

## First Service in the New Sanctuary

### “Pray that the Word May Spread”

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Mark Vroegop

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*13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*

*16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.*

*3 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, 2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ (2 Thess 2:13-3:5).*

During a Sunday Night Prayer Service on May 16, 2010, we gathered around the perimeter of our new facility and sought the face of God as we broke ground for this facility. We prayed in each individual room that was marked out on the gravel that we had used for overflow parking for so many years (remember “gravel is godly!”). After the Elders broke ground, each person was able to scoop up a portion of that ground, and we put it in vials with a verse on it from 2 Thessalonians 3. It said, *“Pray that the Master's Word will simply take off and race through the country to a groundswell of response, just as it did among you.”*

That was our prayer –a vision of what God could do on this very property for his glory and the advancement of his kingdom. Here we are some 16 months later on the threshold of new season of ministry at College Park Church.

God has been so faithful to us during this season of ministry. You have continued to give generously and sacrificially. God has worked through a great construction team led by godly and wise men and women from College Park led by Bruce Smith: Bob Horn, Mitch Peterson, Paul Spilker, Stephanie Johnson, Tyler Ritz, and Andrew Cecil. As well, we are also grateful for a wonderful relationship with the Aspen Group who designed and built this facility, and who worked

really hard to be sure that every week, including this one, was ready for worship. God has used the skills of these men and women to help us arrive here on time, on budget and on mission.

Tonight we are going to dedicate every room in this building, and we are going to pray over every seat in this sanctuary. It will be yet another milestone moment in the life of our church. You'll not want to miss this.

### **What Can I Say?**

This is an overwhelmingly good day because it is a physical reminder of God's faithfulness. I'm excited to be here today because this day is so much more than just about a building; it is about the work of Jesus in our lives. The following Bible verses are running through my heart today:

- From David when the Ark was brought to the Tabernacle: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that you have brought me thus far?" (1 Chron 17:16)
- From David when the collection was taken for the new temple: "But who am I, and what is my people that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own we have given you." (1 Chron 29:14)
- From Solomon at the dedication of the Temple: "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants..." (1 Kings 8:23)
- From the Apostle Paul reflecting on the beauty of God's grace: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7)

It is hard to capture in words all of what this day means, and yet I think it is important to try. Or maybe a better way to think about it is to ask another question:

### **What Should We Pray Today?**

Our text this morning is a power-packed text with wonderful truths, great encouragement, and compelling prayers. And as we stand at the dawn of new ministry season at College Park Church, I think it would be good to reflect on what we ask God to do on this day.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5 records Paul's parting words to a large and thriving church in the city of Thessalonica in the Roman province of Macedonia. His final words anticipate how they should think and pray for him and for themselves as they look to the future. A new facility is not in view, but future ministry certainly is.

### ***The Undergirding Gospel Story***

There is an important backdrop to what Paul and this church prays, and it is directly related to the Gospel. This story – that God rescues sinners by forgiving them through the death of Jesus – is the starting point of everything. This "good news" is what the church – this church – is all about. The

message that Jesus came into the world to save sinners is the undergirding message of everything, and it is the reason why this new facility even exists.

Notice what Paul says about them in verses 13-14:

- They were **beloved by the Lord**. It is so beautiful to think about how gracious, kind, compassionate, and loving God has been to sinful people. Oh how he loves us!
- They were **chosen as first-fruits to be saved**. Behind all the events of their lives and ours is God's sovereign purpose. This is a great mystery that confounds the mind, but in its simplest form, it means that nothing in your life happened by accident. God planned it all, including your presence here today. Nothing is an accident.
- They were impacted by the **Spirit and the truth**. They were saved and made progressively godly ("through sanctification") by the power of the Holy Spirit as they believe the truth.
- There was a **calling** on their lives. God had issued a call to them – a call first to salvation but also to be followers of his Son in the world.
- The ultimate goal is **the glory of Jesus**. Here is the ultimate aim. This is what it is all about and what we want to be known about us: It is all about Him! And notice that it is not only that we yearn for this to be known, but it is also what those who know Jesus obtain. It means that those who receive him, know him, and love him become like him!

And keep in mind that God does all of this to rebellious sinners who deserve none of the grace that they receive. It is an amazing backdrop – a merciful backdrop. It means that everything about this day is all about the mercy and kindness of God! Where would we be without him? "What do you have that you didn't receive?"

Now it may be that you are here today, and in the midst of this great day you are missing what this day is all about. Maybe it would help for me to ask you a very important question: When you die and you stand before a holy God, what will you say about the wrong things that you've done? The family that you were born into, the good things that you've done, the religious observances you've kept, and the bad stuff that you've not done will not be a sufficient answer. In fact these will only serve to give further evidence of how far you really are from God. The only answer to a holy God on that day is that you have received Christ as your savior – that you are "in Christ." And this room is all about that simple but life transforming message. The Gospel is the back-story.

### ***The Call for Steadfastness***

The second thing that we find in this text is a call to perseverance and fidelity. Looking toward the future of this church, Paul wants them to be faithful to the very end.

First, he calls them to "stand firm and hold the traditions that you were taught" (v 15). There are some things that they cannot lose as they consider the future. This is so important because over time many things change, but not everything can change. As it relates to College Park, there is a doctrinal core to who we are that cannot change. Who we are cannot change.

Some of you might even look at this day with some apprehension. I totally understand that and our Elders and staff get that too. We want you to know that some things are definitely changing: there will be more seats in the sanctuary, there will be bigger hallways, our parking lot will be easier to navigate, the “stairway of doom” will be fixed, the carpet will match in the atrium, and our check-in in process with our kids is going to get faster and faster.

But who we are as expressed in our doctrine, how we live that out in our core values, our focus to reach our city and the unreached people groups, and our commitment to boldly proclaim God’s word – that is not changing. There are some things that we must hold tightly.

Secondly, he calls them to be hopeful and keep going. Listen to verses 16-17:

*16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word (2 Thess 2:16-17).*

Based upon Jesus, the Father, his love, our eternal comfort, and the hope that comes through grace, Paul longs for them to be comforted and established in everything that they are doing. It is almost as if Paul says, “Be encouraged. Keep going!”

Fairly soon in the fall, you’ll begin to see a signature sign of the changing seasons. You’ll see geese flying in a V-formation, and as they fly, they “honk.” Years ago Kimber used this analogy and some of you who have been here a while will remember it. Geese honk while in the V-formation as a means of communication to one another, and scientists believe that one thing they are doing is encouraging one another and the one that is flying point. Keep going! Honk!

I want to really encourage you to keep doing what you’ve been doing. It never ceases to amaze me all of the ways that God uses you to do his work:

- Early one morning I stopped at a business owned by one of church members, and the doors were locked. I knocked. When they came to the door they apologized that the doors were locked but that they were in the middle of their Morning Prayer meeting. Around the conference table were the employees of this. Their Bibles were open, and it was obviously a regular part of their week. I was a proud pastor.
- A few weeks ago I received a note that someone had “called this morning and wanted you to thank a couple in a white van who stopped and helped her when she ran out of gas on 96<sup>th</sup> and Keystone. They gave here the church’s card but not their name.” I was proud pastor.

You see! That is what I am talking about. Keep going. Don’t quit. God will establish your heart in every good work and word.

So that’s the background and the call for steadfastness or perseverance. So now let me show you what you should pray for College Park Church on this special day and as we move forward.

## ***Six Things to Pray***

Paul asks for prayer for himself and identifies some things he prays for the church, and I think that these are the things that we should pray for as well:

### **1. That the Word would spread (v 1)**

This first request just moves my heart! The prayer is simply that the Word would take off, that it would spread to every place that doesn't have it. That it would spread to every tribe, nation, and tongue. That it would spread to every home and to every heart. This prayer is for the supernatural explosion of the Word.

We announced the Christmas offering today on purpose. I love what Nate said: "This is for that!" We need to pray the Word would spread.

### **2. That the Word would be honored (v 1)**

The second request is that the Word would be received or honored. In Acts 13:48, the people in Pisidian Antioch "glorified the word of God." In other words, they felt its power. They were smitten by the Word; they were broken by the Word. Jeremiah 23:29 describes God's to be like a fire and like a hammer that "breaks the rock in pieces."

We need to pray that the Word of God would be received with the power that it deserves and has.

### **3. That we would be protected (v 2)**

We live in an increasingly dark and post-Christian culture. And we need to be reminded that we are in a war! A friend of mine says that the church is not a cruise ship but a battle ship. Often the enemy uses people to do his work and usually these people don't know that they are being used by the enemy. A church will always have wicked and evil people in it, and we need to pray for the spiritual protection of this ministry.

Pray that our membership process would continue to screen out the wrong people and pray for our discipline committee as they deal with people who refuse to repent of their sin. Pray that we would be protected.

### **4. That we would trust God (v 3)**

In the midst of a dark culture with lots of evil and in the midst of many challenges in the ministry, there is a temptation to panic. In Deuteronomy 20:8 – the law of God – it instructed that when going out to battle, the officers should remove those people who were fearful and faint-hearted. He was to go home. Why? "...Lest he make the heart of his fellows melt like his."

Pray that we wouldn't fall into dismay or despair. Pray that would keep trusting the One who keeps us trusting.

## 5. That we would be obedient (v 4)

The fifth thing to pray is that we do and will do the things that God commands. Our influence in this city and the world is dependent upon our obedience to God and his word. We need to pray that we would not just be known as a large church, but that we'd be known as a holy church, a pure church, a church that is alive with obedience. Let us be known a church this is not perfect, but is – at least – real.

About a month ago I received a note from a woman who stopped by. Here is what it said:

*“Three members of this church (three men) were at Bob Evans on 96<sup>th</sup> street sometime between now and February 2010. The three guys were having a conversation (I was at a table near to them) and I kept hearing, ‘Lord, Lord’ mentioned several times in their conversation. Then they had group prayer at their table – not just a meal blessing prayer – but actual prayer. At the time I had just been diagnosed with severe heart disease. I was 37 and my heart was functioning at 10%. I had to stop working, and I had a 3 year-old. I was generally overwhelmed. I asked the men to pray with me. It was a calming and encouraging prayer. As of this Summer, my heart is normal, and I just wanted to say ‘Thanks’ for the prayer – Keisha.”*

I was a proud pastor!

## 6. That we would live in the love of God (v 5)

The final prayer is that in doing all of this we would sense the beauty of what it means to experience the fullness of God's love over the long haul. The longing here is that we would grow more and more in love with God, more understanding of his love for us. And as we do this, we'll grow deeper in our steadfastness. In other words, we'll have deep roots that cannot be shaken when hard times come.

This is what I long for and I know it is what you long for as well. This is what we should pray for.

This really is a remarkable day for our church, and it warrants reflection. There were very few moments in the history of Israel where they opened or dedicated new space. This is one of those times for us, and I'm so grateful to God. He has been so faithful.

The gospel is why we are here today. Today marks the first Sunday of who-knows-how-many that from this spot we declare the life-changing message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And it is also on this day that we say, “Who am I, O Lord and what is College Park that you have brought us thus far?”

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