

It's Time to Get Serious

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The final human judgment on my pulpit ministry may be unkind, and that'll be all right. There are times when I may seem to be impulsive in what I do in the pulpit, and that may be an accurate assessment. It wasn't that long ago that I decided 30 minutes before the Tuesday evening service started that we'd do an interview instead of the sermon that I had prepared. Tonight we had announced a message, "Planning For Your Judgment," and I decided this afternoon that I had other things that I wanted to say that were necessary. So occasionally, if not more often than you might suspect, I plan one thing and then I switch to something else and I can only trust that the Lord is directing my steps when that happens, because that's certainly not what was modeled for me in other places where I have been.

Tonight is one of those nights, and as I was preparing, you know, just going over my notes of final time up in the study just a moment ago, my study here at Truth, I thought of what Jeremiah said in chapter 20, verse 9. He said, "There is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." And that's kind of the situation that I find myself in. There's a lot of things that are going on in my mind and it's going to seem tonight like I'm just kind of meandering. I'm actually not, even if it seems that way, because these are the things that I have to say this evening are all things that have been mixed together in the core of my heart over a number of months, if not years, and I need to let it out. I need to say the things that I have to say tonight, things that I've said in some ways before; there's a lot new in here tonight, but there's some things that I've said before. I'm going to allude to things that I've said in other places at other times, things that have happened in the history of Truth Community Church over the past couple of years. I want to talk about that. I want to speak really bluntly and candidly. I want to speak about things that I have said recently on social media about different things that are happening in the Reformed Church. I use the word Reformed as opposed to Evangelical to be very specific, that I'm talking about the circles in which we move, and the podcasts that some of you listen to, and the people that you pay attention to. There are things that just need to be said. Also, the text that I was going to preach tonight, Matthew 7, verses 1-2, if you would just turn there, I want to refer to it and help you see why I didn't want to preach that text tonight because it fits in with the broader context of everything else that is on my heart to say.

Matthew chapter 7, verses 1 to 2, says, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce," here are the key words, "you will be judged, and with the

measure you use it will be measured to you." Statement of fact, that there is a future judgment coming, a judgment for all men of all time, everywhere, in all places, standing before the one true living God and giving an account of life and the condition of the soul. Now, this is a wonderful turnout for Tuesday, and the increased turnout when I'm here on Tuesday nights, I'm seeing more and more people coming with an earnest desire to hear the word of God; it hasn't always been that way at Truth Community Church, but things are changing. But that text, Matthew 7, verses 1 and 2, is so very, very important that I wanted the most people possible to hear it. I didn't want to preach even to a pretty large subset of our congregation, I wanted everybody to hear what I have to say on that text, and that means I need to preach it on a Sunday. So that was the first domino to fall, you know, and it was this afternoon. I don't mind telling you, wasn't just a few hours ago that all of this kind of came together in my mind, but what I have to say here tonight is not something, these are not things that were hastily thrown together, these are things that have been on my heart and in my meditation and in my study for years and the subject of many conversations with some of you over the past weeks and months. And so while this is an apparent sudden change, it's actually just the overflow of everything that's been on my mind for a number of years and intensified in recent days.

That text, Matthew 7:1 to 2, has everything to do with everything in life on this earth, and everything to do with eternity to come. It is an absolutely comprehensive text about absolutely everything and that's the nature of the Sermon on the Mount. I've taught the Sermon on the Mount probably a half dozen times or more in different degrees of detail and so I'm familiar with it, and the Sermon on the Mount is like that. It covers everything. It covers everything in all of life. And when you come to Matthew 7, you're entering into a chapter where the theme of it could be called the disciple and coming judgment. Jesus leaves behind, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you," there in Matthew 6:33, and kind of wraps up in Matthew 6, he kind of wraps up the things that pertain to life on earth, and then he pivots to the reality of coming judgment. And so you look at verses 21 to 23, for example, and you see that he says he's referring to judgment. Let's just look at verse 22 because time's already going to get away from us. Jesus looks forward to the judgment day on verse 22 and says, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" And then he gives that famous sort of parable in verses 24 to 27 about the house built on the sand versus the house built on the rock and indicating that there will be a colossal, catastrophic judgment on people who did not act upon the words of Jesus compared to the stability of those who did. And this isn't about people just having a sense of serenity as they walk through life. It's about what happens on the final day of judgment, and that there will be people who suffer eternal loss who had the name of Jesus on their lips.

And so, at its core, Matthew 7, broadly speaking, and verses 1 and 2, more specifically, seeking, in this section of Scripture, at the core, Jesus is teaching us that we will be judged every one of us, and it's a, you know, even as I'm speaking it practically sends a chill down my spine to realize that in the brief time that we have together as I look out on your on your faces, one day there there will be a time where I'm not part of the equation

here on earth and one day I will recede into the forgotten background and and you will be face-to-face with your Creator and Judge. You know what that tells me? It's time to get serious. It's time to get serious. Christian and non-Christian alike will stand before God. An august time of accountability is coming and will most certainly take place for every one of us. And I take it as a given that very few people take that seriously. Very few people take that seriously. I would, and I say this sympathetically and generously to those of you in the room, I would rather suspect that very few of you take it nearly as seriously as it needs to be taken. Well, that means that I have a responsibility as the pastor to impress some things on your mind so that you will agree with me when I say it's time to get serious about things. So tonight I ask you to please follow me for a while. There's kind of three sections to this message, but I'm not, you know, I don't have specific points to give you. I just want to kind of go with the flow of what's on my heart and so please follow me. Like I say, it may seem like I'm meandering, but I'm really not. I'm really, really not. And these are not things that I say superficially. They're not.

Now, the first thing that I want to address is kind of a glad oasis from the sober way that I've opened this message. What I'm about to say is also sober, but it's very encouraging. And I say this, and I look directly at the camera that'll record the video, that's recording the video for later, with what I'm about to say over the next 10 minutes, I'm talking in the room to Truth Community Church, okay? I'm speaking to our congregation, not outside our walls, with what I am about to say. We had an elders meeting yesterday, and we talked about the things that I'm about to say here. I've had some conversations with some of you about these things. And so those of you that have interacted with me know that I'm not just speaking off the cuff in what I'm about to say right now.

I believe we've been, let me back up. We started Truth Community Church nearly 13 years ago, 13 years on December 18, 17, depending on which event you want to count by. In 2011, December 17, 18, I flew out from California under the cover of night, not wanting anybody back there to know that I was coming here to talk about starting a church; that had a lot of implications for my job security if somebody thought I was going to be leaving and so we had to do it kind of, like I say, under the cover of night. And we had a meeting, a private meeting in a home, then we had a more public meeting someplace else that 46 people came to, and it was very modest, small beginnings, and we made the decision later that we would start Truth Community. And 12 years went by, and then the past year has taken place and, beloved, for the first time, really, for the first time now in these 13 years, I believe that Truth Community Church is genuinely having a season of spiritual blessing, and it's different now than it's ever been in the course of the past 13 years, and most of you are a crucial part of the consideration of what I am saying. There is a fresh corporate unity in Truth Community Church in the past several months that has not been the reality in the past. And I realize perhaps a pastor isn't supposed to say these kinds of things, but beloved, I started out with Jeremiah 29, there's a fire in my bones and I have to let it out. It hasn't always been this way and there was a reason why, looking back on it, looking back over my preaching log, without consciously intending to, there was a period of time where I was preaching a lot of messages on church unity. You know why I was preaching on church unity? It's because our church was not unified. It's because we had a lot of stiff-necked, stubborn, resistant people to ministry in our

midst and causing division, and so I preached on that and preached on that trying to, trying to do something and to address it from the word of God and I found out that the act of preaching alone cannot generate spiritual unity. It has to come from something that is done by the Holy Spirit in the midst of individual hearts and God prunes some away and brings others with new desires, and suddenly we find ourselves in these past several months in a season of spiritual blessing.

And I think it's more than just anecdotal and it's certainly not just my subjective opinion. You know, one of the things, and this past Sunday was a perfect illustration of it, there is an earnestness to conversations that I'm now having with the people at Truth Community Church about spiritual things that is qualitatively different than what was true in the past. I remember when Julie and Austin were married on July 20th, and that was such a blessed, beautiful day, and I remember and I'm gonna do my best to control my emotions as I describe this, I remember sitting in the fellowship hall and sitting down next to one of our ladies and just having a wonderfully sincere and earnest conversation about the joys of salvation and the joy of true conversion, and seeing that illustrated in a wedding and just the joy that surrounded that. Those kinds of conversations are exceedingly precious, and I could multiply by many other examples, other conversations like that, as people come and want to talk about, you know, "Am I really a Christian or not?" Or talking about their struggles with sin and wanting to grow in holiness, and these things just coming up spontaneously, naturally. This is what's coming out of the hearts of a broad cross-section of our church. This is special. This is not common and I would venture to say that many of you are witnesses to the reality that I am describing. Now, it's not that our room is filled with people that have achieved perfect sanctification, because we're not, and this room is not and this pulpit is not filled with someone who has achieved perfect sanctification, and so we're not boasting in anything in what we say here. We're simply describing our experience of the realities that Scripture says should mark a New Testament church.

I think of Ephesians 4, and you don't need to turn there, and I couldn't have said these things a year ago even. Paul says in Ephesians 4 verse 1, after three chapters extolling God for the wonders of salvation, he said, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." My dear, I say "my" in the church belongs to Christ, but this is the church that I pastor and preach at, so I have a ground for saying "my dear congregation," I love what's happening in our church and you don't know, you do not know how, and none of you would think anything about it because you've got humble spirits about you, you wouldn't think that the humble conversations, the simple things that you say and the earnest way that you interact without any kind of self-promotion and just the sweetness of humble spirits, you wouldn't have any idea that that's an expression of biblical realities that testify to the truth of your salvation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in your heart, and the reality of what the Lord is doing in our midst, and I'm just waiting and praying for the Lord to add to that as he adds people through conversion, as he does that work in the midst of his people. And beloved, at the risk of repeating myself, but it's right here in my notes, so I need to say it, and it's in

italics, so I really need to say it if it's in italics, for a very long time, beloved, there was a palpable indifference and even resistance to the preached word. There was. And you say, "How can you say that?" One of the ways that you can kind of pick up on that as a pastor is by the conversations that take place after the word is preached. You know, when five minutes after you've finished a sermon, people are coming up to you wanting to talk about, you know, a business transaction or the latest political news or something like that, you know, you've just wasted your time preaching to them because there's no impact to the word on their heart. They came in thinking about worldly things, you preached, and then they want to talk about worldly things, and the problem is, is that the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart. And so, as I've said in the past, when our Sunday morning service was full and all of that, and people were wondering, "Are we having a revival now?" I didn't buy it for a moment, because the spiritual reality was missing. It was absent. Broadly speaking, now, I have to say that you can't say that in an absolute sense because some of you that are here now and are part of the spiritual blessing that I've been describing, you were here then also. I'm talking about a prevailing spirit, not about every single person and the spirit that from a pastoral perspective was kind of defining the church while some of you quietly walked with the Lord and waited for better seasons to come. But that prevailing spirit of indifference and resistance has changed and I thank God for that, and we give him all of the glory for that because now, men and women, boys and girls, talk openly about spiritual life, and they do so earnestly, eagerly, and without any sense of shame. It's so sweet and so precious, and I can only thank God that he allowed me to stay here and live long enough to see the evident difference as people who have been with us for a long time, grow in grace as the Lord brought others from other places and made their own contribution to that, saying, "I came here because I wanted to hear the word of God and I wanted to be in this church." Praise God.

Beyond that, as I think about, as I look at what's happening in our church, there is an evident, obvious heightened interest in genuine true prayer. It's a challenge to seat everyone who come to our monthly prayer meetings with the elders. And we were just talking yesterday at our elder meeting, what are we going to do about the logistics of that because we like to sit in a circle. It used to be kind of a small circle. Now the circle's so big, you need binoculars to see people on the other side from you and it's not always easy to hear what someone is saying as they pour out their heart before the Lord, and the matters of prayer are so often spiritual in nature. "I don't know if I'm a Christian, pray for me. I'm talking to my son or wayward daughter and I want you to pray for them." These are not things from human motives and human earthly affections when people want to say and pray about things like that. That's different.

Now, I don't even remember what our elder chairman said at our meeting yesterday that prompted this thought as we talked through all of these things. It was kind of an incidental comment, but whatever it was that he said, something struck me and it's this, and this is where we kind of go from observation and giving gratitude and thanks to God for what he's doing in our midst, to realizing that that kind of blessing comes with its own peculiar and special kind of responsibility that each one of us has to embrace and to build upon and to calculate and to take seriously. The title of tonight's message is, "It's Time to Get Serious," and I thank God that the congregation, Truth Community Church, is a

serious congregation. I thank God for that but what we have to realize is that this time of blessing comes with its own particular serious responsibility. And I want you to turn to John 17 for this aspect of the message, John 17, verse 20, and I'm going to read through verse 26, so seven verses all together. Our Lord in this high priestly prayer on the eve of his crucifixion was praying to his Father, praying for the disciples, including us, and preparing the way in prayer for his imminent departure from earth. And so in verse 20, he says, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." So he'd been praying about the apostles, then he looks to the fruit of the apostolic ministry. And I've pointed this out a time or two, I've never preached specifically on this text in detail, but I have mentioned this before, that when Jesus says, "I'm praying for those who will believe on me through their word," beloved, you and I today in the 21st century are included in the orbit of that prayer because we have believed through the word of the apostles and so Jesus is praying for those who throughout the course of time will believe through the ministry of the apostles and therefore it includes us. What an amazing, an amazing thought, but yet, you know, you realize that the Lord intercedes for his people continually at the right hand of the Father, even today, and that the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, then you realize that there is a Triune intercession taking place for the people of God and this prayer of Jesus is one manifestation of it, and if the communion of the three persons of the Godhead are involved in this, then I think that we should take it seriously, that this is something that transcends everything else.

And so as Jesus prays for those who will believe in him through the word of the apostles, this is the content of his prayer, verse 21, "that they may all be one," talking about the spiritual unity in the church, "just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." There is a testimony that goes forth from a unified body as a witness to the world of the truth of Scripture, the truth of the gospel, the truth of Christ, and that God uses to advance the saving power of the proclamation of the word of God. And that's what Jesus is praying for here. He goes on and says in verse 25, "O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me." True believers know that Jesus came from the right hand of the Father. Verse 26, "I have made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

And so the Lord manifests his love to us in our hearts, we gather together corporately and we share that love with one another in a humble, earnest spirit and a spirit of unity is created and God uses that unity of his church to make its witness effective. So here's the point for now and for this message, in light of this unity that the Lord has given to our dear church, is for us to understand this. It would be a critical mistake of selfish and massive proportions, and it would also be the guarantee that we would quickly lose it, if we thought that that blessing was given simply for our enjoyment. That's what our elder chairman's comment yesterday prompted me to recognize, because I've been enjoying thinking about this and looking at it and interacting with you about it and yet now, you know, it's clearer in my mind that if we've been given this blessing, it's so that we would be a blessing. We are not meant to be a cul-de-sac receiving this blessing, we're meant to

be a thoroughfare so that it passes through us to the blessing of others and that means you and me, that means in our sphere of relationships where the Lord brings us receptive people to have an elevated sense of responsibility and looking for the opportunities to be able to speak the name of Christ in the sphere that's given to us. And in addition to that, and combining the thoughts that I'm sharing with you here this evening, as that spirit of prayer grows, and I'm grateful for the men that have taken leadership in establishing prayer in our church over the years. That has not been me. It's been others that have done that, and others have responded as they have done so. You know, that this becomes an even more urgent matter of prayer, that the Lord would make our witness effective, sharing it to the world, and that the things that we love and believe about Christ and our commitment to the church and the ministry of the pulpit would go forth with power to the blessing of others because it's needed, as I will show in a little bit.

So contemplating our church has brought me to say some of these things here this evening. Secondly, this one's much more personal. I've made a point of this on social media in recent days also, but this urgency of which I speak, this sense that it's time to get serious, has been accented and deepened within the walls of my study in recent days, recent weeks, really, if not months. You know, I mean, in one sense, I'm always reading but there's something happening in my own study these days, which is elevated and unique. I've been reading the sermons of Charles Spurgeon by the dozens over the past few weeks, and to read his sermons, beloved, is far different than reading the devotionals that are published, of seeing memes on the internet or whatever. That has, I'm not a Spurgeon scholar by any means, but I can tell you by having read devotionals and seeing the memes and then reading his sermons, there's no comparison. There is nothing like reading the sermons of Charles Spurgeon anywhere in Christian literature and I don't mind telling you that as I've read these sermons, ones I've been reading were things he preached when he was 20 years old, 20 and 21 years old, and I read his sermons and I realize that, you know, by comparison, I've never preached a sermon in my life. I read what he speaks and I tremble at it. I have wept as I've read his sermons. And in large part, in large part, that what is affecting me so much, it comes back to what I was saying about what's happening in our church, is that there was a simple earnestness in his preaching as he spoke to souls, and as he desired the salvation of those to whom he spoke, as he exalted the love of the Savior, and as he warned about the dangers of hell and eternal judgment. (There's another connection to join things together this evening.) His simple earnestness is unparalleled. There are a lot of good men, there are a lot of good books throughout the course of Christian history and even today, but there is nothing like what I've been reading in these weeks.

And let me just step back and give you a brief review of the preaching instruction that I received when I was at the Master's Seminary, and this was 30-some years ago, give or take, 25 years ago. No, it was 30 years ago. And I don't at all want to diminish any of the men who taught preaching to me. Some of them are still my friends, and I love them, and they had a very constructive impact on my ministry, and maybe better stated is that in those proud days of seminary as a good student and getting good grades on my paper, I was just too proud to take things to heart that needed to be taken to heart. That's probably a better way to look at it. We were taught, it was emphasized to us, it was one of the

check marks when you preached in your sermon labs, whether you gave an appeal to the lost or not, whether you invited people to come to Christ in the course of your sermon. And blaming on me the way that this was processed in my mind and exonerating those worthy men who instructed me, it was just a checkbox thing. And you say, "Okay," and you make an appeal, "you need to repent and come to Christ." Sometimes, probably throughout the course of my ministry, certainly in the early days, that was done with a harsh spirit that came across strident as opposed to a true loving appeal out of a genuine desire to see somebody saved. Well, when you read Spurgeon, especially in those early years of his ministry, it's amazing. And Spurgeon preached spontaneously. His appeal for sinners to come to Christ was no routine part of his sermon at all. He winsomely warns and pleads with them. His love for Christ, the person of Christ, not just his love for teaching, not just his love for doctrine, and his doctrine was excellent, there was a depth of love for souls in him that testifies to the way that bears reminiscences of our Lord himself when he wept over Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I wanted to gather you under my wings and you would not have it!" And he wept over them. And you can almost picture the tears streaming down Spurgeon's cheeks. I don't know if that actually happened with him or not, but his heart was full of tears for the lost in front of him. And if you ever read the biography of Asahel Nettleton, who was a great true revival preacher in the early 19th century, you see the same things.

So as I'm reading these things, I'm just greatly convicted in the weakness of my own preaching, my failures in that regard. Let me ask you a question and I ask it somewhat rhetorically. In light of coming judgment, in light of coming judgment, and in light of being face-to-face with people as you're preaching eternal realities, how is it possible for anyone especially me, how is it possible to appeal to sinners in a cold mechanical way that makes it evident by your lack of passion and concern that it really doesn't affect my day one way or another if you come to Christ. I'm afraid I've given people that impression over the course of my ministry at times. It's time to get serious about things like that.

One of the other things that stands out as you read the sermons of Charles Spurgeon, these early sermons especially, almost every sermon, almost every sermon, he spends a great deal of time preaching on and warning people against going to hell. There's this call to come to Christ and there's warning about going to hell if you fail to do so and he's very graphic in it in a way that is, you know, I don't listen to a lot of other preachers, which Spurgeon didn't listen to a lot of other preachers either, which was really encouraging to me. He talks about that, said that he doesn't have much patience for listening to other sermons because as he does, he's wanting to correct them and he's deciding in his mind how he would do it differently. I understand that. But as you read and you see him preaching, he preached on hell in great detail and he had a way, a vivid way of preaching that would warn people with disarming candor against false conversion. It wasn't Bible teaching just for the sake of Bible teaching. He wanted people to understand the consequences of rejecting the gospel and to have them understand that to reject the gospel was to enter into a state of judgment where on the passing at death you would be, as it were, taken by the armpits by demons and your souls ushered into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. And as I read how Spurgeon pleaded with sinners, I'm trying to be

serious about assimilating that example. You can pray for me. I need you to pray for me. I want to be better at that. I need to be better at that.

When Jesus taught on hell, he made it plain that hell was real, hell was eternal, hell was painful. If you'll look at Luke chapter 16, and the key thing here as I talk about these things, I said I'm kind of meandering a bit, it seems like I'm meandering. I'm not. As I talk about Spurgeon, it's simply a manifestation of biblical realities. That's the key thing here. And when Jesus taught on hell, and it's been often said that no one taught on hell more than Jesus did, one of the places where he taught about it was in the story about the rich man and Lazarus, and Lazarus died and he woke up in Hades. And in verse 26, he had appealed to Abraham to send Lazarus so he could put his finger in water and relieve this pain and cool his tongue and Abraham said, "That ain't happening." Verse 25, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us." The lines have been drawn. This is fixed and it's not going to change. Rich man in Hades, Abraham speaking to him, it is reinforced to him that this pain that he finds himself in is eternal. It is not going to change. No help is being sent. There was help that was sent to sinners, proclaimed to them in the person of Christ, in the death and resurrection of Christ, that Christ died for us according to the Scriptures, he was buried and he was raised on the third day for our sins. That help is sent in this life and not the next. And what sinners do with that seals their judgment for weal or for woe.

Jesus said, "Now the chasm is fixed. No one can come to help you. You are eternally and forever lost." And the rich man said, "Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house--for I have five brothers--so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Anguish and torment. Abraham said, "No, they have the Bible. Let them listen to the Bible." And he said, "'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'" You have the Scriptures, you have the gospel, if you're not going to hear that, then nothing else is going to make any difference. And the hardness of hearts is shown in the rejection of Christ and there are eternal consequences to it. I think that's serious, don't you? I think it's time to get serious about that. Sinners are going there. We have loved ones who are going there. Some of you right now are on the path to go there. It will be you writhing in anguish, "Someone give me relief from my tongue for just a moment! Someone deliver me!" Well, the Deliverer was preached to you and you refused him. And you were told, Scripture says, it's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Spurgeon understood all of that and listened to what he said. "Who are these people going to hell? They are people whom you will see with their Bibles marching off to chapel as religiously as possible, or going to church as devoutly as they can, looking somber and serious and fancying that they are quite sure to be saved, though their heart is not in the matter, nothing but their bodies. They have no grace, no life, no Christ, and they shall be cast into outer darkness." Spurgeon had the capacity to paint verbal pictures

to teach truth. If his verbal pictures were literal paintings they would be hanging in the finest places to be where good art is found anywhere in the world in Buckingham Palace or in the Louvre or in the White House or the Smithsonian Institute. That's how great his capacity, verbal capacity was. And in one of his messages, talking heaven and hell, he says this, he says, "in hell, there is no hope. They have not even the hope of dying," that is, "the hope of being annihilated." Listen to what he says. "They are for ever—for ever—for ever—lost! On every chain in hell, there is written 'for ever.' In the fires, there blaze out the words, 'for ever.' Up above their heads, they read 'for ever.' Their eyes are throbbing, and their hearts are pained with the thought that it is 'for ever.' Oh! if I could tell you tonight that hell would one day be burned out, and that those who were lost might be saved, there would be a jubilee in hell at the very thought of it. But it cannot be—it is 'for ever' that they are 'cast into utter darkness.'" It's time to get serious, wouldn't you say?

Now, there's a third aspect of this reason why it's time to get serious tonight and in the days and weeks and months to come. In addition to the unity at our own church and the reading of Spurgeon, there's a third matter that's very deeply on my heart and has demonstrably been on my heart for a number of years. I am convinced, now I speak to you, but also beyond the walls of Truth Community Church, to anyone who would listen and that has any affection for the church of Christ at all, I am utterly convinced that we are in a period of serious chastisement from the Lord. In the Reformed Church, if you'll allow me to review a little bit of my pulpit, I have preached about and against Catholicism and the seeker-friendly church and moralistic therapeutic deism and legalism and other things that are escaping my mind in the moment. You know, we've spoken a lot about what's happening in the broader, broader church. And for people like us, that's a pretty comfortable place to be, because we can kind of cheer it on and say, "Yeah, that's right," and it doesn't have, you know, we might grow a bit in discernment, but it doesn't get too close to our own hearts. I'm not talking about them now. I'm convinced that the Reformed segment of the church as a whole is being chastised. It's demonstrable. It's obvious. It's not only the exposure of Steve Lawson, although that's an evident and obvious part of it. Within the past two weeks, three weeks, since Lawson, a prominent leader, a national leader in the biblical counseling movement was asked by his elders to resign from his pastorate due to the state of his marriage. This is public knowledge. I'm not gossiping here. This is a matter of public record of which I speak. These are men who are supposedly in the trusted circle. Our trusted circle.

And you see, we can't, and I, I don't know what to say. I do know what to say, but it's just not easy to say. I would say to our friends, our deepest and closest friends, that we're past the point of pointing fingers at the Charismatics and the seeker-friendly churches. We can't do that anymore and have within our hearts a reservoir of pride that says, "That's not me. Look at the corruption in the Charismatic leaders. Look at the bad philosophy of ministry in the seeker-friendly churches." And I look at that and my heart just weeps. Look at our own circle of friends. We can no longer take refuge in the fact that the waves haven't fallen on our shore. They have. And beloved, you can go back and listen to the messages. I've been warning about this. Since at least January of 2022, when at the last moment to replace a different speaker, it wasn't because I was wanted on the original program, I was invited to speak at the National Founders Conference and I said these

things. I repeated the warning at "Truth Matters" in May of 2022. I came back from my sabbatical here in 2023 and said, we're going to talk about these things at length here. And at the time, you know, as I did and as I predicted, dozens of people left Truth Community Church to find some other thing, to find other things that would itch their ears for them. They didn't want to hear it.

And now, you know, and I've been saying these things a lot on social media. If you're interested in some of those posts, you can see Nancy Hughes, and she'll help you start getting those things. I've been talking about this. I've been posting about this on social media and, beloved, no one is paying attention. No one has paid any attention to that at all. It is business as usual. And you can see it. You can see it in just the way that people just act like it's an isolated event with this man or that man. It's an isolated event that that man went off the rails. Well, how can we just distance ourselves from that when it's one of our guys? How can we say that we bear no responsibility for that, that that has nothing to do with me? No, we can't respond that way. There is chastisement taking place in a Revelation 2 to 3 kind of way. And I'm eager to return to Revelation, and I hope to be able to do so shortly after the first of the year, to be able to preach on chapters 2 and 3 and it's a great encouragement to my heart that the Lord providentially paused that exposition so that I could preach these things in this context with these new things coming out.

I was at a graduation ceremony at a Christian college earlier this year and this is what you have to understand, beloved, both here in the room and anyone that hears me subsequently: this is a problem inside our camp. This is not out there anymore. I was at a graduation ceremony for a Christian college and one of the leading Bible professors of that institution spoke and gave the commencement address, and he spent more time quoting from Disney movies than he did from the Bible. And everybody laughed and thought it was funny. I don't think that's funny. How can you have an audience of 1,000 people in front of you at a Christian event and quote from the movie "Tangled"? This is not serious, to do that. What I mean is when I say this is not serious, preaching like that shows that you don't take anything seriously. You undermine your credibility, you undermine everything when you've got 1,000 souls in front of you on a great, important occasion in the life of hundreds of young people, and you're quoting "Tangled." What in the world is wrong? This is not serious. You go to conferences just down the road, you can get your picture taken with cutouts of the speakers. What is that? Is this serious? Is this serious? In light of coming judgment, in light of the fact that Christian and non-Christian alike, every one of them will stand before a holy God and have him examine and scrutinize their lives, this is serious? Disney movies is a serious way to talk? Cute little selfies are a cute way, are a serious way to deal with biblical truth?

It's been a long time, well, I can remember conferences, let me put it this way, being at conferences, you know, whatever, you know, it's fine whatever was said from the pulpit, but the surrounding things around it, the things that go on in between, "Popcorn! Get your programs! Popcorn here!" They weren't exactly saying that, but they were calling attention to the fact that there were programs and popcorn, might as well have been a great American ballpark. Some of those places just a little bit beyond our immediate

circles would gladly serve you beer along the way. "Oh, and let me tell you about my favorite cigars and the whiskey that I like to drink. And isn't my beard cool?" This isn't serious.

I don't know how else to say it, beloved. In my judgment, the Reformed Church, broadly speaking, is dead to the primacy and urgency of coming judgment. If it was alive to these realities and there was a vibrant, living concern for the souls of the people that were in front of them, they wouldn't turn things into a carnival atmosphere because the atmosphere informs the way that the message is received. I will never get over that commencement message. I will never get over it. How can you do that? How can you have Bible professor, Dr. Bible Professor, after your name. How can you have 1,000 souls in front of you at a Christian event and young people getting ready to go out into their life in light of the training that they've received and encourage them to quote "Tangled" with you as you speak? My eyes are dry at the moment. My heart is weeping. This is not serious. And beloved, whatever anybody else does, you and I, it's time to get serious, wouldn't you say?

Why this urgency? Why am I saying these things? It won't deepen my friendships in other places, most likely. Why am I saying these things? Beloved, we have to be different. You and I, we have to be different. For the love of Christ, we have to be different. For the love of the word of God, we have to be different. For the love of saints, we have to be different. For the love of sinners, we have to be different. We don't have to be sour, dour people, but we have to be earnest. We have to comport our lives, conduct our ministries, preach the word, and speak with others as if we realize that there's something bigger going on than anything that's happening in life around us. And beloved, a lot of the cues that you're getting are not consistent with that. Men who live double lives and teach in prominent ways have betrayed their stewardship. They have betrayed Christ. They have foolishly forfeited their reward if they ever had one coming to them, and they have misled sinners into thinking that there's nothing here. What sinner would look at a double-lived pastor and take anything seriously about what he used to preach? We are past time where the people of God in Reformed circles should be falling on their knees in weepy repentance but it ain't happening. It's not happening. Not in the places where it matters.

You'll forgive me, I trust, if I let Spurgeon have the last word here. I've got a couple of more extended quotes here. Once in a while, I'm just happy to let someone who said it better than I did take the floor. Spurgeon said, "you may die tomorrow. Let me therefore warn you by the mercy of God; let me speak to you as a brother would speak; for I love you, you know I do, and I would press the matter home to your hearts. Oh to be amongst the many who shall be accepted in Christ—how blessed that will be! And God has said that whoever shall call on his name shall be saved: he casts out not one that comes to him through Christ." Spurgeon went on to say, "may the blessed Spirit reveal to you your state! May he show you that you are dead, that you are lost and ruined. May he make you feel what a dreadful thing it would be to sink into hell! May he also point you to heaven! May he take you as the angel did of old, and put his hand upon you, and say, 'Flee! flee!

flee! Look to the mountain; look not behind you; do not stay in all the plain.' And may we all meet in heaven at last; and there we shall be happy for ever."

Beloved friends at this modest but beloved church, we have an opportunity. If God has favored us with a genuine unity, let us pray and ask him not to use it for ourselves but for the benefit of others. If Christ is visibly chastening his church, as he most certainly is, let us be quick to repent of our own sins and humble ourselves with pleas for mercy upon his people. And if God has favored us with a renewal of the old-fashioned gospel even as our dear brother Charles Spurgeon preached it, let us hold it forth to our family, our friends, the carnal church, and sinners all around us. Perhaps, just perhaps, if we get serious, better stated, if we pursue the seriousness and the earnestness that the Lord has blessed us with, perhaps God would honor our efforts to advance his kingdom for his glory and for the good of our fellow men. We can do nothing less. It's time to get serious.

Let's pray together.

Gracious God, thank you for your blessing on our body here at Truth Community. We pray for the broader circle of those that we love and share doctrine with. Father, we pray that you would bless the preaching of the old-fashioned gospel, to believe in Christ and be saved. Look to Christ and be saved all the ends of the earth. Come and drink freely of the waters offered by our gracious Lord. Father, may there be a wooing by your Spirit as you change hardened hearts to respond in humble repentance and faith to the truth of Christ, where needed, Father, may you provoke a healthy fear of God in the reality of coming judgment. Every one of us, Father, is going to stand quite soon enough with you face-to-face before an august, holy, all-knowing God, for Christians to give an account of their Christian lives, for sinners to hear the judgment pronounced against them, many in the outward visible church, hearing those deathly words, "Depart from me, I never knew you." God, God, this is not the stuff of entertainment, of balloons and popcorn and coffee and donuts. These are matters of great earnestness and we just plead for the sake of the name of your most worthy and beautiful and lovely Son, our Lord Jesus, for the sake of his name, Father, we pray that your Spirit would work in our midst and beyond our midst and that your people would get serious about the things that were so serious that our Lord hung suspended on a cross between heaven and earth, bearing the sins of his people. That's serious, Lord. Let us repent of our desire for entertainment and ease of life, and come take up the cross and follow Jesus wherever he may lead. We follow a man of sorrows, Father, how is it that we want to be entertained by clowns? Sort it all out in all of our minds and hearts, we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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