

# The Church of the Living God

1 Timothy 3:14-16

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 5, 2025

## Introduction

- ❖ I'm looking forward to this new year because of some new ministry developments on the horizon. **As most of you know, we're moving Pastor Henry over to serve as our new Administrative Pastor.** His new role will be primarily focused on supporting the ministry staff (from all three congregations), supervising the office staff, and overseeing the business operations of the church. But, when it comes to preaching, teaching, and shepherding, he'll still carry out those ministries with us here in the English congregation.
  - **But that transition for Pastor Henry to that new role will have to wait until we hire someone to take on some of his current English ministry duties.** The new English minister/pastor will be asked to primarily oversee our college fellowship and our community groups. That search has begun in earnest, so we ask for you to please keep that in your prayers.
  
- ❖ **Another big development will be the new fundraising campaign we're kicking off today and stretching to the end of February.** This will be an opportunity to get involved in our effort to renovate and remodel that building we bought next door. To make it usable for all of our ministry purposes. That's why we included a new pledge form in your bulletin. This is a chance for all of us to get some skin in the game. I'll come back to it later in the message.
  - Next week, I want to keep our attention on the building project, but I want to focus on God's providential hand and how he's been guiding us along the way. Then, on the last Sunday of this month, I look forward to our 50th Anniversary Combined Service. It's going to be a sweet time of worship with our brothers and sisters in the other congregations, reflecting on God's faithfulness to us over the past five decades.
    - Now just to give you all a heads up sermon-wise, after this month, we plan to get back into the book of Genesis. It's a long book, and we've dipped into it a couple of times already. My goal is to finish preaching through Genesis by the end of the year. We'll break it up with a few smaller series. One during the Lenten season on prayer and fasting. And then a series through the book of Hebrews during the summer.
  
- ❖ So that's where we're going in our English worship throughout the course of this year. **But to kick things off, I wanted to preach on a passage that focuses on the church.** Since we're about to start fundraising for our new church building, it's only fitting to remind ourselves of our church's biblical identity.
  - **We know the church is *not* a building. It's *not* a place you go to on Sundays. No, the church is a people with whom you gather on Sundays.** Usually in a building. In our case, this one. Lord-willing, in a couple years, this gathering will take place in the building next door.
  
- ❖ **But, when it comes to the church, the question of *where* really takes a back seat to the question of *who* and *what*.** Who is the church? And what is her mission? Those are far more important questions. That's what we want to explore this morning. Before we expand our space, I want to make sure we understand our place in God's mission.

- ❖ Now when I was praying over a text to preach on, it dawned on me that a perfect text would be the one I see, hanging on the wall, every time I walk into our church building through the main doors. If you haven't noticed, there's a plaque by the keypad and etched on it is a phrase from **1 Timothy 3:15**, "*the church of the living God, pillar and ground of the truth.*"
  - I see that verse almost every day, and I've never preached on it. So it made sense to preach, this morning, on 1 Timothy 3:14-16 and to draw out three images of the church. The church is (1) The household of God, (2) The assembly of the Living God, (3) The pillar and buttress of the Truth.

### The Household of God

- ❖ Let's start with the first image that the Apostle Paul gives us in v15. **He describes the church as the household of God.** We're a household. A family. Belonging to God. That's who we are. Let's read starting again in v14, "*<sup>14</sup>I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, <sup>15</sup>if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*"
  - Now to offer a little context, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who was pastoring the fledgling church of Ephesus. Paul had planted the church but has since continued his missionary journey. Well, in our text, in vv14-15, he explains his reason for writing this letter. **In lieu of his absence, he's writing to Timothy – with the expectation that he'll read this before the congregation – so that all the brothers and sisters will know how to behave (how to conduct themselves) in the household of God.**
    - And he covered that in chapter 2. It was all about how churches ought to conduct their gatherings, their corporate worship. And in the first part of chapter 3, he gave Timothy instructions on what to look for in prospective church leaders, in the elders and deacons of the church.
- ❖ What I want to draw attention to is the first image he gives to describe the church. The church is the household of God. **And just as you might've heard your parents say, "There are certain rules in this house," – or that's something you've told your kids – the same goes for the church.** Just as you might find, in any of our households, certain expectations of acceptable conduct and particular roles and responsibilities distributed among family members – you can find similar patterns within the household of God. That's the basis for all the instructions Paul gives in chapters 2-3.
- ❖ But here's where we need to press the "*household of God*" image a bit further. **It's natural for many of us to stop at the functional nature of a household.** Because that's how we experienced our households of origin. We lived under the same roof but our interactions with family members were largely functional. The focus is on what you bring to the table.
  - If that's been your predominant experience – if the interactions within your own household are largely functional and not all that relational – then it's no surprise if that's what you expect from church. **You're content with a largely functional approach to doing church together.** So church feels more like going to a concert or TED talk or more like visiting a community center.

- ❖ **But in a household – in a family – relationships are primary.** That’s not to say there aren’t rules in this house or that there aren’t roles and responsibilities. But relationships are the most important thing. We’re missing the point if we’re largely missing the relational component of a household. And the same applies to the household of God.
  - Brothers and sisters, ask yourself: **Would the interactions you have with the fellow worshippers around you be best described as functional or relational?** And don’t just think about members of your small group. I’m not surprised if your small group feels relational. But when Paul said “household of God,” he wasn’t describing a small group within the church of Ephesus. He was describing *the church of Ephesus*.
  
- ❖ **Bottomline, that means we should *not* be content with our experience of church until our interactions with the fellow brothers and sisters around us feel relational.** Not until we actually feel like family. And if you don’t know where to start – start with learning each others names. **It’s no surprise that church feels functional when you don’t know people’s names.** I don’t need to know my waitress’s name. I just need her to do her job well, to carry out her function. But is that how we see people at church? How we see those who are serving you here on this stage or behind the scenes? “I don’t need to know their names as long as they’re doing their job well.” No, we know that’s not enough.
  - **Make a point to learn names.** Start with the names of the new members of the church. Their names and pictures and short bios are on that bulletin board in the hallway by the water fountain. And if you’re a member, make good use of your members’ prayer guide, which has names and faces for all our English side church members and immediate family. And once you feel confident you know their names, then take the next step to reach out and introduce yourself. You’re family after all!
  
- ❖ And you’re forever family. That’s what’s unique about the household of God. **Family members in God’s household are in an eternal relationship with one another.** We will *always* be brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - So just as parents admonish their children to make up and get along because, “he’ll always be your brother,” or “she’ll always be your sister,” – well how much more true is that for those of us in the household of God? Sure, we can frustrate and annoy one another like brothers and sisters do. We can get mad at each other.
  
- ❖ But we can’t leave it there. They will always be your brother or sister in Christ. **So make up and get along. You have every resource available to you in the gospel of reconciliation.** Our Elder Brother laid down his life to reconcile us to God and to reconstitute us as family – can we not lay down our pride and old grudges to reconcile with fellow members of the same spiritual family?
  - **Do you really want to wait until you arrive in the New Heaven and the New Earth? When you and your estranged sibling in Christ are brought before the same Heavenly Father?** At that point, he’s going to make sure you get along. But do you really want to wait until then?

## The Assembly of the Living God

- ❖ Make every effort now to experience the true reality of family here in our church. We are the household of God. That's the first image Paul gives us. Let's now consider the second. **We are the assembly of the Living God.**
  - It says "*the church of the Living God*" in v15, but that word for *church* is the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word literally means "*the called out ones.*" I know it sounds spiritual, but *ekklesia* is a common Greek word used quite frequently outside of a spiritual context. **It's a word that describes a public assembly of citizens, gathered for some common purpose.**
  
- ❖ If you're familiar with the book of Acts, you might remember how during Paul's first visit to Ephesus, a riot was started and Paul's life was threatened (Acts 19:21-41). The town clerk tried to settle down the crowd. He tells them to rely on their legal system and to bring charges against each other "in the regular assembly (*ekklesia*)." And then the chapter ends with these words, "*And when he has said these things, he dismissed the (ekklesia) assembly.*"
  - **So in the same city Ephesus, among the same citizens, any public gathering with a common purpose (be it for good or for ill) would've been properly described as an *ekklesia*.** And that would include a public gathering of Christians for the common purpose of worshipping their Lord and making disciples in his name. What we typically call a church.
  
- ❖ Now think about the implications – **the significance of the church being fundamentally a public assembly.** A public gathering of people. **And it has everything to do with the real presence of real people.**
  - What we're saying is that a fundamental property of an *ekklesia* (of a church) is that it assembles. It gathers. **So if you say you're a Christian and that you're a part of the church, then the question is – are you normally there when the church assembles?** Because it appears that the gathering, the public assembly, *this* (what we're doing right now) is fundamental to being the church.
  
- ❖ **Imagine a guy who claims to be a basketball player and a member of a basketball team – but is rarely there when the team assembles.** Whether for practice or for an actual game. Not there in person. It's great that he owns a team jersey and his name is on the roster. **But the whole point of being on a basketball team is to be present when the team actually assembles to function as a team.** In the same way, being present here in the public assembly of worshippers –worshipping our Lord – is fundamental to being a part of the church.
  
- ❖ This point is reinforced by the way Paul calls us the assembly "*of the living God.*" **The emphasis on "*living*" is intended to stress the real, living presence of God in our assembly.** Scripture is abundantly clear that God is omnipresent. He is fully present everywhere, all at once. But, at the same time, Scripture teaches that God is uniquely present when two or more are gathered in his name (Mt 18:20; 1 Cor 5:4).

- ❖ **There's something unique (special) that happens when the church of the Living God assembles.** There's an experience to be shared of the real presence of the Living God. Something you don't experience in private worship. You don't experience it in online worship. Only when the assembly of the Living God assembles – particularly around the communion table (like we'll do later in the service) – only in that corporate context do we experience this fullness of the real presence of the Living God.
- ❖ **So if that's true, then anyone who desires a deeper, more intimate experience of the fullness of God should make it one of the highest priorities to be here every Lord's Day when the assembly of the Living God assembles.** Perhaps that's the New Year's Resolution that the Lord is laying on your heart. Perhaps it's heavy on your conscience. Because you know that, in the recent past, gathering with the church for corporate worship hasn't been a priority. Either you're often absent. Or you're regularly here but mentally checked out.
  - But now you're feeling convicted and you want to make a change. This is a great time to do it. **Make it a resolution to increase your frequency in assembling with the assembly of the Living God.** And don't be content to simply fill a pew. Make every effort to actively engage in worship and to actively engage with church members before and after service.

### **The Pillar and Buttress of the Truth**

- ❖ So far we've seen Paul apply to the church the images of the household of God and the assembly of the Living God. Here's the third image – the church is the pillar and buttress of the truth. That's there at the end of v15.
  - Paul is expressing two functions of the church in relation to the truth of the gospel. Which he beautifully summarizes in a gospel hymn in v16. **The church's job is to support and display the truth.** To support the gospel like a buttress and to display the truth like a pillar.
- ❖ **The Greek word translated as “*buttress*” in the ESV only appears here in the NT and different English translations use different words.** One says *bulwark* (NRSV), one says *ground* (KJV), another says *support* (NASB), a few say *foundation* (NIV, CSB). I think the support or defense of the truth is the underlying idea. That's why the ESV went with *buttress*.
  - You may have seen images, earlier this month, of the newly restored Notre Dame in Paris. It reopened after years of repair after a devastating fire in 2019. **Notre Dame is well-known for its flying buttresses.** Those long arches are designed to keep the walls of a building up. Reallocating to the ground the lateral forces pushing out on the walls that are holding up the roof. If not for their buttresses, these buildings won't stand for very long. They'll collapse.
    - **In the same way, the truth of God is under constant pressure and threat.** And it needs the church to support it like a buttress supports and stabilizes a building. When every wind of doctrine comes storming at us, the church's task is to hold fast to the Word of God. To buttress and bolster the truth.

- ❖ **Now let's take a quick look at the truth of the gospel that we're supposed to support and defend.** Look at v16, "*Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*"
  - **Notice, in the first two lines of that gospel hymn, an emphasis on the Incarnation and the Resurrection.** The Son of God was "*manifested in the flesh.*" He came so close. He became one with us. Identifying with our weakness. Bearing our sin and shame as he died on the cross. But though he died a sinner's death, through his resurrection on the third day, the Son was "*vindicated by the Spirit.*" The fact that death had no hold on him proves (vindicates) Jesus's innocence. His righteousness.
  
- ❖ **The next two lines of the hymn speak of the witnesses of Christ. Those who witness his saving work with their own eyes and testify to it.** "*Seen by the angels.*" "*Proclaimed* (implied by the apostles) *among the nations.*" So the angels were eyewitnesses of Jesus's incarnation, sinless life, sin-atonement death, and victorious resurrection. They had front row seats to it all. And the apostles were also eyewitnesses, and they took what they saw and shared the good news to the nations (*ethnoi*).
  - And the last two lines focus on how Christ and his good news are received. "*Believed on in the world.*" The mission of taking the gospel to the nations has and will continue to bear fruit. The unreached peoples of the world *will* believe if someone would only bring them the good news. And then that last line, "*taken up in glory,*" is a reference to Christ's ascension – to his being received by heaven as the vindicated, glorified Savior of the World.
  
- ❖ So v16 perfectly encapsulates the truth that the church is called to support, to buttress. **To hold fast to the gospel against all winds of change.** But the church can't simply adopt a defensive posture. Because we're not just a buttress of the truth. We're a pillar. And pillars are designed to lift things high and put them on display.
  - **In ancient Greece, pillars or columns were designed – not just to hold firm a roof – but to thrust it high into the air for all to see, even from a far distance.** The Ephesians could easily make this connection since their city housed the famous Temple of Artemis, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. It had a hundred Ionic columns, each over 60 feet high, lifting up into the sky a marvelous marble roof that captured the attention of anyone entering the city, even from a great distance.
  
- ❖ **Church, in the same way, our job is to be a pillar of the truth – lifting high the gospel of Jesus Christ.** Putting it on display for all the world to see, to admire, and to believe on for their hope and salvation.
  - **And how exactly do we function as pillars putting the gospel on display?** On one hand, we do that through the preaching and teaching of the Word. **The truth of the gospel is put on display in the faithfulness of our church's teaching.** At the same time, we each have a personal responsibility to serve as pillars. **The goodness of the gospel can be displayed in the personal holiness of each church member.**

- ❖ And then, on a corporate level, we put the gospel on display through our community. **The beauty of the gospel can be put on display through the highly relational, grace-filled interactions between church members.**
  - The truth of the gospel displayed in our teaching. The goodness of the gospel displayed in our holy character. And the beauty of the gospel displayed in our loving community. **The truth, goodness, and beauty of our great God made visible through his church – for all the world to see and to believe on.** That’s the mission.

### Leaving a Legacy

- ❖ **And that mission – to display and defend the truth like pillars and buttresses – has been foundational to all our building efforts over the past two years.** In purchasing those 10 acres next door, which included the former Mattress Firm headquarters. A building nearly three times the size of ours and renovated to the bare bones just back in 2016. But of course, they used it as an office building. We need to renovate it and make it functional for all of our ministry purposes as a church. That’s the big project that lies before us.
  - This past year, we made large strides in choosing an architect and contractor. The design process has begun in earnest. And should wrap up by the first half of this year, and then we’ll begin the permitting phase with the city. And, Lord-willing, we can begin construction by the start of next year.
- ❖ **But the most immediate next step for all of us is to fundraise for all the renovations.** We’ve presented a master plan that can be broken into three construction phases. The total fundraising goal is \$18M. We’re also open to selling a portion of our existing property to help us reach that goal. But, before we entertain that option, we want to hold another pledge campaign and challenge all of you to participate, especially all church members.
  - I can announce today that we already have \$2.4M pledged towards the renovations. If we just focus on the cost of Phase One – \$10.5M (which is the bare minimum we need to raise) – we’re almost a quarter of the way there. And that doesn’t even factor in a potential land sale. So take a look at the pledge form in your bulletin. There’s also an online Google form you can access through that QR code. **Please prayerfully consider how you can participate and help us build out this vision.**
- ❖ Now if you’re looking for guidance on how much to pledge – in a significant way that makes this all a reality – then consider this. If we factor in a potential land sale, then our internal fundraising goal would be \$13.5 million. And that’s about five times the average of our annual general fund giving over the last two years.
  - **So if each of us took the average of our annual giving to the general fund over the last two years and multiplied it by five – if we’re able to pledge that amount as a gift to this renovation project, then we got our goal.** I realize that’s a significant gift for those who are faithfully tithing your annual household income. Maybe you’re still trying to fulfill your initial pledge. But you already have a stewardship mindset, so you know we give out of love, out of obedience, and out of faith – trusting that the Lord is faithful and that he can always make a way.

- ❖ Now, for some of you, it might not be too difficult to pledge your annual giving by a factor of five. But perhaps that means you haven't been giving to your capacity. **I think what's more important than fundraising this project is for you to develop a stewardship mindset.** Where you see 100% of your income as belonging to the Lord and where you faithfully give a tithe (10% of your household income) directly to the work of the gospel *through* your local church. **So if you have yet to adopt a practice of tithing, then I encourage you to make that a resolution for this new year.** That change is going to have a longer lasting impact for *you* – that goes far beyond this building project.
  - But, of course, if God is laying it on your heart to participate in this project and you're trying to figure out how much to pledge, I challenge you to calculate what would be an annual tithe for you and to increase that by a factor of five and, if possible, to faithfully pledge that amount.
  
- ❖ Some of your brothers and sisters already gave a significant amount towards the purchase of the land. **This is your chance to help bear the burden.** To give some relief to your brothers and sisters who have been carrying an extraordinary load in the past couple of years.
  - So please take some time in the next few weeks to pray over this, to talk it over with family, and to gather as much information as possible. We're going to organize a few more info sessions in the weeks to come. Take some time to visit our dedicated building project page on our website. Watch the videos. Peruse the FAQ page. Stay informed. Stay engaged.
  
- ❖ And don't lose sight of the bigger picture. The bigger vision behind all of this. Yes, we believe God has laid this task upon us – to attend to our physical church building. **But *this* building here –and *that* building next door – are only important in service of the one building that truly matters. The spiritual building that God himself has constructed.** In which we serve as pillars and buttresses.
  - Whatever we end up constructing next door will eventually wither and decay. But the church of the Living God will last forever into eternity. So let's not lose sight of our primary mission to build up the church – to make and to mature more disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations.