

“Thoughts from a Grateful Pastor”

Pastor Dan Erickson

January 2, 2022

Well, it is day two of the year or our Lord 2022 and most of you are doing pretty well so far on those new year's resolutions. Maybe new year's weekend would be a good time to have a sermon on changes we should make in our lives or hopes we have for the new year. However, this morning, I am going to talk about how thankful I am, especially during this challenging Covid era, to be the pastor, senior pastor of Chisholm Baptist Church. Though with Pastor Mark and Bryan in France, and Pastor Ron in Florida, I kind of feel like a solo pastor right now. There are three reasons for this topic: One; I want to express my appreciation to you all for being in so many ways a wonderful congregation. Oh, you are not perfect, but I thank the Lord and thank you for the privilege of serving as your pastor for the past 28 ½ years.

Two; I believe all of you who are part of Chisholm Baptist church should be grateful to the Lord that you are part of this congregation. The reasons I am thankful are also reasons you can be thankful. Now, because this church is not perfect, all of us are at least tempted at times to grumble about those imperfections. Today I want to remind you there is much more cause for gratitude, than grumbling. Three; I believe increasing gratitude, which is my goal today, is always a good thing, because it is the key to spiritual growth and godliness. Why? Because gratitude, which is the proper response to all the way we experience God's grace, is what fuels our love for the Lord. That love enables us to obey Him, not only with the right actions, but the right motives. Remember this chain folks: Grace leads to gratitude, gratitude leads to love, love leads to obedience. And our heartfelt obedience to the Lord is what pleases and glorifies Him.

Now, because it is a holiday weekend some of you are from out of town and are part of another congregation. I hope what I say will remind you of reasons you can be thankful for your church and how the Lord is working in your midst. If no, I know some realtors who can help you find a home within a short driving distance of Chisholm Baptist church. And Hey, if you are doing your job remotely, why not? Oh, Let's pause and pray the Lord would encourage and challenge us today.

First, As the pastor of this congregation, I am thankful for people who trust the sovereignty of God. Now, some of you know that I embrace the reformation understanding of salvation and what are often called “the doctrines of Grace” or are known by the acronym “TULIP.” Yet, within our congregation there are various opinions about exactly how God's sovereignty and human responsibility relate to each other in our experience of God's salvation. And that's okay. Yet, I am grateful that so many of you believe that in the big picture, God is in control and that He is working out His purposes for His glory and our ultimate good. People in this church tend to have a big view of God, believing He is all powerful, totally wise, and perfectly loving. You believe what the Bible teaches. Like Job, you would say, **Job 42:2 I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.** Or as the NLT puts it **Job 42:2 (NLT) I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you.** You believe as Jesus did **that Matthew 10:29 Not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Fathers consent.** This gives you the same confidence the apostle Paul expresses in **Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

Friends, I am grateful to be the pastor of a church where so many people believe this. And you don't just believe it in theory, you believe it in practice. As a result, when things get tough, rather than panic, you trust God. I see that happening frequently. For example, someone gets laid off from his job and rather than panicking, he says, “It is okay. God's got this. There must be a better job out there for me.” Now this fellow will fill out job applications. Being complacent or passive in a situation like this doesn't honor the Lord, but he trusts God and doesn't panic.

Panicking is something a lot of folks have been doing for the past two years because of Covid, for all sorts of different reasons. Even some Christians panic, certain that the world is about to end. I am grateful that this church is full of people who are confident Jesus will one day return to this earth, believe this could happen anytime, and deeply want Him to come very soon. Yet, you also know that it is not for us to know the times and

seasons the Lord has appointed, and that to Him one day is as a thousand years. God will work out His plan in His time and His way. There is no need to panic. And even if our economy crashes, even if the American Republic implodes, even if western civilization as we know it comes to an end, the church of Jesus Christ will not only survive, but will thrive, because the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Through His death and resurrection Jesus has already defeated the forces of the evil one. I am thankful many of you here realize that, and patiently wait for the Lord Jesus to return and make His victory complete.

Second, I am thankful that many folks in this congregation don't panic even in the face of death. As a pastor, it can be a bit uncomfortable visiting with an individual who has been told he/she has maybe only a few weeks to live. Yet, it becomes a totally different conversation when I realize that individual is not afraid to die. I remember visiting with Delores Erickson a few days before she passed away in March on 2019. She knew cancer was about to take her life, her life on this earth. She was ready for eternal life in heaven. She was looking forward to freedom from pain, for a reunion with her husband, Bob and other loved ones, but most of all she anticipated the joy of being in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Delores knew that Christ was truly her hope in life and death. Yes, the death of a 91-year-old widow is a little different than some other situations. Yet, I have seen this same type of confidence evident in numerous individuals in this congregation. Most recently Robb Maki...

There are two verses that come to my mind which reflect the attitude toward death that I see in many folks here. First is what Jesus says in **John 11: 25, 26 I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.** That promise provides the foundation of what the Lord tells us in **Hebrews 2:14, 15 Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. Freedom from slavery, emancipated from the fear of death.** I am thankful that describes many of you in this room.

Third, As the pastor of this congregation, I am thankful for people who take the authority of the bible seriously. This impacts my role as a pastor in a variety of ways. Preaching is one of the primary roles of the senior pastor. Most of you folks don't have low expectations, but you have clear expectations. You are not looking for exceptional creativity or dynamic delivery. Those are pluses, but not priorities. What you want is a clear exposition of the bible text. You want to know what the bible says, what it means and what some implications are for today. You want to what God says to us through His word. I am thankful those are the type of sermons you want to hear, because those are the sermons I want to preach. In fact, whenever I read the bible my goal to hear what God is saying to me by understanding what text says and means and what the implications are. It is a privilege to feed the word of God to people who are hungry to hear it.

I am also thankful for a shared belief in the authority of scripture gives a common standard for helping us make decisions as a church. Whatever the issue is being discussed, the question frequently asked is "But, what does the bible say?" In this congregation what the bible says carries a lot more weight than cultural trends or what other churches might be doing. A claim, "God told me we should do this" is met with skepticism, until we are convinced it is consistent with what the bible teaches. If the Bible is silent on a topic, then we recognize we don't have a clear word from God. We then discuss the different opinions we have, but we realize our opinions are not authoritative like the Bible is. A verse very helpful to keep in mind is **Deuteronomy 29:29 the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.** Understanding there are some topics for which we don't have the answers, provides some needed humility as we seek to honor the Lord together. It also causes us to focus on doing the things the Bible says we should be doing, and not be distracted by other priorities.

This attitude, of not just saying we believe the Bible, but actively taking the Bible's authority seriously, has contributed to a precious unity within this congregation. Over the past 28 ½ years I have attended about 240 monthly Chisholm Baptist Church Board meetings. I have left every single one of those 340 meetings feeling

encouraged. Oh I have sometimes disagreed with decisions that have been made. Yet, I am grateful that 99% of the time I have been confident that the Board members that disagreed with me Deacons and pastors, were not following a personal agenda, but were making a sincere effort to understand and follow what the Bible teaches and be led by the Holy Spirit. I cannot ask anyone to do more than that.

Well, that is just a couple of the ways a belief in the authority of the Bible shapes this congregation and many of you as individuals. Frankly, for the 115 years that Chisholm Baptist Church has existed this has been one of our basic convictions. In the beginning was the work, the word was God, and the living word reveals Himself through the written word, the Bible. We are people of the book, because it is through this book that God speaks and shows Himself to us in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, As the pastor of this congregation, I am thankful that so many of you are eager to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Chisholm Baptist Church has always been about making disciples. In recent decades we have said that we as a church are guided by the great commands and the great commission. In the last year we have sharpened our definition to say the purpose of our church is to “Love God, Love Others, and Make Disciples.” Yet, this is not merely a changing in wording. Though this church has always been about making disciples, we have realized recently that it is important for us to be more intentional about this. Pastor Mark has done a great job helping this happen, especially through the “Every Man a Warrior” groups. Over the last couple of years, we have had dozens of men, of all ages, meeting regularly with a small group of other guys. Within these groups they are accountable for having quiet times, memorizing scripture, and other basic aspects of being a disciple of Jesus. It is so cool to stop at church at 6:15 on Tuesday mornings or 9:00 on Thursday nights and find a group of five men sitting in the library studying the Bible together, especially when I realize that some of these guys have never done anything like that before.

And there are other indications that many of you want to grow as disciples of Jesus. We have more people participating in our adult Sunday School classes now that we have had for many years.

Those are great opportunities to learn and grow. A variety of Bible studies go on in this building and in different homes each week. Last month Carol Ellefson and four of her friends were up here on the platform talking about the “Cultivating Holy Beauty” study they were a part of this past year. The excitement they have for the Bible study was evident and contagious. I remember thinking that morning, “Wow, it is a privilege to be the Pastor of women who are so enthusiastic about growing disciples of Jesus Christ.”

I know numerous pastors, very good men, who want the people in their church to be disciples, to trust and follow Jesus each day. However, most of the folks in their churches don’t want to be disciples. They are too busy following their own agendas, which often are focused on pursuing comfort, convenience, and fun. So these pastors get frustrated. They feel like the apostle did when he said, except for Tim, **Philippians 2:21 Everyone looks out for their own interests not those of Jesus Christ.** Frankly, that describes some of you in this room. Most of the time you are focused on your own interests, not those of Jesus. And it describes all of us at least some of the time. But I am thankful many of you, most of the time, are focused on the interests of Jesus Christ, on trusting and following Him. In fact, I am pretty sure some of you are more committed and consistent followers of Jesus than I am. If you are one of those folks, you are likely to humble to recognize that, but I am very glad that you are part of this congregation. Pastor Rod Toumi, who passed away suddenly a few months ago, would sometimes say to me, “Dan, you have the best people at Chisholm Baptist Church.” I would often respond, “I know. And I am grateful.”

Fifth, As the pastor of this congregation, I am thankful that many people don’t just talk about grace, but practice it. I borrowed that phrase from Randy Lehman. Yes, as Christians, we have experienced God’s grace through the salvation that is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We love to talk and sing about that amazing grace. Yet, having received that grace, we believe it is important that we show grace to others. The attitude many of you have is reflected in the words of the apostle John, **1 John 4:11 If God so loved us we ought also to love one another.** Now, frankly, this seems to be pretty basic. All Christians should always treat other Christians in a gracious manner. Yet, I am aware

of other churches where that is not how people treat each other. And there have been enough non-gracious comments made and unkind deeds done over the years at Chisholm Baptist Church that it makes me very glad that these are rare occurrence and not the norm. It can be very painful for a pastor when people in a church don't show grace to one another, and am thankful that I don't often experience that pain.

Here are just three examples of gracious behavior and attitudes I see in this congregation. People don't yell at each other at church business meetings. Once, over 25 years ago, a woman raised her voice because she was upset about something, that is the last incident I remember. Yet, whether it is a business meeting or board meeting or all the interactions involved when people are doing ministry. You folks are almost always respectful and gentle with each other. That is true even when people have different opinions and disagree. For the most part you take very seriously what the apostle Paul tells us in **2 Timothy 2:24, 25a and the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.** Most people, even most non-believers, are respectful and kind toward those who treat them with respect and kindness. The real test comes when someone is disrespectful toward you and speaks unkind words. Yet most of you are pretty good at applying **Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns a way wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.** When a discussion is getting intense, and someone says something that borders on being harsh, some of you really good at speaking the soft words that remind us we are all on the same team, all a part of the same family. As we will talk about next Sunday, there are times when it is appropriate to feel and express anger, but rarely should that anger be expressed toward a fellow servant of the Lord Jesus.

Rarely do I find an anonymous note in my church mailbox. Some pastors I know get a stream of anonymous notes and letters full of complaints and unfounded accusations. That is just wrong. If something bothers you enough that you feel the need to complain about it. Own your complaint. I am thankful there are not a lot of covert complainers in this congregation.

People get second chances in this church. For whatever reason it is easy for us to write off someone if he/she makes a mistake, especially if it is a public mistake. Now, this doesn't mean we ignore sin, but the goal is always that the person who sins would repent, that we would be willing to forgive, and that we then focus on reconciliation and restoration. My brother Tim, who was a pastor for many years, was guilty of sexual sin. He had to resign from his position and his wife divorced him. Yet, he was amazed how people in this church reached out to him, accepted him and loved him even though they knew he had messed up big time. I am grateful you did that for him, and thankful to be the pastor of a church that is willing to give people second chances.

So, there you have it. I am thankful to the Lord for the privilege I have of serving as the pastor of Chisholm Baptist church; this congregation where people trust the sovereignty of God, don't panic even in the face of death, take the authority of the Bible very seriously, are eager to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ, and treat each other graciously. These realities make Chisholm Baptist Church not a perfect church, but one that is truly blessed and being used by the Lord. For that I am grateful and you should be as well.