

God's Web

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Date: 25 February 2024

Preacher: Dr. Daniel Heeringa

[0 : 00] You get it, I want you to just hold it up for me. Y'all look like you're voting, but in reality, we're praying.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, I love you, and I thank you for the opportunity of worship today. Your sweet spirit's been in this place. I'm thankful for it.

God, with that same spirit, direct us right now. Clear our minds, then fill our minds, oh God. Show us what you'd have us to do, and give us the conviction to do it, oh God, I pray.

In Jesus' name, amen. Easter will be here in five weeks. I want to take an excursion today away from our sermon series on creation to just talk about the importance of what's coming up.

I'll be dealing with Genesis chapter 3 for the next three weeks, and then on Palm Sunday, we'll look to the cross of Christ, and on Easter Sunday, thank God, we'll look at the resurrection.

[1 : 10] Easter is a great day to honor the Lord and celebrate our new life through resurrection, and if you have other plans on Easter and can change them, change them, okay?

If you've not made plans for Easter, don't overbook it. You don't want to miss it, I promise you. One year ago, it was a significant day in the life of our church, so much so that we won't do Easter this year like we did last year because we can't accommodate it, thankfully.

Last year, we hoped for 300 in Sunday school. We got that. We wanted to double that in a combined service of an 8 o'clock outside parking lot service and then a different service at 1030.

If we could combine both of those and maybe have 600. We had about 200 in the parking lot. We had 681 for worship. Amen. 681, we can't handle that.

We had an overflow, and so we need to accommodate that better this year, but man, what a day we had. So I want you to get this schedule down, and I want you to understand it. At 830, we will have a worship service in here, and then at 915, we'll have Sunday school at 8 o'clock.

[2 : 28] Excuse me. You're right. 8 o'clock. Thank you. Don't show up 30 minutes late. Thank you, Jerry. 8 o'clock. And then at 915, we'll have Sunday school. At 1030, we'll have the same.

Well, it says identical. Ain't two worship hours I've ever been in has been identical, praise the Lord. But anyway, but we'll have the same program in both, and so the same order twice.

Our children options will be more advanced at 1030 than at the early one. If you don't have a Sunday school class, don't leave, okay? If you are not in Sunday school before Easter and you don't have a class, then start on Easter.

I'm going to be holding a class in the fellowship hall, so I want everybody here for Sunday school. Either you come at 8 and stay for Sunday school, or you show up for Sunday school and stay for worship.

We're going to have a great day in the Lord. Last year, we made a commitment five weeks out, and it worked. And lives were changed because God blessed our faithfulness.

[3 : 34] So I want us to commit again today publicly and to lay that out before the Lord. The five-for-five card that you received has a tear-off on the bottom.

That tear-off is for you to turn in in a little while. That top part looks much like a bookmark, and that's on purpose. So that you can write names upon that list, make that a prayer list for you, put that in your Bible, put that wherever you need to put it, to pray over that daily.

Pray about five people that you can invite to celebrate the resurrection with us on Easter Sunday.

Now, as I preach this morning, I want you to write those names down.

I've asked God to give you those names, to make them clear to you, to remind you of those things. I often don't want you distracted when I preach.

I want you distracted this morning by five names that God lays on your heart to invite. I'm not asking you to invite them. I'm asking you to pray about inviting them.

[4 : 43] Just write those names down on that sheet. May God grant that. Write them twice on both the top list and on the bottom list.

You'll keep the bottom list. Excuse me. You'll turn in the bottom list and lay it at the cross of Christ at the close of this service. And the top, you can just hold on to that as a bookmark.

I pray that God will let the names flow into your life. God's been wonderful to us as a church, and Easter is a wonderful time to invite people to come and see what God is doing.

People will come on Easter Sunday that will not come any other time. It is a great opportunity. And we have something to share. If you have Christ, you have something to share.

We have no idea how significant it could be to just pray and invite someone to come. I will tell you that there was a name put on at least one of these cards last year and placed at this cross.

[5 : 50] And that man, since that time, has been saved and baptized as a member of this church because people were praying. More than that, but because people were praying.

So I'm firmly convinced that God blesses our efforts in that, and I'm going to ask God to make that clear to you. I've been praying in that way.

So I want us to look at John's gospel, John chapter 1, for just a few moments to give us a glimpse of what can happen when we walk through the doors that God opens for us.

I want you to see how to respond when Christ walks by. It's in John chapter 1, beginning in verse 35. It says this. The next day again, John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, Behold, the Lamb of God.

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, What are you seeking? And they said to him, Rabbi, which means teacher, where are you staying?

[6 : 59] He said to them, Come and you will see. So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that hour, excuse me, that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, We have found the Messiah, which means Christ.

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter.

As I prepared for this last week, I read a devotion around this passage from morning and evening by Charles Spurgeon.

And once again, Spurgeon hit the nail on the head. The old boy was pretty good at what he did. And he said this, listen to this. He said, When Peter went to find his brother, he little imagined how imminent Simon would become.

[7 : 58] Simon Peter was worth ten Andrews, so far as we can gather from sacred history. And yet Andrew was instrumental in bringing him to Jesus. You may be very deficient in talent yourself.

And yet you may be the means of drawing to Christ, one who shall become imminent in grace and service. Oh, dear friend, you little know the possibilities that are in you.

You may but speak a word to a child. And in that child, there may be a slumbering, there may be a slumbering noble heart, which shall stir the Christian church in years to come.

Andrew has only two talents, but he finds Peter. Go you and do likewise. This morning, I just want to ask you to pray about it.

Who would God have you to pray for? I don't want you to think about the awkwardness of bringing it up. I don't want you to think about the fact that you haven't cultivated a relationship where you feel comfortable doing that yet.

[8 : 59] I don't want you to think about any of that. I just want you to write that name down. I want to show you this morning how God works. How he uses us, and we don't even realize the impact.

And I want to illustrate that with something called God's web. I'm going to do it by looking at a hypothetical lady's life.

All of the experiences that I will share with you are real experiences, but not just in one life. But it shows the strands of God's web that I've seen in other people's life and how he works.

I'm going to call this lady Lucille. That was my grandmother's name. And although this is not her story by any means, I loved her, and I thought about her when I was writing this.

So I want to name her Lucille. Lucille was one who was not raised in a godly home. Not a church-going home, but she was invited to vacation Bible school.

[10:08] And when she went to vacation Bible school, people that invited her, the workers that worked there, the people who gave out the refreshments, the friends that were with her there, it was a positive experience for her to have at church.

It was only for one week, and she never went back again. But it made an impact. As a student in high school, she was invited to a youth function.

It was one of those overnight kind of events that youth ministers love, filled with fun games, lively music, and good biblical preaching on salvation.

And as she looked around that room, she saw those who lived that out. She saw others that played at it, didn't really live it out. That confusion caused by their example caused her to listen, but to not move forward toward it.

As she grew older, she had workmates, workmates that went to church, churchgoers. Sometimes she would hear a little about church.

[11:22] She'd hear them say something about their church. That community intrigued her. Maybe it was a place for her child. She's home one day, and she also saw a smiley preacher in a big arena-type church on TV.

He gave a toothy, positive message. It was not the gospel, but it was positive, and he was pretty, and so she watched him. She wondered from time to time how that related to her earlier church experiences.

She heard some ladies one day talking about a Bible podcast, and so she downloaded it, and she listened to that one day.

For just a few minutes, it sounded relevant. Food for thought, nothing much more. One day at work, someone invited her to come to church.

She thought it may be good for her child. Maybe the child would have a VBS-type experience, and she told them she'd consider letting her child go, and the one that invited her asked, why don't you come with her?

[12:34] Now, that hit her hard. She was stirred by that, so she talked to her mother about it, and her mother surprisingly said that she had been praying for that very thing to happen.

She decided to go. She started in morning worship. When she attended there, people were friendly. She felt at home. The message was relevant to her life. The follow-up by the church, by the pastor, by those that had invited her, led to a conversation that asked her about giving her life to Christ, and Lucille said, yes.

Now, let me ask you some questions. Was it the power of the sermon that drew her to the Lord? It played a part, but not alone.

Was it the friendliness of the people that drew her in? Not only that, but it played a part. Was it her decision to go to church that saved her?

[13:59] No. Was it her mother praying that did that? Was it the one that invited her that did that? Was it her persistence in asking?

Was it the TV preacher? Was it the podcast? Was it the workmates talking about it? Was it her experience as a student? Was it the VBS experience?

Did all of that play a part? Yes, it did. They all played a part in God drawing her in to a web of salvation.

Was all those steps equally important? Yes. Was all those steps and responsibilities the same? No. Somebody had to give a positive experience.

Somebody had to invite. Somebody had to pray. Did any of those people do the saving?

[15:07] No. Who did the saving? Who did the drawing? Who designed the strands of the web?

And my question is what would happen if somebody disobeyed God in some part of that?

What if somebody was not sensitive? Who knows? I don't know. We know all of that played a part.

So this is what I ask. Let's play a part. Let's just play a part. Because we do know a few things.

One is we know that God is at work in your life. He's at work in my life. No matter who we are He is working around us and He is working in us and the question is are we picking up on it?

[16:24] Do we sense it? Second thing is this. God is at work in people's lives around us. No matter who you are no matter who they are He is working in people around us.

He's also working in us. So the question is are we working with Him about them in their life?

Not only that but God is drawing. God's drawing. He's drawing people to Him. He's drawing Christians into His work.

God is at work. And lastly we're not to miss a divine opportunity.

You never know the difference that God can make through you just inviting someone to attend an Easter resurrection celebration.

[17 : 40] You have no idea. You also don't know what God will do in you when you commit to pray for people to invite to an Easter resurrection celebration.

Whether it's an out of church member of a long time ago that we just ain't seen. Whether it's somebody that you know that might just need to be encouraged along the way.

What about that crusty neighbor? The one you don't like? The one you avoid? The one that God always brings up to you when somebody says you need to share your Christ with somebody?

Has God placed anybody in your life and you go no not him. Not him. That guy. Write him down. What about somebody who's got hangups?

They're messed up. What about somebody that looks like she has it all together and don't need anything else?

[18 : 51] Write her down. Will you just commit to pray for five of them? For five weeks?

Lord, who would you have me pray about inviting? We'll talk about the next step later.

We'll provide materials for you to help with that process. But let's preface everything we do with just praying.

A concert of prayer as individuals for folks that God's laid upon our heart. What difference would it make if hundreds of people are prayed for?

Would that make a difference in people's lives? I believe it will. And I'm excited not only to see what God will do in those that prayer may lead to an invite and for those who are committed to just pray about it.

[20 : 13] if you would bow your head. I don't want you to close your eyes though. I want you to look at that sheet. And if you don't have five names yet, I want you to ask God to give you clarity in that, to know what that is.

again, you duplicate those names. You write those on those first five lines so you can keep that for yourself.

You write them on those bottom five lines so you can rip that off. It's perforated. You can rip that off and I'll give you instruction for that for just a moment. But before we do that, I must ask, is it possible that someone's here today and you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ?

And you realize, you realize that you're separated from God. You realize that God's placed you in this place today, maybe many times over and over again, but he's placed you here because you need to commit your life to the Lord Jesus.

I'm going to tell you that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. And I'm thankful today that he'll save you. He'll change you if you surrender your life to him.

[21 : 45] I encourage you as we give the invitation in just a moment for you to come. I'll be here ready to pray for you. Be happy to thoroughly show you what it means to give your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't put it off. Maybe you've done that, but you've never publicly acknowledged that through baptism. Jesus, by his example and by his commission, told us that's how we show folks that we're Christians.

So I encourage you if you've never done that, come. Make that right. We'll line that up for you when you come. Maybe you're here and God's drawing you to be a part of First Baptist Church.

You know this is where God would have you to serve. I encourage you to come. I encourage you to come. I'd love to pray for you. I'd love to guide you in that process.

Or maybe you're here and you've got something you need to lay before the Lord. Might be something about your own life. Might be something about somebody else's life. But you just need time before the Lord.

[22 : 43] These steps here are a makeshift altar for us to be able to lay things down before him. I have no idea how God's guiding you. I don't pretend that.

I just do what God leads me to do. I just encourage you to be obedient to follow him in every way. We'll stand together and we'll sing. But more important than that, I encourage you to obey God as he speaks to your heart and life.

Lord Jesus, I love you. And I ask your God that you'll guide each and every one today to simply follow what you would have them to do, oh Lord, I pray. In Jesus' precious name, amen.
Amen.