

The Spirit of God at Work in God's Church

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Let's go to Luke chapter 4. We're going to look at the first phrase of verse 31. I'll not have anything there on the screen for you today because particularly in this message I certainly don't mind if you take notes but I want you to think. I want you to think with the Spirit illuminating your thinking and your understanding. Now, much of what I am going to say is old to a number of you and that we crossed this bridge many, many years ago but we need to be reminded. Some of you who may not have been a member of Grace Life for as long these may be newer things. A few of you may be shocked and even alarmed at a few of the things I'll say this morning but I'm confident that the Spirit of God has lead me to this message. Now, it could be preached better, more effectively but I'm talking about the truth therein. I'm confident the Lord has lead me to this message.

Before I read that first phrase of verse 31, I want to give a sort of preface that I want you to think about first of all. When you think about the Spirit of God at work in God's church, the Spirit of God at work in God's church. There's a couple of things we are prone to do that are wrong, a couple of conclusions or assumptions I would say that I think are wrong, they are out of balance. Number one would be: that when the Spirit of God works it's always the same. It looks the same, it feels the same, it sounds the same. My grandparents were country, country people. Not just one country, two countries. And they went to country brush arbors and you know the sawdust trail and things like that and I know God worked in many of those and a matter of fact, a little bit of my theology came from the stories of the preachers in those brush arbors cautioning people not to quickly run somebody through the motions when they came down to the front. These were Methodist Church of God mostly kind to meetings and the old preachers would say, when a guy came down to the front, "Leave him alone, let him pray it through." And that's one of the things I'm going to hit on strongly here in a few moments is that far too often in modern evangelicalism we put these little cookie cutter hoop jump techniques on the end of the sermon and get everybody to do it then we declare them all saved and they hadn't prayed through. They hadn't got to God yet. Listen folks, salvation is the work of the power of God, it needs not our help. We need to do what God told us to do and let God do what only he can do.

Well, I'm chasing rabbits and I was afraid I'd do that but number one I just want to say this is preface, a sort of introduction: don't get in your minds that when God moves on the surface, or moves in the church it always looks the same. Sometimes it's shouting,

sometimes it's, "Amen," sometimes it's, "Hallelujah," sometimes it's dancing in the aisle. I'm for all of it if God is in it. I love raising our affections and our passions with the truths we're singing. But then there are other times when the Spirit of God is working just as powerfully or more powerfully and there is a holy quiet, a weeping and a humility. Sometimes a love for God and a joy that's just beyond expression. My point is: be careful that you don't make an idolatry out of a certain expression of the Spirit's work in contra-distinction to other ways the Spirit may work because it's not about how we feel, it's not about what we like, it's about what the Spirit wants. So first of all, be careful that you think that when the power of the Spirit moves its always the same, it may be very different.

Secondly, be careful that you do not define the work of the Spirit by the response at the end of the service. It can be a very open visible response. There can be people weeping and I've never understood, see I wasn't raised in a lot of the things you were raised in and so when I was an adult I came into the Baptist church and I saw the things Baptists did. I always questioned that, "Why do we do that? Is it biblical? Is it right?" I just couldn't swallow everything that went on. I believe sometimes people need to move at the end of the service because the Spirit of God is moving them but I don't think there is a magic spot they need to come to. God may move you to go out to your truck, like Butch T. did after I preached on the doctrine of justification one Sunday, he went, he moved to his truck and went before God for thirty minutes and couldn't go anywhere and was gloriously saved. God may move you to go off into a Sunday School classroom and get alone and plead with God for maybe a lost child or something that is troubling your soul. God may lead you to a pastor to pray. There are a lot of things that may happen but here is my caution to you: be careful that you say, "God has moved, or hasn't moved," based on how much movement happens at the end of a service. It may all be happening somewhere where you're not. God is not confined to three songs at the end of a worship service. God may save a man on the first point of the sermon. He may save a man an hour after the sermon or a week later. Our invitation begins the moment we start preaching Christ and it never ends until they die. Amen? Isn't that a big invitation. It's a biblical invitation.

Well, I want you to look now at the text and this is somewhat unusual and I would caution younger preachers don't do what I'm doing today until you've done fifteen years of exposition and then maybe you've got enough reservoir that you can be trusted to do this. What I am going to preach on is the phrase in verse 31, "And He came down to Capernaum." And He came down to Capernaum. You know the context, he has been in his hometown for a very brief period, Nazareth. He was there and he taught in the synagogue and he preached his first sermon there in his hometown, at least the first recorded sermon in the gospels. In their unbelief they reject him. He preaches a very piercing and denouncing sermon to them, how God is going to bypass them and take his blessings to others because of their unbelief and that God is sovereign in his choice of who will be blessed anyway. They get angry, they take him out to the brow of the hill outside of Nazareth and they are going to throw him off and kill him. And miraculously Jesus passes through their midst and they are unable to do anything to him. So now he returns back to Capernaum. Of course, Capernaum has become his new home. Nazareth

is no longer his home or headquarters of his ministry. And Jesus' power and miracles as you understand were not exhibited or displayed or performed in Nazareth because of their unbelief, Matthew 13:58 clearly says, "He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief."

So we come to verse 31, "And He came down to Capernaum." We read that phrase and we miss it. "And He came down to Capernaum." You see, the vital and penetrating truth of the phrase is not so much that he came to Capernaum but that he left Nazareth. Nazareth no longer knows his presence or his power. The blessings of his Messianic ministry are never again visited upon Nazareth. He has departed from Nazareth and he came down to Capernaum. Possibly, that is one of the saddest lines in all of the Bible because coming to Capernaum meant that he left Nazareth because his coming to Capernaum signaled his rejection of Nazareth. His coming to Capernaum signaled the hardened unbelief of Nazareth because if Jesus leaves, you can gain the rest of the universe and still have nothing. If you do not have his love, you have not love. If you do not have his forgiveness, you have not forgiveness. If you do not have his mercy, you have not mercy. If you do not have his peace, you have not peace. If you do not have his provision, you have no provision. If you do not have his life, you have not life. If you do not have his joy, you know not joy. If you do not have his power, you do not have power. These and so many others are blessings that flow from his presence. These cannot be set apart from his presence. Where Jesus is present, Jesus' blessings flow. No presence, no power. But when Jesus leaves, everything leaves. He came to his hometown Nazareth but he only could stay there briefly he just passed through and as far as we know from the biblical text, never returned.

It leads me to our contemporary situation in the church today, the professing church today. All the churches where Jesus has only passed through, he leaves them and he leaves them the void of his presence and his power. Sadly, I am convinced that the majority of congregations today have lost the presence and the power of Jesus Christ. Secondly, I'm convinced that this is the reason for such extensive, unbiblical excesses in our churches. Today it's shocking the gimmicks, the amusements, the entertainments and the superstitious nonsense that goes on in churches in order to "Draw a crowd" or "Keep them coming back." You see we've lost his presence and his power and we're trying to replace that with carnal counterfeits. Few groups have learned how to get along without him, like the Baptists. Baptists have become masters of worthless activity. Jesus is not present. His power is not active. So instead of supernatural power we've embraced superstitious counterfeits.

I love reading church history and I remember reading so much about the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and how powerfully it affected, really England and America, and one of the interesting things I'll point out very thoroughly here in a moment is how they did not do any of the techniques in their preaching that is so common in modern Baptist and Evangelical life to "get people saved." Yet the number of converts is overwhelming. The number of churches planted was amazing during that season of time. But during that Great Awakening there in the eighteenth century and again in the nineteenth century, you read about faithful pastors during those seasons who were used of

God and had seen God do great works and great works of salvation in so many people's lives that they preached. But also those pastors were very diligent to put down the counterfeit work that always rises when God does a work. The enemy always brings a counterfeit when the true is at work.

Now, let's get to the foundation stone. Let me ask you and you answer the question in your own mind. What is the foundational or primary work of the Spirit of God in the earth today? The salvation of men's souls. That's it. That's the primary work. That's the foundational work of the Spirit of God, the conversion of men's souls. But if his presence and his power are gone, then genuine conversion is gone or at least it's greatly diminished. So what happens? Well, it has been happening for two thousand years, as a matter of fact it happened before that: men in their fleshly ingenuities begin to devise methods to get people to respond because God is not there and he is not doing it. Churches are filled with activities and methods that are extra biblical and even foolish in order to get responses. Now, I want to be balanced here and I want to be compassionate here when I say the things I'm about to say I'm not saying that every man who has done these things is evil and doesn't have a heart for God and a heart for souls. But I am saying this: these are things the Bible does not teach. Now listen to me, if it's not in the Bible it is not essential for salvation. "You mean we're to truck along for 1,850 years before these techniques started happening and men weren't getting saved and all of a sudden some smart guys just found some answers that helped people get saved better because in 1,850 years all those great men of God and all of those great leaders and all those great scholars and all of those great pastors just missed it?" Some of the things that have come along in the last 150 years in the church by good men who I think meant well but I think began to be misused and misunderstood, things like, "If you want to be saved, walk down to the front. If you want to be saved, don't look around just raise your hand. If you want to be saved, then repeat this prayer. If you want to be saved, there's a card. Check the box on the card." One of the ones I saw the last time I was in a service that did these kind of things it was, "If you want to be saved, while nobody is looking walk to this side of the auditorium. If you wanna be saved while nobody else moves everybody sit still and you stand up. If you want to be saved and while everybody else's heads are bowed, then you raise your head up and look at me right now, go on look at me right now, come on look at me right now."

In my early years of ministry, you couldn't have been more ignorant than I was. I didn't have much of a church background at all and I became a Baptist because I appreciated the Bible preaching. I didn't know anything but I knew I liked the Bible and in my early years as a pastor so very many, I mean in settings, in pastor's meetings, in pastor's conferences, in personal fellowship with pastors, I began to discern there was a very little emphasis put on the content of the message you preached but increasingly there was great emphasis put on the technique that was used during the invitation at the end of the message. Now did you hear that? The great emphasis, I am not exaggerating a matter of fact, I'm dumbing it down a little bit, there was great emphasis on the techniques to use to get responses when you finished preaching but hardly no emphasis on making sure you preached the true gospel of Christ. I was thinking as I was meditating on this message how the night I was converted I didn't walk to the front, I was driving my car. I didn't

raise my hand, well I think I raised both hands a lot during that time actually, I didn't repeat a prayer, nobody told me to repeat a prayer. I didn't check a box on a card. I didn't walk to the side of the room, again I'm in an automobile. I certainly didn't stand up. I didn't raise my head and really if you listen to a lot of modern preaching they will say you have to do this to give people the opportunity to be saved. Well, if those things are essential to salvation I am still lost. I mean, when we get these kind of instructions it's as if the pope has walked in and he is instructing the flock in what they must do to receive salvation. What happened to repent and believe the gospel? What happened to that? You see, we want to take the mystery out. We want to connect... Jesus told Nicodemus, "There's always going to be mystery in true conversion." The gospel is preached, is preached in power, it's preached in its fullness and then there must be the born again. We want to put some feet on born again; we want to get our hands on that. Listen, leave a mystery what God leaves a mystery. Even with the best motives, if you begin to tamper there and add there and put steps there when the Bible doesn't put them there, even though your motives are pure you'll begin to muddy and mess up and defile the true gospel.

It is not the antics or the activities at the end of the sermon that saves or even helps to save. If that were true the New Testament would clearly instruct such. The New Testament gives numerous examples of Evangelistic preaching. We have the Evangelistic preaching of Jesus; we have the evangelistic preaching of the apostles; we have the Evangelistic preaching of Paul and of Peter and of Steven and there are others and one thing these all had in common in their preaching was the content of the message they preached. They preached men as sinners and Christ is crucified and faith in Christ is the only hope of salvation, period. Not one thing in any of these New Testament sermons even remotely looks like the things that are done in the churches today at the end of the service, "to get people saved." The Bible says in Roman 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel," not techniques at the end of gospel preaching, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." I want you to think about, "It is the power of God." Brothers and sisters, do you really believe the power of God needs our assistance? Do you really believe the power of God needs all these extra antics, all these activities and helps to confer to man's soul? When the true gospel is preached in the power of the Spirit, you don't have to help it along. You don't have to make it easier. As a matter of fact, you don't make it anything. Listen, the gospel is what it is. Christ is who he is. His message is what it is. The demands of the gospel is what it is.

One of the most famous preachers on the television today has a little ninety second thing at the end of his message every week and he says, "I will not close until I give you an opportunity to be saved." Are you kidding me? Now think about it, I know there can be good intentions behind things like that so that's why I'm not making this a personal attack. I am challenging brothers to think. You mean to tell me Jeff Noblit and other like preachers have the authority from God to give men the opportunity to be saved? Think about that. I have no right, that's blasphemous almost. I'm going to give you an opportunity? Christ is the one who gives the opportunity. The Spirit of God works and gives you the opportunity. I cannot stop it or start it though I'm to be a faithful preacher

of the truth about it. And then when they jump through the hoop that the pastor says at the end of that service then he declares as if he is the omniscient Spirit of God which is the only one who can bear witness with your spirit that you're a child of God according to Scriptures, they say, "Oh, if he did that you're saved."

Now, I just want you to be honest this morning and many of you were under my ministry when this happened: how many of you did some of the things we talked about and you meant them? You went through the hoop or you did the thing whatever only to realize later you weren't genuinely saved and you've been genuinely saved since then? Raise your hand. That's a significant number of people. Now if these things were iron clad, the thing that does it, that wouldn't have happened. What am I getting to in all this? I'm getting to this: when the presence and the power of Jesus leaves we go to other stuff to get things to happen.

You don't need to alter the gospel, you don't need to soften the demands of the gospel which is to offer the gospel. Think about Jesus' closing statements if you want to call it the invitation. Jesus would just say, "Repent." He'd say, "Take up your cross and follow me." He'd say, "Deny yourself." He'd say, "Hate your father and mother, brothers and sisters in comparison to your love for me." How about that for an invitation? Talk about making it easy. These are the typical expressions of Jesus' closing invitations. The narrative texts of Jesus' sermons shows that he did not sit around and beg folks to follow him, he gave the gospel and the next thing they saw was his back as he was walking away. Now, in context it was a unique time, he was in his Incarnate form walking the earth in his itinerant ministry but the demands of the gospel remain the same. I've heard people say, "Well, Jesus had people come publicly so we ought ask people to come publicly." I don't want you to just come publicly, I want you to live the rest of your life for him. I want you to do more than just get to the front or get to the room, I want you to get to him and love him and joy in him and treasure him so that the totality of your life begins to look like one that is following him. We've got ten million Southern Baptists who have walked somebody's aisle and prayed somebody's prayer, checked somebody's card, raised their head and did all this. We've got ten million of them that do not come to church and when they face Jesus one day at the judgment bar, they are going to quote some preacher, "Well, pastor said if I came to the front, I did that. Pastor said if I pray that prayer, I did that." Do you not realize that if you give the flesh a hoop jump, the flesh will do it every time? But one thing the flesh cannot do is cause your spirit to be born again. It can't do that. "Pastor, we don't know how that works." Neither did Nicodemus, neither do I but I've grown to love the mystery. You know why? I've tried to pastor those people that I got saved. Are you with me? I've tried to pastor a whole bunch of them that got saved. Charles Hadden Spurgeon, one of the great, great theologian Evangelistic pastors of the last several hundred years was confronted by a man on the street and this man was leaning against a street light and he's drunk and he's kind of staggering and he said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I'm one of your converts." Spurgeon said, "You must be because you're none of his."

The gospel offers a full and free forgiveness of sin to those who will in faith trust Christ as their substitutionary sacrifice including a radically altered perspective on life so much

so the Bible says you become a new creation whereby you begin a new lifestyle with a totally new purpose centered on Christ and his kingdom with corresponding new patterns and practices, not perfection, but new patterns and practices of this new life. This type of salvation, which is true salvation, requires the Spirit of God. That will not happen, that's why we as a church have had services, one service we dismissed five hundred people from the church row that just wouldn't come. They'd all walk down an aisle, they'd all pray prayers, they all did a bunch of stuff but the Spirit of God had never changed them. They didn't have a new conviction of sin, a new love for Christ. The power of God had no affected them.

Years ago I determined that I was going to preach the glorious gospel of Christ, the unsearchable riches of Christ encouraging all, pleading with all, begging all, urging all, motivating all, commanding all to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. But I was absolutely determined that I was going to give up and abandon all gimmicks, all techniques, all ploys and all procedures to "get people saved." I was determined to do all that the Scripture requires a gospel preacher to do and leave it to the Spirit of God to do what only he could do and if God's Spirit did not bless and move and change people's hearts, then we would just diminish and fail as a church. But I'm convinced based on the many, many counseling times I've had, that since I made that determination in my heart years ago, we have experienced many fold the number of genuine salvation testimonies than in the years previous. Now, the key is genuine biblically defined salvation testimonies.

You might say, "Pastor, what is the evidence of the presence and the power of the Spirit in the church?" This is not exhaustive but I will give you several: number one, a love for sound doctrine, when the Spirit of God is working in the church, they love Bible preaching. I'm not talking about loud preaching that uses the Bible, I'm talking about the preaching of the word with the rich truths and doctrines, the whole council of God, many things of which are difficult to understand but you begin to love it anyway. There is a love for the truth of God when the Spirit of God is working in the church. There's a love for purity. When the Spirit of God...look, he's the Holy Spirit. That means when the Spirit of God is working, he works on us as individuals and us as a cooperate family to be repentant of sin and deal with issues to strive to maintain, never perfectly, but to strive to maintain the purity of the church. There is a spiritual unity when the Spirit of God is working. Most churches that get along don't know anything about spiritual unity, they have the toleration of flesh. They might not be fighting but they're just tolerating each others flesh. Spiritual unity is totally different. Humility which ties into all of these, there's just a humility in the body when the Spirit of God is working whereby we just decide we are not all that important and our ideas and viewpoints are not all that important because there are 900-1,000 others who have viewpoints and ideas that are just as valid as mine. We are just humble about stuff. We don't get as upset about stuff. We let stuff go when the Spirit of God is working in us in humility. But again, the keystone thing that you would look for if the presence and the power of Jesus is working in the church is this: conviction of sin and a treasuring of Christ. You can say it a lot of different ways but conviction of sin and a treasuring of Christ. Even if you've been saved 50 years, if the Spirit of God is alive in your church and working in your heart week after week sometimes stronger, sometimes not as strong, you're aware of your sin before a

holy God. But secondly you're aware of the greatness of Jesus Christ and you treasure his salvation, you treasure his forgiveness, you treasure his pardon. When the Spirit of God is working, those two are alive in varying degrees, yes, some weeks different than others, yes, but you're convicted of your sinfulness before this infinitely holy and beautiful God and you treasure his Son Jesus who saves you.

Now, I want to circle the field and give you six things that really jump out from the text that are evidences, if you will, are true when Christ's presence and power has left a congregation. When Christ's presence and power has left a congregation, number one, the congregation does not miss him. That's an interesting truth that when people are so carnal, Christ no longer strives with them and works with them. There's also a blindness and a spiritual dullness that sets in so that they don't miss him nor want him back. Our former pastor used to say that in our Southern Baptist church, "The Holy Spirit could leave and we wouldn't miss him for six months." Most would miss him forever. There is no evidence in the biblical text, no record at all that Nazareth grieved or regretted that Jesus left. They were glad he left, they wanted to kill him when he left.

Now, occasionally there are some remnants of people and the church where Jesus presence and his power is not working who are grieved but as a church body as a whole, they don't miss him. They're glad he is gone. Number two, in a congregation where the presence and power of Christ has left there is an over emphasis on temporal blessings and temporal concerns. An over emphasis on temporal blessings and temporal concerns. If you listen to them talk they still talk of Jesus but the Jesus they are talking about is primarily the provider of a better life now. The Jesus they talk about is the Jesus that is going to heal my now, he's going to comfort me in my sorrows now, he's going to fix my finances now, he's going to straighten out my children now, he's going to give me a better marriage now as if God's primary concern is to "help you have the best life now." Now I'm not saying that Christ doesn't affect those things but that's not the primary thing. If it were the primary thing, he would've healed every disease and fixed every sorrow on earth but he didn't do that. As a matter of fact, what did we just see him do? We just saw him leave Nazareth and left them in their sorrows and left them in their pains and left them in their troubles. And he just left them and he gave them two examples from the Old Testament where the prophet Elijah bypassed all of the widows in Israel who were hurting and needful and sorrowful to minister to one widow, Zarephath the Gentile and how God's prophet Elisha bypassed all the lepers in Israel who were hurting and sorrowful and needed a better life now and he bypassed all of them and went to one leper of the Gentile's, Naaman, the Syrian. My point is: that's not Jesus' primary ministry now but when Jesus has left a congregation, his presence and power are gone. They'll still use the Bible, they'll still talk about Jesus but there is an over emphasis on now. "Fix me now, bless me now," and there is not an emphasis on the eternal things that truly, ultimately matter the most.

We had a preacher sometime ago, as a matter of fact, let me give you the biblical reference here up in verse 23, they demand Jesus, "We want you to do the miracles and wonders and signs here in Nazareth we've been hearing you've been doing in other places." What's their point? They're not burdened over their sin. They don't see

themselves as wretches before a holy God. They don't see themselves under the wrath of God and needing a Savior to free them from that sin and that judgment. They are concentrating on temporal needs now. That's evidence of a carnal church that knows nothing of the Spirit of God. We had an entertainer that came here years ago and he preached to the congregation and his whole message was about how coming to Christ fixed his marriage and got him off of drugs and that's wonderful and beautiful. Now, I'm not denouncing that, but it was interesting there were about eight people who responded at the end and I counseled with most of those and I could not get them to think about their sins before a holy God, they wanted their marriages fixed. I could not get them to think about God-ward things and to be God-centered and their pitiful deplorable judged conditions on how they needed Christ, they wanted to get off their addiction problem. You see, it takes the Spirit of God to bring him in to their foundational need that they are a sinner who needs forgiveness through Christ. And the others come through the years of sanctification and by the way, imbalanced. If you come to Jesus, it may bring some new sorrows into your life. It may bring some new troubles into your life. Jesus called it carrying a cross, that's not fun last time I checked. So be careful talking about Jesus as the answer. He may not be the answer in the way people say they need answers. He's the answer to your sin problem before a holy God, that's the gospel. Not just to fix your troubles though he does a wonderful job at that as a secondary ministry, it's not the primary ministry of Jesus.

Number three, the third thing that seems to jump out at us when Jesus' presence and power leaves, as his presence and power left Nazareth, they replaced him and his power with ritual and ceremony or with amusements and entertainments. There is always a replacement. They either fall back into the old traditions of ritual and ceremony, they don't have Jesus but they have the ceremonies and rituals, or they turn to carnal amusements and entertainments to bring them into the church because they need something to go on because God is not there. After Jesus left Nazareth, they kept right on week after week, meeting at the synagogue and going through the motions but Jesus had left. When I was in Romania this last time on a mission trip, we were in the mountains of Romania in a more rural area and we went to one of the oldest Greek Orthodox churches. Now we're talking old, I don't know a thousand years old, and the building was haunting if you will, dark, dark, all the little statues where in there that they prayed to or prayed through and candles were burning and I remember the Orthodox priest he came out on this elevated platform, it's like he just kind of hovered out. He had this huge gray beard and he was a big man and had this giant hat with jewels and gold all in it and had a robe of brilliant colors and a gold sash around the the top of that robe and he had the jewelry hanging around his neck with all kinds of medallion on it. He came out there and I suppose he was speaking Latin and it was kind of like he was in a trance and I thought it was the weirdest, strangest thing. You know what all of that is? It's a substitution for the presence and power of Jesus Christ. When he is not there in his glory, men try to put on some glory to replace him.

Number four, when Christ's presence and power leaves the congregation, that congregation grows angry against the truth. They'll stand up and say, "I believe the Bible. I believe the word of God." But preach one of the grand old doctrines and see what they

do. They're just in a growing animosity to the truth of God. If you confront them that they are no longer holding to the sound doctrine of Scriptures, that their view perhaps of what true biblical conversion is is counterfeit and inaccurate, they will grow angry. Jesus brought out the doctrine of unmerited favor. He brought the doctrine of total depravity. He brought out the doctrine of irresistible grace and his story of Elijah and Elisha bypassing the Jews and going to the Gentiles. What did they do? "We'll take him out to the hill and we're going to kill him." Nothing has changed in two thousand years. I talk to Baptist preachers every week who call me and basically said, "Brother Jeff, they are trying to kill me." What did you do? Are you sleeping with prostitutes? Are you a drug addict? What have you done? "I preached the doctrine of total depravity last Sunday and they hate me." And these are young men who are like me. Honestly, I thought when I preached the Bible and brought the truths of the Bible before the church, they'd love me for it. And that's what these young men say and it's the same thing today that happened two thousand years ago to Jesus, very same thing. When Christ's presence and power have left, they grow angry against the truth.

Number five, only got two more, when Christ's presence and power leaves the congregation, faithful pastors will suffer hostile opposition. We've already talked about that but I think it is somewhat distinct from the truth. They oppose the truth but they oppose the man who brings the truth to bear. Now, notice it's interesting and this is the exact same thing we see happening over and over and over in our churches today. Look at verse 22 of Luke 4, "And all were speaking well of him." Hey, it's going good right? He's just starting his message, Jesus' ministry in Nazareth is just getting going and they appreciate him, they like what he's saying, it is going good. They think it's now, verses 25-27, tells them the truths, deeper truths and now they want to kill him. I've advised pastors who take over established churches that they need to be very careful if they take over a church that historically has had weak preaching, they'll find out that first the people will usually like them: they'll like your personality, perhaps they appreciate their charisma, they're kind of impressed by the leadership skill of the new pastor, he has good communication abilities whatever it is. But then you'll find out as you bring the truth before the church and God forbid you begin to teach them how to implement the truth in church life, that's where it gets really tough and then they'll hate you. Hostile opposition. You'll find out that they didn't love your God or your doctrine, they were just impressed with you and once they got over you and saw who your God and doctrine was, they hate you for it. But Jesus' example teaches us that no matter what happens pastors must remain faithful to the truth.

Number six, when God's presence and power leaves the congregation, God will move his faithful pastors to those who deserve them. God will move his faithful pastors to those who deserve him. Capernaum for the most part received the ministry of Jesus. Capernaum had at least an element, a seed of belief and so he abandons Nazareth and he moves his ministry headquarters to Capernaum. I've often said churches usually get the pastors that they deserve. I've heard, "Well, this pastor is this and hes that," and I say, "Yeah, that's probably about what you deserve." I had some times this week where I had immense joy in my study and prayer and meditation and I had some times this week

when I was really fearful and here was my fear, "Oh God, don't leave us. Lord Jesus don't leave us."

So I'll leave you with just four thoughts, literally just thoughts and we'll go home, about making sure the presence and power of God stays in our church. Not that he is here and he ought to be now and one of the things you gotta remember about that is God is sovereign and there are times when God is just not going to move in the outward ways he did at other times. Pentecost didn't last but just a few weeks as best as we can tell. No matter how much they prayed or fasted or whatever, God had done what he was going to do and then he fell in other places at other times and other seasons so be careful that you think this is something we work up. God is sovereign, however, we've got to stay humble and stay repentant if we want God to stay in our church. If we harbor unrepented of sin, if we do not deal with known open unrepented of sin in the body, Jesus will not stay here. John Dagg was the foundational theologian among Baptists in America, he wrote his Systematic Theology I'm guessing about in the 1830's. Baptists just didn't have that many scholars so when we had one of the caliber John Dagg, he got a lot of recognition and John Dagg said this and I quote he said, "When discipline leaves the church, Christ goes with it."

So we must stay humble and we must stay repentant concerning sin. Secondly, pray, pray believing, pray depending. As I get up to preach I'm praying, "Oh God, if you don't communicate the truth I'm sunk." Pray for your small group, pray for the worship service, pray for our interaction, pray that God would be with us. Tell him we know, tell him we recognize, tell him we are aware that we are nothing, nothing if he does not show up and work and bless. Pray that he will bless Brother Tom and all that he does when we sing, pray that he will just take over, pray that he will bless in all of our small groups, pray, pray, pray.

Third one is obey. Number one be humble and repentant. Number two pray, number three obey. Here is my point: God is not going to stay and bless if we are openly and knowingly disobedient to clear scriptural truth. Obey.

And the last one I'll leave you with is one that you've probably grown accustomed to me telling you because as I've grown older I've realized that Manley Beasley, the wonderful Southern Baptist preacher who was a man who was challenging Southern Baptists to get back to Spirit of God and quit all of our gimmicks and goofy stuff. When I asked him one day, "What's the most important thing, what's the most important advice he could give to a young preacher?" He said, "Balance." That's my last word for you: balance. Don't saddle up this stuff I taught you on a horse and ride off too far. Some of you, it's hard to get you back in. Here is my point: some men will land in different places so don't go out with a big club smashing everybody that may do some of these thing. Number one, they may be handling it right. They may do some of the things that I may not deem comfortable but they may be very careful to make sure they explain to people it's not in the work of walking to the front, it's not in the work of going here or there, they may be careful. So be careful that you're not overly critical and demeaning and condemning. So

purpose to be balanced. We don't want to have to reel some of you in from running off of one cliff or the other on this day.

Well, that's it. That's all I've got. Let's stand together and we'll pray.