosely, it's just about lost all meaning. We will call reaching a high attendance goal a miracle. What was a miracle?

We had 500 in Sunday school today. That's not a miracle. Clemson has 85,000 every Saturday in the fall. You understand that? You can draw a crowd by just doing some pretty good publicity, by getting on the phones and calling your friend.

Nothing wrong with that. But just understand, that's not, is it a good thing? Yes. Did God have his hand in it? I believe he did. Is it a miracle? Well, of course not. This building that we're constructing out here, the front of your church, it's going to be gorgeous.

And God has provided the means. Is it a miracle? No. Construction company's doing that. You understand? We're paying for it. It's not a miracle. It's a good thing.

It's a godly thing. Is it a miracle? It's not a miracle. I want to tell you, a miracle is when God does something that no human being can possibly, in their right mind, take credit for.

[9 : 12] It's something so supernatural that any who look at that say, boy, I don't know how to explain that. Even if they don't believe in God, that's unexplainable. But, man, something happened here that's beyond the normal.

It's beyond the realm of explanation. And I'm telling you, God did bona fide miracles. Men who were lame got up and walked. People speaking in languages they've never understood or studied, that's a miracle.

It's a miracle how the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ spread in that first century. And here's what verse 42 and 43 tell us. It uses the imperfect tense in that verb that fear kept coming upon them.

And what it means is this. The more they prayed, the more God did. And the more God did, the more they stood in awe of God. And the more they stood in awe of God, the more they prayed. And the more they prayed, the more God did.

And it became a wonderful cycle. And I'm telling you, more than anything else, that's what's holding our churches back from being more successful in evangelism today than anything else.

[10 : 20] We don't witness the power of God the way we once did. And I believe that's attributable to the fact we don't pray as we once did. Well, let's move on.

You've caught up with me now where we are in our message. The fifth thing I want you to see is this. They were incredibly generous in sharing what they had to meet the needs of congregants in their assembly.

You look at verse 44 and 45. Now, all the believers were together and had everything in common. Let that sink in for a minute.

Now, all the believers were together and had everything in common. And when we read that, sometimes we're tempted to think that means they were in one spirit and one accord like we read about in Acts chapter 1. Well, it indicates that a little bit, but that's not nearly the essence of what it's saying.

Look at verse, the same verse or the next verse. So they sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all as anyone had need.

[11 : 27] Can you get your head around that? Have you ever been a part of a church where that kind of thing was taking place? I know you're a part of a generous church, but can you imagine this level of generosity?

And let me tell you what drove them to do that. These people who had come to know Christ, many of them were from other parts of the world.

That's the reason there was a need for this miracle of tongues. And so as they had come together for Passover and now Pentecost, and now they received Christ as Savior, these who had been with Jesus recognized we can't send them back to their homes unless they know more about the gospel.

And so they immersed them in the teachings of Jesus. And these folk didn't immediately return home. And after a period of time, their resources ran out. And so what they did was they said, hey, we need to help these people out, these fellow believers out.

These people have become a part of our family. We are inseparably linked to them and tied to them. They're partners with us in Christ. And so some had some real estate. They went and sold it.

[12 : 38] Some had some homes or some possessions. They sold them. And they brought the money and they laid it at the apostles' feet, the next few chapters tell us. And they then distributed it to people in the congregation however they needed it.

Now, some folks have mistakenly said this is a picture of what communism looks like. And that's why we ought to be communist. That's absolutely false. This is not a picture of communism at all.

It is a picture of Christianity at its best. Understand the differences in this in communism. Communism says, I'm going to give you five and you'll have five and you'll have five and you'll have five.

At least in theory, that's what they say. It never really works out that way. But we're all going to take what we have and spread it out and everybody will have five and we'll all be equal and we'll all have equal concern for everyone in the world.

But if you want to see a true picture of communism, look at the Ukraine right now. That's a picture of what communism looks like where Putin says, you know what?

[13 : 44] We have might and might makes us right. And because we can take what is yours, we will. And we'll take as much of it with no regard for you or your people or the sanctity of life.

We'll just take whatever we desire. That's communism. You understand that? And what you see here is exactly the opposite. It is a spirit of generosity born by people's gratitude for what Christ has done for them on the cross.

where God changes our heart. And material things are no longer the benchmark by which we measure the success of our lives because we know there's life after this life. So do we use material things?

We do. Is it okay to have material things? It is. But do we just invest our whole life in that? Of course not. We recognize this is a tool that God has given for us to help others and to spread the gospel.

I'm going to tell you, if you want to be a New Testament church, a solid, good New Testament church, be known by your generosity. Man, I was fortunate. I pastored only two churches in 40 years, and both of them were generous, generous churches.

[14 : 54] They were generous when they had a little, and they were generous when God had blessed them, and they had more. I hope you'll always endeavor to be a generous church. Now, let me just say a personal word here, and I'm not going to dwell on this, but I just want to tell you something.

I've been looking at your budget, and I want to first of all commend you for exceeding your Lottie Moon offering and for doing well in the campaign to build this new addition to your building.

But two weeks ago, I was looking at how far we've fallen behind in our budget receipts to date, and we were about 60,000 two weeks ago, and I saw where today you've closed that gap and you're only 50,000 behind, and man, that's great.

Can I tell you something? It won't be long. You'll have a full-time pastor. Don't put the burden on him of having to find a way to close that gap. Can I just be honest with you?

If I were coming as your pastor in the days to come, I would want to do this in my first year. I don't know what he'll do, but I suspect whoever you get, this will be their agenda, to come in in that first year and simply preach the Scripture and get to know you and love you and not have to make hard, critical decisions, especially about my...

[16 : 12] In fact, if I came as your pastor, I wouldn't want to talk about money for a whole year if I could get out of it because I'd want to build credibility with you where you trusted me and you knew that, okay, it's okay for him to do that.

He's proven himself. Don't make him come in and ride out of that, have to deal with financial issues. Right now, you're not paying a full-time pastor and you're not paying a full-time youth minister, and I'm telling you, if a full-time pastor was here and a full-time youth person were here, that pastor would have some difficult decisions to make financially going forward.

So don't put him in that position. Just take that off the table. Say, you know what? Between now and Easter, let's really try to close this gap so that it's not as significant as it is now.

There's a sixth thing, don't you see they did? They were faithful in getting together for worship. Look at verse 46 for a moment. And allow every word to sink in.

And every day. Everybody say that with me. And every day. They devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex.

[17 : 23] Every day. Every day. You know what that means? That means Sunday they gathered and they had worship and they prayed and they probably ended up with a fellowship meal.

They got to get, they did some discipleship. And then of course on Monday, well they got together and they worship and they prayed and they fellowship. But then on Tuesday they got together and they worship and they prayed and they fellowship and on Wednesday they got together and they prayed and they fellowship.

But now come Thursday they got together and they prayed and they fellowship. And then Friday they got together and they prayed and they fellowship. But Saturday they got together and they prayed and they fellowship. and then they did that again every day now we're not going to do that here and we can't do that here I don't want anybody to feel guilty about that because I want you to know the world that they were a part of is not like the world that you and I are a part of and that's not our fault we shouldn't feel guilty our world has changed I want to show you something Jesus came into Jerusalem 2,000 years ago on a donkey but at the turn the beginning of the 20th century man was still pretty much riding on beast of burden they were pretty much getting around on donkeys and on horses but in the last 120 years things have radically changed our world has shrunk in many ways but it has also expanded for us personally because now we have the ability to be here today and in New York this afternoon or to be in Europe tomorrow morning right and some of you you don't work the way they did then where they worked pretty much within a few hundred yards of their houses many of you work 5 or 10 miles from home and many of you work 50 or 100 or 1,000 miles from home some of you get in the car on Monday morning or on a plane Sunday afternoon and you're somewhere all week and you're back here on Friday and with your families on the weekend man our world has changed right and so we can no longer because of school and so anything we can't meet seven days a week but I want to tell you something we can be regular in our worship we can come together on a weekly basis and we can worship the Lord and praise the Lord and do discipleship even more than one day a week we can meet to pray and we can meet to fellowship and to do the work of the church but the big thing is there needs to be regularity in our worship in Hebrews chapter 10 one translation puts that old verse that we all know by memory forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is here's how it puts it not staying away from our worship meetings as some habitually do in other words not just once in a while but often but encouraging each other and all the more as you see the day the day of Christ returns what it's talking about drawing near the writer of Hebrews is saying this listen

I know you're busy and I know there are things going on in your world but don't get to the place that you forsake the assembling of yourselves together some have taken up that habit and they are habitually out of fellowship with the church do you hear what he's saying you need to assemble with other believers and that's true not just during times of heartache but in your everyday routine you need the fellowship of the church and I'm going to tell you something the fellowship of the church needs you we need you in the choir we need you in midweek prayer service we need you in the nursery they just desperately need folk down in the nursery all the time they need people in the children's department and in the youth ministry we need believers here at the church and believers need to be a part of the fellowship of God can I tell you the last few years of my ministry at Brushy Creek boy it broke my heart some things I saw happening and it wasn't just at Brushy Creek it was across the board

I talked to so many pastors about this from about the year 2000 attendance in church radically changed I'm talking about people's attendance habits changed from the way it was when I started in the 70's when I went to Western Avenue in the 70's you could count on this there were about 80% of whoever was in the congregation that attended almost every Sunday about 50% of that 80% about 40% of the whole church attended Sunday night Wednesday night anytime the doors were open but about 80% attended on Sunday morning you count on them being there next Sunday and next Sunday and next Sunday and next Sunday and they would miss two to three or four weeks a year and we call those active participants right we all knew what it was he's active in his church it meant he's there just about every time the doors are open he's there at least four or five Sundays out of the month occasionally he'll be off on vacation occasionally after work occasionally he'll be sick but most all the time he's there then there was about 20% of the congregation that are hit and miss they'd come one Sunday they'd miss the next or they'd come two Sundays and then they'd miss the next two or they'd come for a month and then you wouldn't see them for a month you know what I'm talking about right and then you had the third category person and that's the ones who showed up on Christmas and Easter they'd always come out the door and say pastor is that the only two messages you got well come more often maybe you'll hear something different you know but around the year 2000 we not only recognized that Americans have more disposable income they have more what they view as disposable time and what happened was this it got to be okay for folk to miss a couple three Sundays a month and they could go the on vacation and then next week they might go to the lakes they got a friend that's got a lake house they'll just go the way or maybe

[23 : 46] Wade just worked hard this week and we just need to sleep in or I've got some yard work I need to do and it got to where instead of one or two groups in the church that 80% group just disappeared and we redefined what it was to be active people in their mind think now that active is I show up a couple times a month at church I'm active I've actually seen people in times past when I'm still a pastor and I'd say hey we missed you the last couple of Sundays and they'd look at you like how dare you insult me I'm active I was here three weeks ago you understand what I'm saying the scripture warns us admonishes us don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the matter of some is you know it's important that we be faithful to our church that that become a priority in your life and I want to tell you especially why those of you in this room who maybe have fallen in that category where you say well we go about every other week or we go two out of three weeks can I tell you something your parents went more often than that for the most part now some of you may have come from non-Christian homes but attendance has been declining in terms of people's habits of regularity for the last 20-30 years and I want to tell you something you're going to live to regret the time's going to come when you see your children leave home you're going to find out rather than come once or twice a month they're not going to come at all because you're signaling them it's okay not to be faithful in my attendance it's just not that important

I can still love God and I can still you see what I'm saying you don't want to do that these people they were faithful in their attendance to church seventh thing I want you to see is this they got along well and worked to protect the harmony of their fellowship verse 46 the latter part of the verse and broke bread from house to house they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart you know what that says they got along they liked each other you wouldn't meet so often and go to each other's homes and fellowship and have your meals and be involved in that level of discipleship unless you developed a strong bond with each other these people were friends in and out of church they were their closest associates they were the ones they were doing life together with and so as a result man they protected the fellowship of their church now you see that in the epistles of Paul one of the churches

Paul liked I believe the best we had him here right now in this state he'd say Paul of all the churches you ever served at which one you liked the best I don't know which one he'd say but he would tell you one of the places he liked the best was the Philippians they were good to it and he wrote them the book of Philippians is about that relationship but even in the midst of this book you know what he says he said there are two old girls in that church who man they're fellow workers with me in the ministry and I love them both but you know what I hear I hear they're at odds with each other some of you go and straighten that mess out man don't don't let them continue to be at each other work through that to the Corinthians a church I think he probably had a lot of problems with he says hey I hear and I partially believe it's true because I'm hearing so often that there is actually division among you and he cites some of the problems and he says you need to address these problems and you need to discipline those folks even if it means putting them out of the church for the good of the whole body you need to do that so this was a tight-knit group they loved each other but I want to tell you something they weren't above going to somebody and saying hey you know what your life is drifted away from the truth and we need to call you back and you need to repent and if not we're going to practice church discipline in your life and in our church we have this notion today that to be loving is always to be gentle but I'm telling you to be loving at times is to be gentle but at times it's to say we can't put up with any foolishness

I raise my kids on that principle and I'm going to love you and as long as I can be gentle I'm going to be gentle but I'm going to tell you something if I have to have a firm hand with you I'm going to exercise a firm hand because I'm going to discipline you because there's a way I want you to turn out and I don't want you to be lawless I don't want you to be unruly I don't want you to be making trouble all your life for yourself or for other folks and so is their daddy I discipline my children and they love me and respect me for that I want to tell you I've been disappointed at times in the church when I see church people sit back and see somebody in the church who is unruly who divides who is a sharp tongue and leadership in the church and membership in the church just sits there and never says a word they think they tell themselves try to convince themselves we're just being loving we're just being patient we're just being gracious and sometimes it's a matter of being cowardly before I left

Western Avenue I'd been there about 15 years and one of the last couple three years I was there we were having a business meeting and there was this lady who from the very start of my ministry there she didn't do it often but about once every year 18 months she was going to say something in a business meeting that was crass she was going to pick somebody apart sometimes it was staff sometimes it was me sometimes it was a deacon in the church but she would just say something that just had a barb to it and when she would do it well people would just wince you could sit on people didn't like it in the congregation they were a harmonious church and they didn't like that but she would say and one Sunday night in a business meeting she had some pretty sharp words for me and she said what she said and I didn't say anything and we went on the business meeting and when it was over I looked over at my wife and four or five women had come and gathered around my wife because tears were streaming down her face she didn't like to see me get beat up like that and so they were huddling around her and I went over to her and said you ready to go and I heard one of these women say to my wife she said

[30 : 12] I want you to know call this lady by name says we all take her with a grain of salt don't pay that any attention we know how she is she's always been she was that way with the last she just got to say what she says she prides herself in her frankness and her candor and we don't take her seriously she just says what she says and then she said we want you to know we're always behind you we've always got your back my wife it was out of character for her because I'm the one who's more opinionated but she looked that lady in the face and she said that's the problem there are times I wish you were in front of us instead of behind us you hear what I'm saying you've been in those meetings haven't you where somebody said something you just knew that's not Christian behavior that's not how we should act and I'm telling you it would be a good thing if in those moments you went to that person either publicly or privately depending on the situation how bad it is and say you know what we love you we're not going to tolerate it here at First Baptist Pickens that's not how we behave that's not how the Bible instructs kingdom people to behave and say you can't do that here if you're going to do that you're going to have to go somewhere else because we just can't tolerate that they guarded the fellowship of the church and I'm going to tell you something a church that doesn't guard the fellowship of the church is a church that one day will be in trouble if you think harmony just happens and unity just happens you're mistaken you've got to guard it you've got to prize it

I hit my odometer this morning five miles from the church going that direction on highway 8 because I'd noticed this before and I had my wife who was in the dark this morning because of the time moving back I think I got them all I'm not sure but you know how many churches there are from just five miles down this road to this spot right here there are either 16 or 17 churches down that road in a five mile distance you think that's all about missions you think that's all about spreading the gospel of the Lord Jesus are you like me are you a little bit suspicious that we just can't get along one another isn't that the case you hear about that old guy he was rescued from this island and he'd been missing five years and when they got there they said hey we spotted you by a plane and we came back to rescue you and so they're putting him in the helicopter to get him out of there and this guy who was flying the helicopter said hey you got three outbuildings out here what are these buildings he said well that's my house okay well what's that other building he said well that's where

I go to church he said well what's that other building he said well that's where I used to go to church that's why you got 17 buildings down this road you understand because we don't take seriously working out our differences and guarding our harmony and guarding our unity it's just easier to pick up and go somewhere else I want you to see an 8 thing they were looked on with favor by the outside world verse 47 8 praising God and having favor with all the people that means just those in the church that's what we just got through talking about here he's talking about having favor with people outside the church I just got to tell you if you're the church that God has called you to be and you're going to stand on biblical principles the people in the world are not always going to like everything you got to say there are going to be times that the world is not going to like your pastor or your staff or you because of your standing on abortion or about homosexuality or about transgender situations about alcohol and drugs and I could just go on and on and on and on many people when they hear the word of God preach are going to be offended by it and they're going to be angry with you it's one thing for them to be offended it's one thing for them to be angry and it's another thing for you to give them just cause and some believers some ministers they live such unscrupulous lives that when people see them on the outside they discredit their testimony because they say man that guy comes in the restaurant and he's just rude he's just he's just rude may that never be said about anybody here at First Baptist

Church of Pickens when I was serving in Statesville there was a time where I was asked to serve as chairman of this group that was going to fight a liquor issue in our town and I had to go down to the chamber of commerce because the guy who was leading the fight for this liquor thing was the president of the chamber in Statesville North Carolina and so when I walked into his office for a preliminary meeting he said now you're the guy at Western Amity right and I said yes sir I am and he said the guy who was your predecessor was Jake Honeycutt wasn't it I mentioned Jake a few weeks ago to y'all and he said I said yes and he said you know I don't know if you know this or not but Jake and I locked it up like you and I didn't ready to lock it up about 10 years ago over the issue of liquor and I said yeah that's what I hear and he said I'll tell you something even though he and I went toe to toe and nose to nose and it got hot sometimes he said I hope you're as nice a guy as he was because he said I'm going to tell you something I don't have anything but good things to say about that guy he said man he was a man of character and a man who is gracious and a man who is loving and I want to tell you something that's how it ought to be with every one of us in this room we might have to disagree with somebody we don't ever have to be disagreeable do we we ought to be people whose lives are found in favor with the world and then there's one last thing and I close they partnered together in getting out the gospel look at verse 47

I love this and every day the Lord added to those added to them rather those who were being saved can you imagine that every day somebody was being saved you know there are churches right here in Pickens I'm not making this up who in the course of a year they never baptized anybody all across the state of South Carolina there are lots of churches that don't baptize a single person in the course of a year I know without even seeing the records that during these two years of COVID fewer people have been baptized in our Baptist churches than probably in the last hundred years there's no question that COVID has kept us from being as aggressive in evangelism as we were at one time but I'm going to tell you something if this becomes a way of life for us and we just settle in and say you know what it's okay that we just minister to our own and that we not take the gospel out to the nations only take them we will have forfeited our right to be called church we'll be nothing more than a sacred society of secret snobs do you understand that the church's mission is clear cut and that mission is to take the gospel to the nations as soon as you're a new pastor on board I hope you quickly will develop a strategy where you'll say let's have a strategy for reaching

[38 : 08] Pickens for Christ and then you'll have a strategy about how do we influence Pickens County and Greenville County for Christ and how do we get the gospel across the state and into the nation all 50 states and how can we be a part of bringing the world to Christ how can we give the gospel to the Ukraine and to Uganda and to places we've never been and may never go that's the mission he's given us and if we settle for anything less than that we can be good people and having a good time and doing some good stuff but I want to tell you something you're not a church you're just not a church and I hope you'll never ever satisfy to just be a bunch of good folk who maybe even love the Lord who are looking to him to save them but have no regard for people in the world who don't know Christ let's bow together in prayer

Father I pray this morning that you would convince us leadership staff members alike that this is the pattern that we're to follow we don't have to reinvent the wheel Lord we just have to get on board with what you've already told us in scripture we ought to be about and I pray God that we'd always hold this standard up before ourselves we'd go back and check from time to time and say are we doing those things that really the church is called to do are we getting out the gospel are we discipling the lost are we praying are we ministering are we sharing our goods with others please oh God I pray you'd make First Baptist Church Pickens the strongest in the days to come it's ever been in this wonderful history bless them give them souls for their labor it's our prayer in your name amen