

# The Glory of God on Display in the People of God

sermonaudio.com

*Anniversaries*

By Ty Blackburn

**Preached on:** Sunday, September 10, 2023

**Providence Church**

2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles, this is not going to be an exposition of this passage, but a starting point is 1 Peter 2. Go back to a couple of verses we looked at a few months back as a launching point for today's message. The title of the message is more of a topical reflection on what God has done in 40 years in this church, "The Glory of God on Display in the People of God." The glory of God on display in the people of God. Our God is a glorious God. He does all things well. He's great and greatly to be praised. His goodness is unsearchable. His goodness is on display in all of his works, and they are worth contemplating, the smallest being that he's made to the greatest. The galaxies, all of these things, we see unfathomable artistry, the brilliance, the glorious creativity of God. And yet his most amazing work of all is the work he does in his people. This is the work that he delights in above all others. You see this, a careful reading of Scripture shows this. He glories in what he has done in the lives of sinners who have come home to him through faith in Christ, to take us from being dead spiritually, lost without God, without hope in the world, to transform us by the power of his word and then to keep transforming us more and more to the image of his Son. This is of all his works, his greatest and most glorious and he delights in that. And so when we reflect on 40 years of this church, we're reflecting on the glory of God as displayed in the lives of real people in which he did and has been doing eternal work.

This verse I want to, the two verses I want to read to begin with are 1 Peter 2:9-10. It speaks about the identity of the people of God, the church, those who have been called out of darkness, we're going to see, but he's making a people for himself. 1 Peter 2:9-10, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." The people of God, the glory of God displayed in the people of God. Let's go to the Lord and ask his blessing on his word.

*Father, we come to You this morning to praise and worship You because You made us for that purpose. Every human being was made to worship You. Though we come into this world because of sin now, alienated from that purpose, seeking our own, dishonoring You, defiling ourselves, destroying Your good works, and yet You have made a way to save rebels, to save those who were dead and without hope through the Lord Jesus*

*Christ, the awesome work of Your Son. We come to praise You for the saving grace of Christ, the glory of the cross, the indescribable victory of the resurrection. We come asking that You might speak to us and help us to glory in Him, that as we reflect on the times, the ways that You have worked, that in everything Christ would have preeminence, for He alone is worthy. We pray this in His name. Amen.*

You know, verse 9, those four collective nouns that describe the people of God, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. That last phrase, a people for God's own possession, literally a people in the phrase that describes for God's own possession means a people literally unto God's purchase. The idea is there's a verb at work in that noun that describes the other noun, a people, possession. The possession means from a verb that means to make one's own. It means to purchase for oneself. So when God purchases us, he purchases us for himself. It's not so much about, I mean, he's blessing us. He is giving us life. He is giving us everything we were ever made to be. But there's in the truest sense, he's purchased us, purchases us for himself. He delights in you if you're a child of God and if you're not, he's willing to delight in you if you will come to him through his Son, Jesus, even today.

A people for God's own possession, a people belonging to God, that is what the church is. The church is the assembly of people who've been called out. Actually, the word church that we get our English word church from in Greek is the word ecclesia, and it means called out, those who've been called out, an assembly of those who've been called out of the world. We heard in John 17, it was read earlier, Jesus praying for those not praying for the world. He makes a point of saying, "I'm not praying for the world. I'm praying for those whom You have given Me out of the world." He's praying for the church, those who will become his own that the Father will give him. And as we saw, it's not just the disciples at that point in history, but all who would believe in him through their witness, and if you know Jesus Christ, you are one of those for whom Jesus was praying on that night as he stood in the shadow of the cross. The people of God, the people belonging to God, that's who the church is and he delights to glory in his work. His work of redemption is more wondrous and more amazing than his work of creation as amazing and staggering as his work of creation is. His work of redemption is even more glorious to take those who were his enemies and make them his children.

And I want us to think about this kind of now reflection over 40 years, three points this morning that speak of how the glory of God is displayed in his people as we think about how the Lord has worked. And the first is the ways of God. I want to consider the ways of God. We're going to look at the ways of God, the word of God and the work of God. Those are the three points.

The ways of God. One of the beautiful hymns that came out of English Puritanism is, "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm." He works in mysterious ways. William Cowper wrote those words and they remind me of Isaiah 55:8 and 9. where the Lord says, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My

thoughts than your thoughts." The ways of God. One of the things that we see when we look carefully at the people of God, as we see the wonder of God's ways, think about the way that he worked in your life to bring you to himself. The things that he did, all of the things that he had to do to prepare the soul of your heart to receive the word of God, the seed so that it would take root. So often it comes through suffering and pain, confusion, discouragement, brokenness. The Lord has to break our hard hearts, humble our pride, and so he works in ways that are not our ways. We would not do things the way God does them because his ways are infinitely higher than our ways.

Thinking back on even just the details of the church and the founding of this church in 1983, David Pickard, the founding pastor, moved to Duluth with his wife, Dottie and four children in the summer of 1981 to be the pastor of another church in the area, Mount Tabor Baptist Church, which is about six miles south on Beaufort Highway. You go out to the Beaufort Highway and turn left, you'll pass Mount Tabor. Same location it was six years ago when David and Dottie went there. He was an enthusiastic young pastor, loved the word of God and heart for souls and so he came to that church full of enthusiasm and within two years he ran into some significant opposition and conflict, difficulty. Before I knew about the difficulty, I knew him because in God's providence, I was in, I was a senior in high school with his daughter, his oldest daughter, Mary. So they moved in the summer of 1981, the summer before our senior year, mine and Mary's. She came to Duluth. And so they were at ball games and I remember basketball games day, Pastor Pickard being there and getting to know that he was the pastor at Mount Tabor, but not really knowing him, but knowing Mary. And then he preached our baccalaureate sermon in 1982, May of 1982. Some of you will remember what a baccalaureate was, those of you who are older, when you were graduating high school, they used to have a worship service associated with that. Some still do. And so he preached our baccalaureate sermon and I had just been getting back into the things of God. Patty, the Lord worked through my family issues that were going on in my family and actually also the affection I had for a young girl at Duluth High School who went to Duluth First Baptist. So when mom and dad suggested we start going there, I was happy to accommodate that desire. I can see her on Sunday as well. And so when we were at First Baptist Duluth, David was pastoring Mount Tabor and he preached that baccalaureate sermon and he preached at that time the best sermon I'd ever heard in person and I was so moved by the word of God, his conviction in proclaiming the gospel that I went up afterwards just to tell him how much I appreciated that, what a blessing it was. You know, playing ball back then, we used to have different ministers come in, share motivational talks, and nobody had preached with the clarity that he preached that day. And so I thanked him and he actually, in just responding, I remember sitting outside, it was at First Baptist Duluth back then, and I was sitting outside talking to him and I remember him talking to me and sharing and encouraging me. He said, "I want you to think about the Lord may be calling you into ministry." He said that to me that day at the baccalaureate service. And I thought, "Wow, that's really something that you said that." And I didn't think another thing about it.

And so we went off to college, Patty and I went to college in Rome, Georgia. And so we were there and I was working to plan to be, I wanted to be a baseball/football coach, math teacher. Loved math and thought that's a great thing. You can get a job as a teacher and a

coach, especially if you teach math. Most coaches are teaching history or other stuff. Nothing wrong with history, it's wonderful. But anyway, so I was teaching math, gonna do that. My daughter's a history major. Anyway, so. And she knows I love history actually. I think I love it more than math, but we go off in between the third and fourth years of college, I felt the Lord was calling me into ministry. It was surprising to me. I didn't really think much about what David had said, but now I really felt like the Lord definitely was calling me into ministry. I won't go into the circumstances of that, but shortly after that, David heard about it and called me and he asked me to have lunch with him and sometime when I guess it was spring break or something, we were home and I went to lunch with him. We talked about ministry. We talked about the gospel. We talked about the word. And he asked me to preach my first sermon at his church, Victory in Jesus, which was meeting at that time at Shorty Howe Park, you know where that is on Pleasant Hill Road. There used to be a building they were renting on Sundays for that. And I preached my first sermon there around March, April of 1986. And Carolyn McAfee came up afterwards and really encouraged me for the message I preached, which honestly, Carolyn, I basically plagiarized a sermon from a guy I'd heard. I didn't know how to prepare sermons at that point. And I heard a great sermon on Exodus. I didn't know it was plagiarizing. I was just like, hey, this is from what the word says. So I just, I said it, but I did borrow a lot of his words. It was a really good sermon though. But I know better than that now, but she came up and encouraged me so much and I was just so blessed.

Well, then David shortly after that asked me to come and be the youth pastor at Victory in Jesus Baptist Church and this church was founded in 1983 as Victory in Jesus Baptist Church. Now, how he founded it, I've got to go back to 1983. He came in '81 to Mount Tabor and he was a man who loved the word of God and loved missions, and he ran into difficulty with the leaders at the church because he was an inerrantist, committed to the inerrancy of Scripture, committed to the conservative resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention and he was very bold about that, a little bolder than some of the deacons would have preferred for him on that. And then he also was committed to this church, that church, he wanted Mount Tabor to support missionaries in addition to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program, I'm sorry to throw out terms, happy to explain them later, we don't want to waste the time on it now. But he wanted to support missionaries in the SBC and outside. He wanted to support whoever the Lord led the church to support, you know, through relationships and connections, and that was something that they could not abide. The leadership was not open to that. Well, David had the votes to stay there, but he felt like the Lord was calling him to plant a church and so he planted Victory in Jesus in the summer of 1983, all because he wanted to plant a church that was, as he said, led by the Spirit of God and committed to the word of God. And so that's what the founding of this church was about in 1983.

So anyway, back to 1986 now, I'm getting connected back to the church in '86, three years later, and so we came on, I came on as the youth and children's minister in 1986. And then Patty and I got married that summer, August of '86. And we were here for two years as the youth minister, part-time youth minister. And then we went off to seminary. And then five years later, after we graduated seminary, spent a few years in Jackson,

Mississippi, then Birmingham, Alabama for three years, the folks here called us because David had had some difficulties. His family was getting older and he wanted to move back to Chattanooga to be closer to family. The church had gone through kind of a little bit of a difficult time between his leaving and when we came, a difficult pastorate in between. And so they called and asked us to consider coming. And long story, just to make a long story short, we came in 1993, 10 years after the church had been founded. But the Lord worked through even difficulty in opposition to bring about this church, to birth this church.

The ways of God are not our ways. He also, through interesting means, turned, developed our theology, mine and Patty's, as we went off to seminary, went to a seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, though we were not Reformed at the time. We went there because all of the Southern Baptist seminaries were so liberal at the time. Southern, Southwestern, Midwestern, New Orleans, Golden Gate, Southeastern, they were just awful liberal places that you could not find the word of God or the gospel there in those seminaries. Now they've been radically transformed in the last 30 years, especially. So we went to RTS, even though we weren't Reformed because they were committed to the Scriptures. Well, through that, the Lord started deepening our theology and we became Reformed. That is, we began to see that the Bible does teach the doctrines of grace. That salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That the doctrine of the election is something that's real and beautiful and glorious. And you heard it in the high priestly prayer when Jesus prayed not for the world, but for those "whom You've given me out of the world." In the shadow of the cross, he prays for the elect. Doesn't mean that salvation is not available to every single person it is. It is, and we're to preach the gospel to every single person, but the balancing truth of Scripture is that God will save those whom he will save, though he invites all. And when people reject, they will be in hell because of their own rejection of grace, not because God pushed them into hell. No, God invited them to heaven, but those who are saved are those whom he has worked savingly by his effectual calling. The mystery of election.

So anyway, we've moved a long ways when we come back and so the church, the first few years of the ministry here, you know, there was so much joy in being here back in our hometown. We never expected to come back home. We thought, you know, you go off the seminary, you're going off to minister. We'll never come back except for, you know, seeing family or whatever. But the Lord had a different plan. And so we came back here. John was a year and a half old and the church, loving group of people, just a wonderful place to be. And so we began ministering and I didn't know much about being a pastor and they put up with me, amazing that they did thinking back on it. I'm just like really amazed and you get older and you get wiser and you see other people, sometimes younger people and you realize they're just acting just like I did when I was their age. I see some heads nodding, older people who, like me, know that. I've seen this. Oh, it was me that was like this.

But the Lord worked through that and the Lord works through the hard times. And so we came to, after seven years in, I mentioned last week in a sermon I was preaching on marriage, how Patty and I had a very difficult time in our marriage. About five years into

the pastorate here where we needed to get some counseling and actually got some biblical counseling from folks before we knew what biblical counseling was. We got some. The Lord took us to some folks that helped us and we praise God for that, and we saw our marriage turn around. And the church, we were trying to figure out our direction and so what God ended up doing was causing there to come sort of a crisis of direction. Which way should we go? And wonderful, loving people who were trying to figure out what is God leading us to do? And anyway, what happened was surprisingly to us, we felt like we should go one direction and most others felt like we should go more in a more maybe, we wanted to go more Reformed direction and others did not want to go that direction. And we thought we were going to be out because we were outnumbered. And it made sense, but the Lord did something that we never expected. He led a lot of people to leave the church and we were left here standing. We actually, the church went from, I mean, we lost about 60 or 70% of our Sunday attendance over about a year period. When you lose that much attendance, you know, everything is hurting, everything. We shut down everything. We had no Sunday school. We had no nursery. We had nothing. We had just worship service. That was it. And this was right when Maggie was about to be born. She was born the day after Easter, 2001. And Patty and I were thinking at that time, you know, it was like I heard someone say, "Honey, I shrunk the church." I did. And we had, and we thought we were probably going to be needing to leave. It didn't seem like this was what God would want to do.

But the Lord started sending us other people who also had a vision kind of more for a more Reformed direction and so the Lord started bringing folks in. We're so grateful for those that came so quickly after this turning point. And so we began building what we felt like was, you know, I think the church was founded on the inerrancy of Scripture, that is that the Bible is perfectly truthful in everything it says. It speaks about history or science, it speaks so perfectly. There are not any errors in Scripture. But what we were coming to, I think, in this point was turning, the Lord was putting pressure on us to really understand the sufficiency of Scripture. Not just inerrancy, but sufficiency, that the Scripture speaks to everything. And so it speaks to how you do church. How you do church is not up for grabs. It's not up for us to determine. We are to do things according to his divine design that we can draw out from the word. The regulative principle of worship, that everything we do in worship should be regulated by Scripture. We do it because God says it. And so that's something that the Lord graciously helped us with and it was slow learning for me because I'm hard-headed and it was, but it was a wonderful time.

And so this brings us to the second point, the ways of God, how God works in ways that we would never choose to take us places we would never choose to go even. The second point is the word of God, the word of God. I mentioned the point, it's not just the inerrancy but sufficiency of Scripture. If you have your Bible still open to Isaiah 55, after he talks about, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, My thoughts are not your ways," Isaiah 55:10, he says, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without

succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." Love that word picture. He says that the rain and snow come down from heaven and they do not return there. They do return there eventually, right, when they evaporate, but they don't return there without first watering the earth and accomplishing the purpose that God gave it, which is to produce more life. He says, "So is My word, which goes forth from My mouth." It will always accomplish the purpose for which I sent it, the word of God.

And so this time of growth in our lives, we were seeing that the word of God, it's the word of God must be the foundation of everything. What do we have but the word of God? We have nothing to offer but the word of God. One of the things the Lord did to bless us through that time was we got to go to, for the first time in 2002, to the Shepherds Conference, which is a minister's conference, ministers from all over the country go to Sun Valley, California, as Los Angeles, to John MacArthur's church, Grace Community Church, and Shepherds Conference. We went there in 2002 and then '03. A number of us went and wives included to that time, and during that time, there's just such an encouragement to be around so many pastors who love the word and were trying to build their lives upon the word. I was beginning to understand more and more what expository preaching really meant. I thought I had learned it in seminary and I had to some measure. But this time God really did a work of digging down and what he did at the 2003 Shepherds Conference in March was they announced that for the first time they were going to have something called the Expositors Institute. The first time ever the Expositors Institute and it was a week-long gathering, small group gathering. They were making it available to pastors that would want to come and that their church would send them for a week. And you'd meet with John MacArthur and the staff there at Grace Community Church and they'd talk about expository preaching from 8 a.m. basically to 6 p.m. at night for five days. And anyway, so that's what we did.

The church graciously agreed to send me, and so I went in July of 2003, and what a week that was. The Lord did so much in that one week in my life. I look back on it, I was reading the book on the plane, "Preachers and Preaching" by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and that book was really working on my heart. And then I got there and John preached a sermon that Sunday morning at Grace Community. We got there Saturday night, the guy that I went with flew out with and a pastor from up north who we met in Atlanta and flew out, he and I got to go to worship that Sunday and John preached a sermon, "The Marks of a Man of God," and the marks of the man of God, the man of God, not just as a Christian man or a godly man, but the way Scripture uses that phrase, man of God, really is a formula for the man who speaks the word of God. It's not just any man, it's the man who has the word of God. First used of Moses, the man of God, because God gave him his word. Used of Elijah and Elisha, the man of God. It's used really powerfully in 1 Kings 12 about a prophet that we're not told his name. We're just told he is the man of God and he's the one who takes the word of God to Jeroboam so powerfully in 1 Kings 12. He's described probably 12 or 15 times he's mentioned in the passage, but never by name, always "The man of God said, the man of God did this, the man of God, the man of God."

And so MacArthur preached a sermon on what a man of God is and it's a man who has the word and so then we learned that week all week we talked about preaching. John taught Monday, almost the whole day. We went to his house on Friday. I could believe I'm sitting in John MacArthur's house in his den with 18 other guys, or 17 other guys, 18 of us total, and John's telling us about ministry. We're talking about the preaching of the word. And then in the middle of that, got to hear from Tom Pennington, Rick Holland, and my personal favorite was Steve Lawson. was there. He had lost his job, was fired because he was Reformed, was fired from the largest church in Alabama, Dolphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile, because of his theology. And in the time he was kind of just, you know, working through some things, taking some time to seek the Lord, he spent some time out at Grace Community and John had him teach us. And so we spent more hours with Steve than we did with John and it was such a, such an incredible privilege. I love those two men so much, both humble men, surprisingly, you know, you hear them preach and they're so weighty and powerful, but in person, so humble and gentle. And it was a tremendous week.

And you know, expository preaching, I came home committed that no matter what I was going to exposit the word for the rest of my life, however long the Lord let me do it. I would exposit the word that was all that was the foundation of everything else and expository preaching, another word is exegetical preaching. Exegetical or exegesis comes from two Greek words, which mean basically to lead out. To lead out. Exegetical preaching is you're leading out the meaning of the text. Eisegesis is you're putting into the text what you want to talk about. Exegesis is you're leading out what the text actually says. And so expository preaching is essentially exposing what God has said in his word. It's leading out what the passage, what God means to say in the passage, not what meaning I might find in the passage, not what application I might want to find in the passage. No, what did God actually say and mean when he wrote this passage, that's the point. And so you study the words, the sentence structure, the grammar, the context. You think about the historical circumstances of the author and the audience. You labor over it till you can know that when you look at this passage, what was in the mind of God when he inspired these words to be written? What was in his mind? What did he want to have happen in the hearts of his people? When you understand that, now you're ready to apply it to the hearts of people today. That's expository preaching.

And so the Lord helped me to develop that passion and burden. Like I said, it had been there before, but it just like supercharged that desire and so that's what we've been trying to do since then and we're so thankful for God's kindness. And then the Lord added to that, the church is built on the word of God, not just the public ministry of the word, preaching and teaching, that's public ministry of the word, but also the private ministry of the word. The Lord allowed us to cross paths with, to have folks come here and then to cross paths with dear brothers and sisters who love biblical counseling and we had people come and train us in that, and biblical counseling is simply the speaking and preaching of the word one-on-one. It's taking the word of God and applying it to the heart of another person in need and it's to do it accurately, to handle it accurately, just like expository preaching. And that's to set up then the idea that we all are called to counsel one another. We all are called to speak the word of God to one another. So the preaching of the word



sets a foundation, and then the rest of the church is built by the speaking of the truth in love. It's like the preaching sets, kind of starts the movement, and then the church continues to rebound the word among our hearts, and you speak to your brother, your sister speaks to you, and we're all transformed. by the word of God.

This is the way that God intends to build his people. It's the way he does everything. Think about it. How does God do anything? He speaks. How does he create? Think about that. He speaks. He could have done it without speaking. But he chose to speak. By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and all the starry host by the breath of his mouth. He speaks. His word is mighty and majestic. And how does he save a soul? He speaks. He speaks his word and saves a sinner. And what's amazing is he does it through other people. He speaks his word through people. He could have spoken out of heaven. It's actually, this is what's going on in Exodus when you read the account of them coming to Mount Sinai in chapter 19 and following through 24, especially God spoke out of heaven and he terrified them. They were so terrified. They said, "Moses, don't let that ever happen again. Tell God not to speak to us directly." And I love how God reveals himself to his word. I mean, he knew what was going to happen. It's not like he's, you know, responding, "Oh, I was a little too rough on that." No, he planned to speak to them, to let them see what it's like to hear his voice out of heaven because you and I, how many times have you not asked yourself, "I wish God would just tell me what to do, that I could hear His voice"? How many of us would say we've never had that thought, "If God could just tell me right now what to do, I'd be so happy." No, you wouldn't. Read how they felt. Terror stricken. When the almighty God, the omnipotent Creator and fashioner of all things, upholding all things by the word of his power, speaks out loud, they were terrified.

And so God spoke so they would know that and you and I would have that to read and he said, "No, Moses, they're right. I intend to speak to them through you. I'm going to put My words in your mouth and that makes you the man of God. You're speaking for Me. I'm giving you My words." This is what a prophet is, a prophet is one who has the word of God and speaks for God. He's a spokesman for God. This is how he chose to do it. So he could have just deposited it kind of like, you know, just sent down. There comes a book. He could have done that. Now we didn't have to hear it, right? But there it is a divinely written book. Clearly it's coded in a way we know it came from heaven. We know it and just read it and listen to it. He could have done that, but no, he didn't do that. What he did was he put his word in the hearts of men and he inspired them to speak it and to write it with perfection. He did it through other human beings. This was his beautiful plan. Seems like, like I said, his ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. I wouldn't have done it that way. Seems too open to error. But he knows how to take a crooked stick and hit a straight blow so that the word that comes out in the Bible is perfect, every jot and tittle not going to pass away until all is fulfilled. That's Jesus' view of the Bible.

But he speaks through men and then what he does is he keeps on speaking through men. He gives us the 66 books and now what he does is he lets us hear the word of God from each other. This is his plan. Preaching of the word, one of my favorite quotes, I know if

you've been here long, you've heard it, where Calvin talks about that. If we heard a voice out of heaven, you know, it would humble us to hear that, but oh, how much more humbling it is when a puny man risen from the dust, stands up and says, "Thus says the Lord," how it humbles our sinful hearts to listen to a puny man risen from the dust who in no way excels us speak God's word. The ways of God. To see his glory and at the same time be humbled. And he does it through all of us. Not only the public ministry of the word, but the private ministry of the word. Like I've said before, even recently, isn't it amazing how you hear somebody else tell you what you already know and there's power in it. And you're sitting there hearing it thinking, "I know this," and yet you didn't know it like you needed to. Another human being speaking it to you, it's going into your heart and it's getting to something that's never been gotten before. That is the Spirit of God at work in the people of God. And that's why he says, "Keep speaking to one another in love. This is My plan." To take other people, other puny men and women risen from the dust, who in no way excel us, and to speak the word back and forth.

And that leads us to the third point, the work of God. The work of God. One of the things that I remember David saying early on in my early conversations, Brother David as we called him affectionately, Brother David, Pastor Pickard, he would talk about changed lives, that he wanted to see changed lives. That was his phrase. That the gospel and the word changed lives. That's what we're here to do, to see lives changed. And the word of God does change lives. I want you to turn to Psalm 107 for a minute. I mean, the word of God does everything, changes lives. You know, how I said earlier God made the heavens through his word, right? He spoke and he made the heavens. He said, "Let there be light and there was light." He said. And then when it comes to salvation, he does the same thing. He saves us through his word. The new birth happens as 1 Peter 1 says, you were born again, not a perishable seed, but of imperishable. If you've been born again, you were not born again of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God. The word of God, the Scripture causes someone to be born again. New birth happens through the word, through the proclamation of the word, so often through another human being telling you the Bible and what it means, sometimes you reading and reflecting on what you've been challenged with. He sanctifies you through the word. That was in our Scripture reading today, John 17:17. Jesus prayed for those who would believe. He said, "Sanctify them in thy truth." Sanctify means make holy, not just save them, but now make them more holy. "Sanctify them in thy truth. Thy word is truth." How do they get sanctified? They get sanctified through the word. They get born again through the word. They get sanctified through the word. The word changes lives.

I love the pictures in Psalm 107. We don't have time to look at all of them. There are four glorious pictures of how the Lord takes people who are in misery because of their own self-inflicted pain caused by sin and rebellion and how gracious our God is to hear our cries of distress and to send and heal us. But look with me at verse 10. "There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery and chains, Because they had rebelled against the words of God And spurned the counsel of the Most High." They're in misery, chains, dwelling in the shadow of death, they're prisoners, shackled because of their own spurning of God. You may remember what it was like before you came to Christ. This may describe so well what you were experiencing. This

can describe what believers experience when they rebel against the word too. We can find ourselves again in misery and chains.

Skip on down to verse 17, another example of people who find themselves in self-inflicted agony. "Fools," verse 17, "because of their rebellious way, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted." How'd they get that way? Rebellious way, iniquities. They're afflicted, they're weakened, they're knocked down, they're low, low as low can be. "Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, And they drew near to the gates of death." I think he's describing something like the kind of misery you have when you've sinned and you've broken, you've messed up your life so greatly that you despair even of living. You're on the verge of suicidal kind of thoughts. You just want to escape the agony that you're in. And it's all self-inflicted, he says. "Can't even eat because of how miserable I am. Is there any hope for me?"

Look at verse 19, "Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble." You think he ought to say if his ways were like our ways, what would he say? You made your bed lie in it. That's what I'd say. Praise God, his ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. That's actually the context of those words when you look back at Isaiah 55. He's saying, "I forgive because I'm not like you." So glad he's not like me.

"Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses." And look at that next phrase, "He sent His word and healed them, And delivered them from their destructions. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men! Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, And tell of His works with joyful singing." That's who we are as the people of God. His work is to take people who are in misery and chains, people who despair even of life, who draw near the gates of death because of their own foolishness, their wicked rebellion, he loves it when people like that come to the end of themselves and cry out to God. God sends forth his word and heals them. It's the word of God.

The word of God does the work of God. The word actually, there's so many wonderful things he says here. He saved them out of their distresses. That is, he pulls them out. He sent his word and healed them. His word saves, his word heals and look at verse 20, delivered them from their destructions. It delivers. Earlier he talks about how it feeds us. We're hungry, we're thirsty, it feeds us, it nourishes us. We're lost, it directs us. We're storm tossed and hopeless, it stabilizes us. The word does everything that you need. And so that's what God is doing. Everything that is good that has ever happened in your life, in my life, everything that is good that has ever happened in the life of this church happened because of his word. All to his glory.

And you are pictures of his word and his glorious power, each of you who belong to him. Paul says about the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, he says, you are living epistles. He's talking to Corinthians, he was writing an epistle to them, his second epistle that makes it in Scripture. But he says, listen, I'm not talking about the epistles I've written to you, I'm talking about you yourself are living epistles. He's talking about his ministry is on demonstration in their lives, but more than that, he's talking about their changed lives are

a testimony to the work of God. They are something that people, a lost world can look at and read and it redounds to the glory of God. That's the beauty of what the church is. That's why this is his glorious work. Isn't it wonderful to hear other people's testimonies and to hear what God did in their lives? A brother was sharing with me earlier just a small word that somebody said to him two years ago that helped him to be more faithful in church attendance. And somebody kind of crossed a line a little bit and got a little in his, not in his face, but you know, asked him a couple of follow-up questions is something and it changed his life. God is at work. And those moments are things that redound to the glory of God. Those are things we're going to be celebrating in eternity. And when God looks down at the people of God, he delights in you and what a privilege it is for us to be together and to delight in one another.

I want to end up with Psalm 48, a couple of verses there. Psalm 48:1-2, "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised." Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised. Look at, he's great and everything he does is worthy of praise. Look what the psalmist says, "In the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion in the far north, The city of the great King. God, in her palaces, Has made Himself known as a stronghold." He's saying the most beautiful place in the world is Jerusalem. He goes on in chapter 50, verse two, to say, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty." Zion, another word for Jerusalem, and what we've seen is you read the Scriptures carefully, Jerusalem becomes the people of God. You as a follower of Jesus, according to Hebrews 10, you have come to the true Jerusalem. The living Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven, Revelation 21, is the bride of Christ, the people of God. And so God says the most beautiful place in the whole earth is where the people of God gather. He looks at it and he says, "That's beautiful." You say the Grand Canyon. You say, "No, it's a place I saw in California or in the coast of Maine." Whatever place you want to say, wherever it is around the world you think is beautiful, God says, "Oh, there's one that is far more beautiful than that and that is wherever the saints of God are gathered in My Son's name." That is the most beautiful place on the face of the earth at any moment and you're a part of that if you belong to Jesus Christ. That's the beauty of the church. The glory of the church and it's all we know, it's not in us, "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to Your name be glory." He has done it. He has done it and it's marvelous in our eyes.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the great work that You have done in Jesus Christ to take sinners who are like we read about, Lord. If we were left to ourselves, we would still be in our misery and chains and our darkness, deepening our agony in our rebellion. But You are a God who hears the cries of those in distress, even those who've made their own beds, You hear their cries. There are people here today, Lord, that are still in those places of suffering and agony. Well, thank You that You're a God that will hear them today. Though they've rebelled against Your counsel and spurned Your reproof, You will even now save them. You will send forth Your word and heal them, because that's just how wonderful You are. Grant them grace to do it. And Father, for those of us who*

*belong to You, may we never forget where we came from. May we never cease to glory in our great Savior. And we pray in His name, Amen.*