

What Kind of Church Do We Want to Be? (Part 3)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today I'm going to finish up this three-part series we began two weeks ago, and it's been on what kind of church do we want to be. It's found in 1 Thessalonians 3.

If you have your Bibles, turn there, and we'll begin there this morning looking at that last verse, the 13th verse, and then part of chapter 4 and just a verse or 2 in chapter 5. So go ahead and turn there, and if you're just now joining us, let me just bring you up to speed in about one minute or less, okay?

Here's what we've seen so far. The Apostle Paul is on his second missionary journey. He's had to flee the city of Philippi. He goes to Thessalonica, the target of this message series and this letter that we're reading today, and he preaches there on three consecutive Sabbaths.

A number of people hear the gospel, respond to it favorably, and then after the third service they have, Paul has to leave town. Members of the church come and tell him his life's in danger and he needs to get out of Dodge, so to speak.

So he goes to the next town and he keeps wanting to go back because he knows why there are folk there who are showing positive signs of believing in Christ. They're beginning to grow in their faith. These are babies in the Lord.

[1 : 0 8] They haven't known the Lord very long. He's taught them everything he can teach them in three weeks, but he knows that's not a finished work, and so he worries about them. Are they going to fall by the wayside? What's going to happen?

Are they going to get discouraged? Will persecution cause them to abandon the faith? So he says in chapter 3, verse 1, and then later in verse 5, he says, I've wanted to come back to you any number of times, but when that wouldn't happen, when I could stand it no longer is the actual phrase he uses, I send Timothy back.

Timothy goes back, talks to the folk there in Thessalonica, hears about what's going on, comes back and reports to Paul beginning in verse 10. And what he says to him, or verses 6 to 10, I think it is, and what he says to him essentially is this, these people have not fallen by the wayside.

They've not gotten discouraged and given up. They're still seeking the Lord Jesus. In fact, they're growing in their love for one another and for people throughout the region.

They're beginning to be known as a people with a reputation for loving folk, and these are people who are walking with God. So Paul's encouraged by that, obviously, and he writes back and he gives them a written prayer.

[2 : 1 7] He says, I want you to know, here's what I'm praying for you. And that's been the focus of this three-week series. What kind of church do we want to be? I think we can tell by the prayer that Paul prays the kind of church we need to be.

This is what he says. He says, I'm praying that you will be filled with love and even overflow. He tells me you're growing in love, keep growing in love, but be filled and actually overflow with love.

And then last week we saw he said this, I want you also to walk blameless in holiness. Now, some folk, the Jews, knew about holiness because they heard the Pharisees talk, and the Pharisees wore their religion on their sleeve.

They acted holier than they really were. So Paul says, I'm not interested in that kind of holiness. I want you to have the hidden, true holiness, purity of the heart that's seen in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, he finishes this out with a single phrase. Look with me to the last portion of this, found in chapter 3 and verse 13. This is what he says.

[3 : 26] May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father. And then this phrase, at the coming of our Lord Jesus, with all of his saints, amen.

The third part of this to me seems to be that Paul wants these people in Thessalonica to be ready for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to tell you, when you read the scriptures, you see some of these letters that Paul writes, and you say, now that's a pastor, that's a church I like to pastor. And some you see and you say, no, that's a church I like to not have to pastor unless God just made me go there, the Church of Corinth being one of those.

But this church at Thessalonica, I want to tell you, most every pastor I know would say, I would love to be the pastor of the church of Thessalonica. But it wasn't a church, and there are hardly any churches, if any out there, that don't have occasionally a problem.

And this church was no exception. As good a church as they were, as loving as they were, as pure and holy in their walk as they were, this was a church that had a few problems.

[4 : 38] And it may surprise you, if you're not familiar with this letter, what their problem centered around. Because when I tell you, some of you, if you don't know this already, you're going to say, that's a strange thing to have a problem over.

But you know what their problem was over? It was over something Paul said in a sermon, probably several times, that Jesus is going to soon come again.

Now, it's amazing, because you've talked to folk a lot of times about a variety of subjects, how one person, when you're talking to them, hears one thing, and somebody else hears another.

You ever had that happen? Four or five family members accompany a parent to the doctor, and the doctor gives a report on a health situation, and you get home and you begin rehearsing, what did the doctor say?

And one person hears one thing, and another person hears another thing, and one person interprets that thing one way, and another person interprets it yet another way. Any of you ever had that happen?

[5 : 36] So Paul stands and he preaches, and he says, Jesus is coming again, and he's coming soon. Now, some people heard that, and they thought, well, that means one day, Jesus is going to come again.

Again, probably, probably, can't verify this, there's no documentation of this, but in all likelihood, most of those folk thought, when they heard Paul say it, Jesus hadn't been gone all that many years, it's probably going to be in my lifetime.

Wouldn't you agree? Probably what they thought. But some of them thought, well, it may be after my lifetime. And some may have thought, well, you know, it may be next year, or the year after that.

And some, no doubt, you know what they did? They were literalists. I don't want to ask you how many of you in this room are literalists, but sometimes, some of you might hear something like that, especially if said by the Apostle Paul, and you would go, okay, it's been five minutes, six minutes, two hours.

He's not back yet. When's he coming? And some of them in the church at Thessalonica, not nearly all of them, but some of them in the church, enough that it was problematic, some of them heard that, and they thought, why hadn't he come back?

[6 : 52] In fact, let me just ask you, how many of you in this room right now have ever heard a preacher say, Jesus is coming, and I believe it could be soon? You ever heard that? Raise your hand. I know Fred said that.

I've said it. A lot of folk have said that, right? I'm 69. He's not come back yet. I've been hearing it since I was a little bitty boy.

And I've had folk ask me all the time, when do you think it could be? Especially in these times we're living in now, with a lot that's happening, I've had any number of people in the last 12 months come to me and say, do you think all these things point to the fact that Jesus is coming again soon, right?

So we've all had questions about that. And these people were no different. They wondered, well, if he's coming, you said he was coming, when's he going to come? Let me share with you three problems that arose from their misunderstanding of what Paul said.

First of all, some, when they heard him say that, you know their response? Well, let's just sit down and wait for him to come.

[8 : 02] I mean, let's just sit down and watch the clouds, maybe move to the mountains, don a white robe, stop what we're doing, and just wait until he comes because surely it's going to be tomorrow, if not today, and if not tomorrow, day after tomorrow.

So some of them just said, we're going to sit down and we're going to wait. Do you know that since the Lord left and we've been awaiting his return, there have been certain sects and certain cults and certain even groups of folk within the family of God who have so looked for his coming, they have done exactly that.

They have gone off to the mountains. They've donned white robes on occasion. And they've said, we're going to stop our jobs. We're going to just stop living. And we're going to wait because we think he's coming on this day.

Some of you can remember just a few years ago when one fellow predicted this particular day, this particular moment, Jesus is going to come again.

And so some folk have done that. I want you to listen to what Paul says about that. Go with me if you have your Bibles. Look with me to the fourth chapter and let's begin reading in verse nine.

[9 : 17] About brotherly love, you don't need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. They're doing well there. In fact, you're doing this toward all the brothers in the entire region of Macedonia.

But we encourage you, brothers, to do so even more. Now, I don't know how many of you write in your Bibles, and this is a passage that some people might consider obscure.

It doesn't say anything real holy sounding. But can I admonish you to do something? If you write in your Bibles, underscore every word in verse 11 and even verse 12. Here's what it says.

To seek to lead a quiet life. Paul said, let this be your ambition to seek to lead a quiet life.

Here's a real portion I want you to underscore. To mind your own business. That's a pretty good one, isn't it? To seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands as we commanded you.

[10 : 17] In other words, don't forget, I told you. I didn't tell you to sit down. I told you to work. I told you to be busy. So that you may walk properly in the presence of outsiders, and this is a big thing, and not be dependent on anyone.

You know the problem about just sitting down and saying, you know what? I'm going to be so holy, I'm just going to sit and wait and watch on Jesus to come. I'm going to think about nothing but His second coming, and my eyes are going to be focused on the clouds, and that way I won't get in trouble, and I'll be ready when He comes, and there's nothing better than I can do that.

You know the problem with that? When you sit idle very long, what happens? Because you don't have anything to do in your life, you'll begin to mess with other folks' lives.

Have you ever said about somebody you know, and don't look at them right now, don't point at them, have you ever said, they need to get a life? Because they just are constantly meddling in other folks' business and other folks' lives.

They got too much time on their hands. They need to be busier. You ever thought that? I know you have. You don't have to do this right now, but you know what I'm talking about, right?

[11 : 36] Some folks are just idle, and they're busybodies, and they meddle in other folks' business, and it always leads to trouble in the church, in the home, in the community. And Paul says, man, don't do that.

And here's another problem with it. If I sit and just wait on Jesus to come, how am I going to feed myself? Because I'm not going to stop eating. And how am I going to keep a roof over my head and over my family's head and clothes on our backs?

You know what's going to happen? In the name of holiness and religion, I'm going to become a burden to folk around me. And Paul says, man, don't do that.

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, to work with your hands so that you don't become dependent on other folk.

I'm going to tell you, work is good for everybody. Amen? Everybody ought to work. And even though you retire, man, you ought to stay busy. If your idea of retirement is to say, I'm going to just sit down and let people take care of me from here on out.

[12 : 43] I'm going to let the government take care of me. I'm going to let people take care of me. I just don't have care in the world. It's everybody else's responsibility. Man, I'm going to tell you, you need to get a life. You need to get a life.

And that's what Paul says. There was a second problem. And the second problem probably was a greater problem than even the first problem. The second problem was some began worrying about their loved ones who had died before Jesus came back.

Now, think with me. Paul said, hey, here's what's going to happen. Jesus came and he lived and he died and he rose from the dead. And that's the reason for our hope in the gospel. You trust in him, you have eternal life.

And one day he's going to come again and he's going to take us all up to be with him, right? And they all applauded and said, man, that is great. Can't wait. But guess what happened?

Same thing happens in Pickens and Greer. Today, as soon as this service is over, I've got a 2.30 funeral I've got to be off too. I'll tell you something. Folk began to die.

[13 : 48] And they die here in Pickens. And you don't have to wait years for them to die. In the 16 weeks or so, I've been the interim pastor here at Pickens, there have been a number of people in your congregation who passed and loved ones related to people in your congregation who passed, right?

And Thessalonica was no different. Somebody's wife died. Somebody's husband died. Somebody's best friend died. Somebody's partner in business died. And they began saying, no, wait a second.

You said if we trusted Jesus, gave my heart, we'd have eternal life. Jesus is going to come again. He's going to take us out of this world and to be with Him. But they've died before He could get back.

So, what's up with these folk? Listen to what Paul says about that. Look with me, if you will, to chapter 4 and verse 13. We do not want you to be uninformed brothers concerning those who are asleep.

Now, that's a metaphor for dead. He's not talking about they fall asleep. He's talking about they're graveyard dead. So that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope.

[15 : 04] He says, listen, people of Thessalonica, I don't want you to be ignorant about death and about what happens to people after death. Because I don't want you to grieve like those folk who have no hope.

Now, I want to tell you, I've seen believers through the years, I don't encounter this often, but I've seen it on occasion where believers think that for me to be a good Christian, I dare not show any emotion if anybody in my family dies.

Especially if they die tragically. That I'm supposed to suck it up and put on my game face and go out there and just be all smiles and cheery and stand before everybody. And a good testimony is, hey, you know what?

They died, they've gone to glory and I'm okay with it. I'm not hurting, I'm alright. God's taking care of me and I'm alright. But that's not what he's saying at all. He's not saying that we shouldn't grieve, we just shouldn't grieve like people who have no hope.

There's a difference in how you grieve. Do you understand that? I can grieve, but still have hope. And that grief looks different than when I grieve and I don't have any hope.

[16 : 11] When I don't have any hope, I'm ready to jump out a window because I'm desperate. I mean, there is no tomorrow when I don't have any hope. But if I have hope, it's different. Let me show you what I'm talking about.

Our son, Matthew, he marries a girl named Carla Smith five or six, seven years down the way. She gets pregnant, they have a baby, right? Right before they have the baby, they move off to St. Louis.

He's managing the store for Chick-fil-A. They send him out there to shut one down. He stays a few months. He moves back to Greenville just before the baby's born. We were so delighted, right? The baby's born, Scout, my firstborn, I want you to meet her sometime.

Great, beautiful gal, 15 years old now, little baby then. I'd go out on Wednesday nights after I do prayer meeting and I'd go to their apartment and I'd say, can I hold Scout?

And he was working, his wife was there and she'd say, sure. And so I'd sit in the living room all by myself, hold that baby in the rocking chair and rock her and just talk to her and sing to her and tell her how much I loved her and keep looking for her to tell me, I love you too, Papa.

[17 : 18] We've all done that, right? So a few months down the way, he comes to me, he says, Dad, they're reassigned me to a store in Williamsburg, Virginia. It's a great opportunity, brand new store, good community and I'm going to manage that store and it's just a great opportunity.

I said, well, I understand that. He said, I've got to go do that. I know you'll be heartbroken but I just, I need to tell you, I've got to go do that. I understand perfectly.

I said, now, let me just ask you, how often will you get to come home and see Scout because she's staying with us? Now, you know, he can't do that, right?

So I remember just like it was yesterday, it was about 15 years ago, we step outside, we walked out, we've hugged them, we put them in the car, they're only going to be seven hours away.

We put them in the car and I've put on my game face and I've hugged them all and I'm smiling, wishing them well, they back out and they don't hit the curb going out of my driveway until tears are just pouring down my face.

[18 : 24] I mean, I'm just crying and I'm just sobbing, I'm broken hearted. She's just seven hours away but I'm broken hearted. You know what?

Not because I thought, well, that's so far, I'll never get to see her again because I'm going to tell you something, within about three weeks, I jumped in my car one Friday, drove all the way up there and saw her and came all the way back. But the tears were because I love her and momentarily we're separated and that's why I'm going to cry if something happens to my wife or my dad or my sister or brother or my children or my friends.

I'm going to be sad but it's a different kind of sadness. It's a sadness that's tempered by the fact this is not the end. I'm just saying goodbye moment but it still hurts.

You understand that? So, when someone passes you a life, grieve for them. Just don't grieve like people who have no hope. Listen to what he says, Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

For we say this to you by revelation from the Lord, we who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly have no advantage, no advantage, over those who have fallen asleep.

[19 : 39] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

And so will we always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words. And those are encouraging words, aren't they? Paul says, Listen, you don't need to worry about it.

Here's what's going to happen. The archangel's going to sound the voice. The trumpet will blow. Jesus will come. Those who have died, they're going to be raised first.

And they're going to meet all of us who are living at the time when the Lord comes and he's going to take us to heaven to be with him. And that's where we'll be forever. That's an encouraging word, isn't it?

Amen? Boy, I love that word from Paul. Well, there's a third problem. Some became obsessed with knowing when he was coming.

[20 : 38] I pastored a number of churches now, been interim at a number of places. Can I tell you something? In every church I've ever been very long at all, I've met some folk who almost are obsessed with when he's coming.

You've known some folk like that, right? I mean, all they can think about is when is it going to be? These signs we're looking at today point to the time of the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Our country's in trouble. You know that, right? I know that. And a lot of folk have come in these troubled times and said, do you think this means this is the beginning of the end?

I'll tell you something. Everything seems to me to be pointing to it, but I want to warn you about something. Keep perspective. Nations like the United States of America have come and gone throughout history.

And if the Lord tarries a thousand years, there'll be a string of other nations, saints, including this one, who come and go. Do the signs point to the coming?

[21 : 47] I believe they do, but I want to tell you something. I don't know when that's going to be. And if you ever meet a preacher, somebody who says, man, I've studied prophecy all my life and this is my gig and this is what I know, and he says to you, everything here says, Jesus is coming and it's going to be absolute.

It'll be in the next year. It'll be in the next two years. You know you've met somebody who has outpunted their coverage. You know you've met somebody who thinks they know more than they know.

And I want to show you why. You don't have to take that on my authority. Look, if you will, at chapter 5 and verse 1 about the times and the seasons, brothers. You do not need anything to be written to you.

For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. You ever been robbed? They send you advance notice. You're going to be robbed?

No. And when they say peace and security, then suddenly a destruction comes on them like labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in the dark.

[22 : 58] That's what Paul would say to everybody here at First Baptist Pickens who's struggling to know when's he coming. He says, But you, brothers, are not in the dark so that this day would overtake you like a thief.

For you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We're not of the night or of the darkness. So then, we must not sleep like the rest, but we must stay awake and be sober.

You know what he's saying? This wasn't a word that he would have used. It wasn't a word in his vernacular. But if he were living today in our culture, you know what I think he'd say to folk like that who are just constantly saying, Is it going to be January the 5th?

Is it going to be next April? Will it be in 2025? You know what he'd say? Chill. Just chill. Just live for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mean, just chill out and look for the Lord to come and be prepared for the Lord to come and live as though he's going to come tomorrow, but stop worrying about it and stop listening to folk who tell you that they can predict whenever that's going to be.

[24 : 08] So what has Paul said to us? What has James we saw last week said to us? These three things. First of all, be a church that's known for how it loves.

I want to tell you about every church I've ever heard or talked to or met. That's what they all say about themselves. But you know a lot of places that isn't so, is it?

I want to tell you more than anything else, you want the badge of your discipleship to be we love people of every stripe, those who love the church and those who don't, those in the church and those out of the church.

Secondly, we want to walk the talk. We want to say to people out there in the world, here's how you should live and then we live differently.

We want them to look at us and not think we're oddballs and nutcases, peculiar in that sense. But we want them to look at us and say, you know what?

[25 : 14] There's something just different about those folks. They have a level of character and a level of integrity and honesty and they just live by this code that we don't quite get.

It's not in keeping with the world. They talk about this guy Jesus and they seem to have this kingdom kind of mentality. They're more worried about the eternal than the temporal.

They're more worried about the spiritual than they are the physical. They're not materialistic. They're holy and they're pure but they don't brag about it. They have this hidden holiness and righteousness of which when the world sees it, can I tell you something?

They'll be envious of it because they'll say, that guy may be a little naive, she may be a little naive but I'm going to tell you something. That's a good person. That's a person who walks with God.

And finally, be a church, be a church that is looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not because your eyes are fastened on the clouds and you got your calendar out and you're marking a day but because you believe what he's promised and therefore you're free to live your life with hope and without fear because you know one of these days he's coming again.

[26 : 29] Now, before this series ends, can I throw in a personal note? Give you a little advice from somebody who's passed a long time. You take it for what it's worth. But I want to share with you three things as you think about what kind of church do we want to be?

Three pieces of personal advice I'd give you as you try to live out these three things. Here's the first. Be driven always by a sense of purpose. Know exactly who you are and what your mission is and what your reason for existence is.

Can I ask you this morning, do you know that already individually and collectively as the people of the First Baptist Church are pickings? Because I've got to be honest with you, I go a lot of places and preach when I was doing revivals years and years and years ago and I found people who they were faithful to their church, they were actively involved in their church but I think I could look at many of them and say, do you know why your church exists?

And they go, well we do this and we do that and we do the other. We're involved in this and that and we have this program and that program. Yeah, but you see all those are tools.

They're tools that you use to accomplish your objectives but you understand what your objective is and I believe many of them their eyes would have glazed over. Do you know what the purpose of the First Baptist Church of Pickens is?

[27 : 57] When I had pastored Rushy Creek about 15 years, the deacons came and said, we want to give you two months off and we want you to just go away and pray and think. Just rest and get refreshed and come back.

My wife and I went away for two months and I thought a whole lot about what is the purpose of the church because we were growing and seeing people come to know the Lord but I just felt like our purpose was nebulous.

The written statement in our church constitution, it was pretty, it talked about kingdom things and about worship and it just had a whole lot of stuff. It was about four or five sentences long. Nobody, nobody could have quoted it to anybody.

So when I came back I said, you know what we're going to do? We're going to scratch all that and we're going to bring it down to three words that everybody can get. So that everybody who was a member at Rushy Creek, this was required, you had to know those three words.

Pretty easy when you just got three words, right? Here are the three words we chose. Rescue, grow, and serve. We're about rescuing which is evangelism, reaching out after people.

[29 : 02] I love that word rescue. It's used a number of times by Paul in his letters. We're rescuing people out of sin and out of destruction and bringing them to life in Christ. Secondly, we're growing the idea of discipleship.

We don't see people become believers and then just stay there as they do in so many churches. We don't see them grow up strong. We devoted a single night. Wednesday night was for nothing but discipleship.

That's all you could do. Wednesday night is our discipleship night. And then the last was service. We want to be in missions. We want to be in ministry and we want to love people and serve people and we believe that will open the door for us to share the gospel and do that first thing of rescue.

So we said that's our mission and if it doesn't pertain to rescue, grow, and serve we're not going to do it. That leads to the second thing I'm going to tell you but I'm going to hold off from that for just a moment.

Do you know what your mission statement, your printed mission statement is here at First Baptist Picks? I hope you do. What is it? Do you know? There's a single word. What is it? Somebody say it. There you go.

[30 : 03] Good for you. You want to be a well church. You want to be well individuals. You want to worship. You want to evangelize. You want to learn which is discipleship and you want to love which is the idea of service.

It doesn't matter how you state it, what your words are. What matters is you understand your purpose and you understand that's why we're here at First Baptist Church Pickens. That's what we're about.

I want to commend you on your purpose statement. I want to ask you are you moving in that direction? Is that really and truly your purpose or is that just propaganda?

Is that your real purpose or is that just something you say is your purpose but your purpose is something secondary? Only you can answer that. Second piece of advice I'd give you is this.

Stay laser focused as a church on that purpose. I mean set that as your target and don't let anything else interfere with it because I want to tell you something.

[31 : 03] I know from being a pastor for many, many, many years your church is going to be asked the pastor is going to be asked to be involved in lots and lots and lots and lots of good stuff.

But you need to constantly be asking yourself is this good thing we're being asked to participate in help us accomplish our mission or is it take us off focus of our mission?

Because you know what I found happening in the 90s especially? A lot of churches especially larger churches they became Walmarts. They became Walmarts where you know what I mean by Walmart?

They sell a little bit of everything, right? And so churches would say man we've got a hundred ministries and we're involved in this and we're involved in this and we're involved in this and we're involved in this and this and this and this and those ministries became ends in themselves instead of a means to reaching an end because they forgot what their mission was.

And I want to just tell you today I don't mean to sound an alarm but church is different in 2021 than it was in 1960. If we're honest back in 1960 many of us looked to the church for not only spiritual well-being and help and guidance but for social avenues as well.

[32 : 26] But in 2021 folks aren't doing that any longer. They're looking to the church and still need the church for spiritual advice and help and guidance and to work together to accomplish a mission.

But I'm telling you something they're doing things socially in a lot of different ways and the church doesn't have to invent every wheel. Do you understand that?

There are good things that can happen and the church not be the leader in that. In fact I think it's a healthier approach to say this this is our mission and this is where we're going. We see some good things out there.

What we're going to do is instead of reinventing that wheel we're going to ask our ministers and our members to go be partners with people in the world doing those good things and influence people who are lost who are involved in doing those good things instead of saying always you come to the church or we'll do it here at the church house.

You understand what I'm saying in that? For instance and I can say this instantly because I don't know what you got. Okay? I know I'm up in somebody here and I'm not meaning to and I don't know anything about your church and ask anything about this but most churches have softball teams right?

[33 : 39] And I'm not telling you to go disband your softball team don't hear me say that but what would be wrong instead of having nine guys on the field who know Jesus and one guy you invited who doesn't know Jesus to come in to play ball with you for a couple guys from the church to go play ball with eight or ten other lost guys and to influence those lost guys rather than say come here and play with us.

You understand what I'm saying? That's yes. Infiltrate the world. Take the gospel to the world where people live and be a part of their world instead of always saying come and be a part of ours.

So I would say to you know what you're about and stay low laser focused on doing that which you're about and not just doing good stuff and here's the third reason the final piece of advice I'm going to give you and I close because you need to always remember the clock is running.

Use your time wisely. Paul told the Ephesians to redeem the time. Remember that phrase in the book of Ephesians? Redeem the time because the days are evil. There was a version of the scripture called the cotton patch version years and years and years ago and it was written from a southern perspective and you know what the cotton patch version said about that verse it said this and I loved it it said use your time as though you had to buy it.

That's a pretty good idea isn't it? In other words don't waste your time. Use your time as though you had to buy it because the clock is running out.

[35 : 22] I'm going to speak to everybody in this room right now at least my age and older. You're well aware of that because there's hardly a day passes in my life that I don't at some point in the time they think the clock's running for me and it's running out.

I didn't think that when I was 30. I didn't think that when I was 40. It didn't cross my mind even when I was 50. But as my 70th birthday is approaching I know this the clock's running and time's running out.

And it's not just running out for us as individuals. I want to tell you something. It's running out for all of us collectively as a church. We're on mission. The Lord Jesus Christ is going to come again and when he comes again the clock will have expired.

Our opportunity to bring the loss to faith in Christ will be over. So I tell you this. I close with this. Know your mission.

Decide as a church here's what we want to be about. Here's what God has called us to do. Get a laser focus on that and don't let anybody or anything get you off that mission.

[36 : 36] Say no to good stuff and just do the best stuff. Don't try to do it all but I'm going to do the best stuff. Not just the good stuff, the best stuff.

Which means I'm going to say no to some things that will upset some folk because they'll say well this is a good thing and you ought to be doing the good thing but it's not my purpose. Individually and collectively in life it's not my purpose.

I close with this illustration, true illustration about a year before I retired, maybe two, I think it was just a year before I retired. I was beginning to be more and more and more reflective and more and more of the mindset we've got to stay focused because there were just so many demands to do so many different things.

There was a guy I had discipled when I first came to the church, he was newly wed, he had surrendered to ministry, he'd gone off to seminary, he'd started a church out in Tennessee, it was booming, it was rocking.

I called him and I said, Todd would you fly here to Greenville, we'd like to buy some of your time, I want you to talk to our staff about what you've done there at that church. He came and he shared with our staff, we met in this conference room, and he shared with our staff, here's something you can do to impact your community.

[37 : 50] It was a big Easter egg deal, right? I won't go into great detail because it's insignificant to you and your purposes, but we planned this big event. I had about eight staff members that said, you're going to be in charge of it and everybody here is going to help, everybody here is going to have responsibility because a lot of times you can have a good plan but you don't execute your plan.

Sometimes you execute your plan but your plan was a bad plan. You don't know unless you evaluate so I was always big on evaluation. So here's what we do. You're going to be in charge of this. We're going to work this up over about two months and then we're going to do this on Saturday right before Easter.

Okay? Everybody fulfill their responsibility to the nth degree. 2,000 people who weren't members of Brushy Creek came to that event.

First year we had it. The next year we did it. 2,000 people came to that event. The second year evaluation was different than the first year because the first year we've just had it.

But the second year we've had it now we've had it a second time and we've had a chance to see how did this impact our church. Right? I remember we're in this conference room and they're all sitting here around this conference table.

[39 : 01] I get up from the conference table and for some reason I just went over and I'm looking out this window and I'm looking at the streets there running by the church and I'm listening to all the conversation and they're telling me about how many people came and what it cost and the whole nine yards.

So I turned to them and I said I looked at the one I'd made in charge and I said I want you to know you executed the plan perfectly. You did a great great great job. And every one of you who participated in this everybody you showed up you did a good good job and I'm going to give you an A plus an effort and it couldn't be any better.

Last time we're ever going to do it. And you could hear the air suck out of the room. What do you mean the last time we were here? We had 2,000 people there.

You see our goal is not to see how many people we can bring to an event. It's to see how that event impacts our church and the kingdom. And it had little if any impact, lasting impact.

And so we're not going to do that anymore. In the eyes of the world they'd probably call it success. success. We're not doing it anymore. Because that's taken us, our energy, our resources, away from what our purpose is.

[40 : 14] And it makes us feel good but it's not accomplishing our purpose so we're not going to do that anymore. I'm going to tell you as somebody who's pastored for a long time, the hardest thing to ever do in a Baptist church is not to start something new.

That's probably what you think. To sell people a new idea. If you're a pretty good salesman and you've got a pretty good plan, you can always sell people a new idea. You know what's hard in a Baptist church?

To kill something. To bury it when it's already dead. We'll walk by a stinking, decaying body of ministry all the time.

And you'll go, whew, that stinks. Let's just do it again next week. Maybe it'll be better next week. Isn't that so? Huh? Got any corpses around here at Pickens?

If you want to be a church that's doing what God wants you to do, you've got to first of all, get in the Word and find out what He wants us to do. And boy, once we lock in on that, we're not going to do other stuff.

[41 : 19] We're going to leave that for somebody else to do. We'll go join them in doing good stuff. Our members, we're not going to be afraid. They don't, everything you do for the kingdom doesn't have to be through First Baptist Pickens.

Do you understand that? You can go join some other things. I'm not talking about churches. I'm talking about joining other ministries. Go sing in the local chorus. Go play ball on the softball teams and baseball teams here in Pickens.

Be involved in the PTA. Do a lot of stuff and let your influence for Christ be known in those places. Let the church stay on focus with what the mission of the church is.

bringing men to Christ. Bringing God glory. Let's bow in prayer. Father, you know it's not my heart or my desire to just rock the boat or to offend anyone.

But God, I pray you'd help our churches across the land to realize you've saved us for a purpose and you brought us together for a purpose.

[42 : 28] purpose. And if we can stay focused, we can accomplish that purpose. And I pray that we never settle for something that's easy and something that's shiny and something that maybe will make folk applaud us.

But Lord, we would do that which you've called us to do, which really is important to love people, to live holy, to look for your coming, to bring you glory. have your will and way in this service as I pray in your name.

For your sake we pray. Amen. Amen.