

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **Matthew 5:13-16**. Adapted from Tom Moore.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty *again*? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. [14] “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] “Nor do *men* light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. [16] “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

-  B. Today begins a five (maybe 6) part series on Moving the Church Forward. The lesson titles are:

1. Moving the Church Forward -- Challenges to Accept.
2. Moving the Church Forward -- Enemies to Defeat.
3. Moving the Church Forward -- Dangers to Avoid.
4. Moving the Church Forward -- Opportunities to Take.
5. Moving the Church Forward -- Attitudes to Develop.

- C. I think the saying is basically true: we are either, going forward, standing still, or falling behind.

1. Sadly, this is also true in the Lord’s church
2. The problem is that many congregations have become complacent and comfortable (the prelude to standing still).
3. And once we are standing still, everyone passes us by and we begin to fall behind.

-  D. To introduce our theme, read Phil. 3:12-14.

Not that I have already obtained *it*, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. [13] Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

1. Paul believed in moving ahead.
2. We can’t rely on our laurels or past reputation.
3. Moving forward is the only way to avoid decline and failure.

- E. As a church, we need to think about what it takes to move ahead:

1. We must never be satisfied with the past or believe that what we are doing in the present is all that we can do or should do (2Pet. 3:18).
but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.
2. To achieve all that God will give us opportunity to do, we must move forward to meet the challenges of the future.

- F. Today, there are **challenges to accept** if the church is going to move forward.

II. WE MUST ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.

-  A. Notice these critical passages of Scripture (Mt. 5:13-16; 1Pet. 2:9).

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God’s* OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

1. People need to see a difference in us.
2. We must “show forth” God by the things we do...

- B. We must accept the challenge of making a difference.

1. That difference must come as we live rooted in and founded on the word of God.
2. Christians have been silenced and made to feel unwelcome and unwanted by so many in the world.
3. But we cannot let the world shut us up, shut us down, shut us out, or shut us in (1Cor. 15:58).
Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in* vain in the Lord.

- C. We must not resort to ungodly actions, but must continue to show the world that we have the answers to the problems plaguing mankind.
- D. We need to fight in our nation, in our communities, and in our schools for morality and oppose every evil.
- E. We can change the world the same way God's people have always changed the world - by teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus and changing the hearts and minds of those who live around us.
- F. Paul turned the world upside down (Ac. 17:6).
And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also;
- G. We MUST accept this challenge - the challenge of making a difference in the world!

III. WE MUST ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF EVANGELIZING OUR OWN COMMUNITY.

-  A. Everywhere I have been, most people thought their community was not open to the gospel of Jesus
 - 1. Was that based on the failure of well planned and well financed efforts to evangelize the community? - NO!
 - 2. Was it because there was so much opposition or animosity to the church that no one would listen? - NO!
 - 3. Was it because the people so hated God or His people that they refused to yield to His will? - NO!
 - 4. It is mostly because the local church simply did not put forth the effort needed.
- B. See Mk. 16:15-16; Mt. 28:19-20.
(Mk 16:15-16) And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. [16] “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.
(Mt 28:19-20) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- C. Here is an illustration to help us see the challenge:
 - 1. Coca Cola is so well known, that you can go into some of the most remote places in the world and there you will find bottles of coke
 - 2. Their motto: Think globally, but act locally. They want to be everywhere, but to do it they know they must take care of each location.
 - 3. The Lord's church needs to learn this lesson.
 - 4. It is good for the church to be involved in mission work, but the most important work we need to be involved in is locally.
 - a. Many times our numbers drop because we are more concerned about evangelizing the world than we are our own community.
 - b. Does the community cry out as did David in the long ago?: “No man cares for my soul” (Psa. 142:4).
Look to the right and see; For there is no one who regards me; There is no escape for me; No one cares for my soul.
 - c. The gospel is best spread into the world - one community at a time.
- E. Remember Prov. 11:30.
The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls.
- F. We must accept the challenge of making a difference in the world, evangelizing our community, and...

IV. WE MUST ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF FOLLOWING GOD'S WORD.

-  A. There is a movement in the church today to abandon Scripture as our authority for what we practice.
 - 1. But as we move forward into the future, the Bible must be the foundation of what we believe and practice religiously.
 - 2. In recent years, there have been some decisions made that threaten to change the true worship and work of the church...changing worship, women's role, etc.

- B. Notice what the Bible says about the importance of God's word (Deut. 12:32; Prov. 30:6).

(Deu 12:32) "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.

(Prov 30:6) Do not add to His words Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.
- C. We must be a people rooted in the book. We must know what God's will is (2Tim. 2:15; Mt. 15:9; Jer. 6:16-17).

(2Tim 2:15) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

(Mt 15:9) 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'

(Jer 6:16-17) Thus says the LORD, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk *in it*.' [17] "And I set watchmen over you, *saying*, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'

V. WE MUST ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPING LEADERS.

- A. Have you thought about who will lead the church 10, 20, 30 years from now? Elders....?
 - 1. Notice this key passage; 2Tim. 2:2.
And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.
 - 2. Paul invested himself in the training of Timothy, and Timothy was to do the same with other faithful men, who would in turn invest themselves in yet others.
 - 3. Christian leaders must develop future leaders.
 - 4. There needs to be planning - leaders are not trained by accident - we can't just work day to day.
- B. There is a responsibility of leaders to train, and a responsibility of followers to become trained:
 - 1. The best leaders have had good followers
 - 2. Good leaders first learn how to be good followers
- C. I might add that currently the challenge is to develop male leadership.
 - 1. Notice the chain of command (1Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23).

(1Cor 11:3) But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

(Eph 5:23) For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.
 - 2. We must abide by God's chain of authority if we are going to succeed as God's people.
 - 3. We might ask, "Why are women in many places usurping the authority over the men?" It is because many men are acting like wimps and not taking the leadership role.
 - 4. We must accept the challenge of making a difference in the world, evangelizing our community, following God's word, and developing leadership.

VI. CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. Ultimately, moving the church forward into the future involves every member
 - 1. Since we are the church, the church moves only as its people move
 - 2. All these challenges are personal challenges to each of us.
- B. This is the Lord's Church...
 - It is composed of people just like me.*
 - It will be friendly if I am.*
 - It will do great work if I work.*
 - It will make generous gifts to many causes if I am generous*
 - It will bring others into its fellowship if I bring them*
 - Its seats will be filled if I fill them*
 - It will be a church of loyalty and love, of faith and service.*
 - If I who make it what it is, am filled with these*
 - Therefore, with God's help, I dedicate myself to the task of being*
 - All these things the church should be.*
- C. WILL YOU ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE?
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians, erring Xians.