

October 17, 2004 by Steve Brandon



False Religion

Matthew 21:12-22

False Religion...

1. Uses Religion for Profit (verses 12-14).
2. Won't Worship Jesus (verses 15-17).
3. Lacks Fruit (verses 18-22).

Before I was a pastor, I worked in the secular world at a hospital in the computer department. One of my duties, which I did about five times each year was running the midnight operations when our regular midnight operator was on vacation. I would stay up all night ensuring that the computer systems worked correctly. My duties included printing and distributing massive reports. Since the staff at the hospital during the night was minimal, we also helped to relieve the main receptionist for a "lunch" break at 3am. In that capacity, I would answer the phone and transfer it appropriately, enter new patients into the computer system, and direct people who came through the doors. I remember on one occasion when I was relieving the main receptionist, a Catholic priest happened to come by. He asked about the location of a very sick patient in the emergency department. I told him where the patient was. He proceeded on. Not five minutes later, this priest came back through where I was sitting, and left the building. About an hour later, I found out that this priest had come to administer Last Rites to this patient, who was dying. I also found out that the patient died only a few minutes after this priest had left.

Certainly, this priest had done his religious duty, but was not doing his pastoral duty in seeking to console the family. And how many are there in our land who are like this Catholic priest, performing outward religious ceremony while giving little attention to the heart of the matter. This morning, we will be looking at Matthew 21:12-22, in which Jesus will speak against those who are involved with religious activity, without the heart. In this text, we find Jesus cleansing the temple and cursing the fig tree. Like two weeks ago when we looked at the triumphal entry, these events are living parables which have significance beyond the event themselves. In cleansing the temple, Jesus was teaching the Jews how far they had deviated from worship that please to the Lord: their worship needed transformation. In cursing the fig tree, Jesus was teaching what will happen to those who bear no fruit. In so doing, Jesus teaches us about "False Religion." I have identified three characteristics of false religion.

False religion, ...

1. Uses Religion for Profit (verses 12-14).

In verse 12, we find Jesus entering the temple. Let me tell you what He saw. He saw a huge crowd of people. Like I told you a few weeks ago, Jesus came to Jerusalem during the week of the Passover, when Jews from all around the nation would come to Jerusalem. Two weeks ago, I told you that as many as two million people may have come upon this city, whose normal population was somewhere around 30,000. The focal point of all of their celebrations would have been the temple. All of these people had come up to Jerusalem to offer up sacrifices, according to the law of God (Exodus 12). These sacrifices were performed in the temple. Upon approaching the temple area, the density of the crowds would have been even greater than Jesus experienced during the triumphal entry. Some of these people would have brought their own animals to sacrifice. But for many, the long trip to Jerusalem would have been made much more difficult if they brought their own animals. And the Jews understood this, so they came up with a system. In the court of the Gentiles, they had set up a marketplace, where you could simply purchase the animals that you needed to sacrifice. In and of itself, that wouldn't be too bad. The idea was a good one. It would have helped ease the burden of travel. You wouldn't have to lug an animal along a three day journey from Galilee. My father always tells me, "Steve, when you travel, it is best to travel light." Furthermore, the Jews provided money changers for those worshipers who came from foreign cities or nations outside of Israel, where their currency was not accepted in Jerusalem.

I think that this arrangement was a bit like concessions at a ball game. I told you recently how I attended a Milwaukee Brewers game with my neighbor. I'm sitting in my seat and these guys are walking up and down the isles, carrying various items they want to sell you. They sell drinks. They sell hotdogs. They sell pretzels. They sell ice cream. Of course, they sell peanuts and crackerjack. Why? Because it's convenient. Think about it. You're at a ball game for three hours and you get a bit hungry or thirsty after a while. They are ready to help you out. But what do you know about the price of food at the ball park? They charge you through the roof. For a simple hotdog, four bucks. For a large pop, three seventy-five. For some nachos, three bucks. They can do this, because they have a captive audience. If you are hungry, you have no other choice, and you will pay the high prices.

For those in the temple, they had an equally captive audience. It was very difficult to bring an animal from home. But, for worshipers to sacrifice, they needed one. And prices were sky-high. Those who sought to beat the system by bringing their animal from home or by purchasing one from a nearby village, would often find that the priests would deny their sacrifice as "unclean" since it wasn't purchased at the temple. From a business standpoint of view, it was a great thing ... for the priests. But, from God's point of view, it was a terrible thing. And when Jesus saw this, I'm sure that he was angered at the profits that people were making as worshipers were coming to worship. And do you know what Jesus did? Verse 12 tells us exactly what he did.

"And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves." (Matt. 21:12)

It is difficult to fully describe the intensity of Jesus' actions at this point. Simply try to imagine the sounds of tables turning and chairs being overthrown and hundreds of people being forced out of temple. Verse 12 tells us that Jesus cast out all those who were buying and selling. One man was able to do this! Today, at a ball game or concert event, if one man causes a disturbance, it is often only a few security guards who are able to apprehend the offending party and remove him from the stadium. But in this instance, it was Jesus alone who cast many out of the temple!

Did it cause a commotion? Certainly it did. Were people shocked? Certainly they were. But, it allowed Jesus to make a simple point: "You are taking advantage of people, ... and it's not right." To use Jesus' words, He said, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." In this one sentence, Jesus pulls two Old Testament quotations. The first is from Isaiah 56:7, where God speaks about the abundant blessings that will come upon the people of God when they return to Him. God will make them joyful. God will accept their sacrifices. And the temple of God will be a place where people come and love to pray. The second quotation is taken from Jeremiah 7:11, in which God gives His thoughts on wicked people, who come and worship in the temple. He speaks of murderers (Jer. 9). He speaks of liars (Jer. 7:9). He speaks of idolaters (Jer. 7:9). He speaks of thieves (Jer. 7:9). These are wicked, sinful people who come into the temple, saying "we are delivered!" But God calls it an abomination, "when this house, which is called by My name, becomes a den of robbers."

When you place them together as Jesus did, the thrust of His message was that the worship that is being offered here in this place is entirely wrong! It needs to be reformed! It needs to be changed! Such is the importance that Jesus places upon having right hearts when you come to worship Him. God is very concerned with this issue. It is very important to come and worship the Lord with a proper heart. The prophet Amos described the Lord's action when those who were wicked came and feigned worship. Amos wrote, quoting God, ...

I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. (Amos 5:21-23).

The Lord was telling Israel that their worship was like the sound of fingernails on a chalkboard. God would plug His ears to as not to hear their worship. He would turn away from their sacrifices when people are worshipping with wrong hearts.

Regarding Jesus' attitude toward the things that were taking place in the temple, the Christian world today has much to learn. There are many false teachers out there who willingly will take advantage of people in much the same way as those in the temple did. Hucksters on television will seek after sums of money from anyone who is willing to listen and give money to their "ministry." The people give and they take. It's not surprising, because Peter told us that greed is one of the signs of a false teacher (2 Peter. 2:14). Peter tells us that these false teachers will "entice unstable souls" (2 Peter 2:14) for their own profit. I don't watch much Christian television, but I have seen enough to know that these teachers spend a bunch of time on their television shows attempting to entice people to send in their money. They will make incredible promises. I have often heard them say something like, "If you will take your step of faith and give to us your \$133 faith pledge, the Lord will double your money within the next six months." Whenever I have heard this type of argument, I have always thought to myself, "How about this plan: Why don't you step out in faith and send me your \$133 faith pledge and trust that the Lord will double your money that you need so desperately." I know that they would refuse such an offer. In so doing, they are demonstrating that they are simply taking advantage of people. How great is the contrast of Jesus in verse 14, where we read that "the blind and the lame came to [Jesus] in the temple, and He healed them." Jesus wasn't looking to exploit the rich. Jesus was looking to help the destitute. He didn't come looking to profit from the people. Rather, He came to serve the people.

Lest we think that the issue here is only the televangelists, I want to help you think that the danger of taking advantage of people is much greater than this. I did a bit of research this week into Christian retailing. Christian retailing involves the selling of Christian items for profit. Whether it's books or tapes or CD's or plaques or mugs, it is BIG BUSINESS. I found out this week that there is a magazine called "Christian Retailing" which is devoted to reporting and discussing trends in the world of selling and purchasing of Christian items. In recent years, this entire industry has boomed. It is huge business. Christian books have even topped the list of best sellers. Little bracelets that say "WWJD" on them have sold like gangbusters. In fact, there have been more than 17 million WWJD bracelets sold in the United States. And people have figured out that if people will purchase WWJD bracelets, they will purchase WWJD Bibles, WWJD T-shirts, WWJD hats, latte mugs and stuffed animals. The prayer of Jabez has also been a huge money maker. Today, you can purchase Prayer of Jabez magnets, Prayer of Jabez key rings, Prayer of Jabez paperweights, Prayer of Jabez afghans, Prayer of Jabez mugs, Prayer of Jabez t-shirts, Prayer of Jabez mouse pads, Prayer of Jabez tote bags, Whatever people will purchase, there is someone willing to sell it.

Don't get me wrong. I don't think that there is anything wrong with a little bracelet that you wear to remind you that you live always in the presence of God. I don't think that there is anything wrong with the prayer of Jabez on your blanket that you use to cuddle up to the fire in the fireplace. In fact, I think that it is a wonderful thing that there are so many items for us to be able to use that will help our spiritual walk. But it's my fear that many places see these types of items as a potential money maker, rather than a genuine help for ministry. I have even heard that some of the most well-known Christian book publishing companies are not owned by Christians. As such, they cannot be making business decisions based upon what is pleasing to the Lord. Rather, they are making decision solely based on what will turn the biggest profit.

Please understand, the production of Christian materials is not wrong in and of itself, and I thank the Lord for the abundance of Christian material available to us today. I'm simply saying that there are potential dangers in these things. God hates it when religion is used to obtain a financial end! Regarding Jesus and the temple, I don't believe that these abuses all began overnight. I'm sure that they started out fine enough (like many of the Christian retailing businesses in our land). I don't believe that the Lord was against the selling of the animals outside the temple for sacrifice. Physicians and carpenters and teachers and potters who owned no animals had to purchase animals somewhere since they needed the animals for sacrifice. The entire system certainly began as a way to help the worship of God. There was nothing wrong with this. When Jesus rebuked the moneychangers, it was because they were making a hefty profit out of religion. It was no longer about

worship. Rather, it was about money! Today, we face the same danger.

False religion ...

2. Won't Worship Jesus (verses 15-17).

"But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant, and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?' And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there. (Matt. 21:15-17)

With these verses, we see the true motives of the chief priests and scribes: They were against Jesus. They saw the wonderful things that Jesus had done (verse 15). They heard the wonderful praise to Jesus offered by the children (verse 15). And "they became indignant" (verse 15). People were worshiping and praising Jesus and the chief priest and scribes wanted it stopped! They came to Jesus and told Him to stop this nonsense. Verse 16, "Do You hear what these are saying?" These religious leaders knew full well what these children were saying of Jesus. They were worshiping Him! But, Jesus received their worship and justified it from the pages of Scripture. Jesus quotes from Psalm 8:2, in which David is worshiping God and describing how even little children are involved in the worship of God as well. The heavens are displaying the wonder of God (Psalm 8:1). The mouths of "infants and nursing babes" do the same (Ps. 8:2). As children were created to give praise to God, so also would they give praise and honor to Jesus.

The worship of Jesus is where the continental divide of all religions takes place. All religions either worship Jesus as the only true God or they don't worship Jesus as the only true God. And those that refuse to worship Jesus are false religions. Judaism fails at this very point. They don't recognize Jesus as worthy of worship. Islam fails at this point as well. They may respect Jesus as a prophet, but they won't worship Jesus. Hindus, with their many gods, may claim to worship Jesus, but not as the only true God. For many Christian cults, this is the divide as well. Mormons will not worship Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses will not worship Jesus. Christian Science will not worship Jesus.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem during the triumphal entry, He received the praise that He deserved. But when the chief priests and scribes refused to worship Him and sought to hinder those who were, they demonstrated themselves to be false. It's no wonder that this is the dividing line. The content of the Christian gospel revolves around Jesus. If you deny Jesus, if you take from His glory. If you minimize His work, then you are striking at the very root of salvation! John Piper has put it more clearly than I could ever hope to do. He wrote,

"The Christian Gospel is 'the gospel of the glory of Christ' because its final aim is that we would see and savor and show the glory of Christ. For this is none other than the glory of God. 'He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature' (Heb. 1:3). 'He is the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15). When the light of the Gospel shines in our hearts, it is 'the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6). And when we 'exult in hope of the glory of God' (Romans 5:2), that hope is 'the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus' (Titus 2:13)." (Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ, p. 22).

When Jesus gives salvation to us, He does so with a purpose. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me" (John 17:24). Jesus desires that we would see His glory. In this sense, a major reason why Jesus saves people is for His own purposes: Jesus delights in putting His glory on display. Those who refuse to worship Jesus are those who refuse to acknowledge the glory of Jesus. And those who refuse to acknowledge the glory of Jesus aren't Christians.

As these religious leaders resisted the worship of Jesus, they demonstrated where they stood: They were involved in a false religion. They hated Jesus. They wanted to destroy Jesus. Perhaps this is why we read in verse 17, "And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there." During this last week of Jesus' life, He didn't spend His nights in Jerusalem. He spent His evenings in Bethany, two miles away, just over the Mount of Olives. He probably stayed at the home of Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. Perhaps when Jesus left them, it was time to distance Himself from the chief priests and the scribes for another day. They had demonstrated their antagonism against Jesus. They had refused to worship Jesus. They had attempted to stop the worship of Jesus.

It comes down to you as well this morning. When you think of Jesus, does your heart melt with praise and adoration and devotion and worship to Him? If you had seen Jesus disrupt the temple sacrifices in that day, would you have joined the chorus of the children singing, "Hosanna to the Son of David"? Would you have joined those who were angry with Jesus? Two weeks ago, I gave you four reasons why you ought to worship Jesus.

1. Because of His Saving Plan (verse 1).
2. Because He is the King (verses 2-8).
3. Because He is the Savior (verse 9).
4. Because You Know Him (verses 10-11).

Do you worship Jesus?

Let's turn our attention to the final characteristic of false religion. False religion ...

3. Lacks Fruit (verses 18-22)

Here we find Jesus arriving in Jerusalem for another day. Look at verse 18, "Now in the morning, He returned to the city." By this time, it's

Tuesday or Wednesday morning. When He came into the city, we find out that Jesus "became hungry." We don't know why Jesus was hungry. Perhaps Martha and Mary didn't send Jesus off with a good breakfast. However, I suspect that Jesus was dealing with what was soon to take place. Jesus knew that His death was coming within the week. On three occasions, Jesus told the disciples that they He would be killed in Jerusalem. Jesus took this very seriously. In fact, when Jesus is in the garden we will see how difficult it was for Him to face. Perhaps He had spent the night with a knot in His stomach and didn't eat much in the morning.

Whatever the reason, we read of how Jesus spotted a potential solution to help relieve His hunger pangs, "And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only" (verse 19). It's no wonder that Jesus saw this fig tree. There must have been many of them around this region. The city of "Bethphage," was named for its figs. "Beth" means house. "phage" means figs. Furthermore, this wasn't just a small bush. Fig trees can get up to 30 feet tall and several feet wide. In fact, when Jesus called Nathanael, he was sitting underneath a fig tree, probably enjoying it's shade. We find out from Mark's account that it "was not the season for figs" (Mark 11:13). And yet, this particular fig tree was full of leaves. Now, when a fig tree is full of leaves, it is usually an indication that it has figs. This is because figs come out before the leaves. When they first come out, they are small, green, and don't taste so well, but they still can be eaten. Jesus was seeking to satisfy His hunger with some figs. But, upon searching for figs, He found none. All he found was leaves. As a result, Jesus cursed the fig tree. He said, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." We read that at once the fig tree withered. Mark tells us that it was "withered from the roots up" (Mark 11:20). This was a big, thriving, healthy tree until Jesus cursed it. And when He did, it never bore fruit again.

When you get to this point of the story, you say to yourself, "Why did Jesus curse the tree like this?" Was it simply because He was looking for figs? Again, I think like many of the stories surrounding these last days of Jesus in Jerusalem, Jesus was teaching His disciples through specific object lessons. When Jesus healed the blind men, it was a greater picture of the blindness of Israel. When Jesus overturned the tables in the temple, it was a greater picture of the need for the worship system to be reformed. And here, when Jesus cursed the fig tree, it had significance to the nation Israel. Though there were outward signs of life in its leaves, it was bearing no fruit. Just as this fig tree bore no more fruit, neither would Israel. It is a living illustration of what Jesus had previously taught in Luke 13:6-9, which reads, ...

And He began telling this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any. "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Certainly, this parable was directed toward the Jewish people. Jesus had been among them for more than three years ministering to them. For three years, Jesus had been patient. For three years, Jesus had sought fruit from the Jewish people. His patience was long. Yet finally, there reached a point when His patience would run out. I believe that the cursing of this fig tree was a living parable to indicate that the time for judgment had come.

I believe that this is the point of the parable in Matthew: Though the fig tree put forth signs of life by having leaves, it put forth no fruit. If anything was true of the nation of Israel, there were signs of life. There was activity. There were crowds. There was influence. But there were no figs, only leaves. They had the temple, the Scriptures, the sacrifices, the priesthood, anointing oil, incense, but no figs. Only leaves. You might say this sounds a lot like Christianity today. There's big excitement, activity, much going on, and many people coming, ... but no fruit. There's no figs, only leaves.

Though God had richly blessed the nation of Israel, they had not responded to God. God promised blessing to Israel like no other nation. Israel was delivered like no other nation was delivered. Israel was protected like no other nation. Israel was loved like no other nation. Israel was sent more prophets than any other nation. Israel was entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2). And yet, there were no figs, only leaves. As such, the nation was demonstrated to be false. Because false religion lacks fruit. And the fate of the nation Israel will be much like the fate of the fig tree. In a mere 35 years, the city of Jerusalem would be totally destroyed by the Romans in A. D. 70.

This is the theme of the rest of the chapter: Israel lacks fruit. Here, the Messiah is entering Jerusalem. The Jewish people ought to receive Him. But, rather than doing so, they reject Him. In verse 23, they question Jesus' authority. Beginning in verse 28, Jesus will tell a story of two sons. The first promised his father that he would work in the vineyard. Yet, when it came time to do so, he didn't go. The second said that he wouldn't work. But later, he repented and did go to work. The son of empty promises is like the nation of Israel. There is outward talk of righteousness, but no fruit of righteousness. They had leaves, but there were no figs. Beginning in verse 33, Jesus will talk about the vine-growers who hated the owner of the vineyard. Their hatred reached such a point that they would kill the son of the owner. Jesus made it very clear that the religious leaders were like the vine-growers. They hate the son and have rejected the chief cornerstone. Israel missed their Savior! They didn't believe in Him. Their religion was all show. Their religion was all cultural. Their religion was all external.

In recent days I have seen this. Perhaps you have as well. Elections are taking place in a few weeks in our country. As a result, the media is filled with comments from the various political candidates. I am astounded at the comments that some of them have made. Many have professed to be Christians and to be very religious. And yet, they fully support abortion. Furthermore, they fully support homosexual marriages. In God's eyes, these things are an abomination. If you support these things and call yourself a Christian, you are like a fig tree that has leaves, but no figs.

This application come straight to us. Is there fruit in your life? Or, is your life all talk, all show, and all activity. Certainly, you may attend Rock Valley Bible Church each week. You may be keeping up on the Bible reading plan. You may be able to talk theology with the best of them. Those things are good. But, is your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ genuine? Are you just talkative and able to talk about religion all day, every day? Or, does your faith descend deep into your heart? Does it move your affections, control your will, keep you from sin, and grant you joy in God. When you think of Jesus Christ, do you know about Him? Or, when you think of Jesus Christ, do you love Him? Do you show it by rejoicing in your Redeemer, by trusting your Savior, by bowing to Him, and by longing for His glory?

I'm not asking you if your faith is great. I'm asking you if your faith is real. This is the thrust of Jesus' message at the end of this section. Perhaps this is because faith is the most important fruit. From faith flow all other spiritual fruit. This section in Matthew closes with the disciples marveling at what just happened to the fig tree. In verse 20, we find them saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" Jesus then addressed their little faith. He said, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to this fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it shall happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (verses 21-22). These verses come as surprising. We have expected Jesus to comment on the failures of Judaism. After all, this appears to be the point of the cleansing the temple, the cursing of the fig tree, and the rest of the chapter. But, Jesus doesn't address this matter. Rather, Jesus gave this lesson to the disciples on faith and its relationship to prayer. Jesus told them that they too could wither fig trees if they had faith. Jesus told them that they could do greater. They could move mountains with praying faith. Surely, he was referring to the Mount of Olives (on which the disciples were standing). He called it "this mountain."

I believe that Jesus was speaking here in hyperbole. I have never heard of anyone actually moving a mountain through prayer alone. Though I have heard of many examples of those who did great things through prayer alone. The two that come most quickly to mind are Hudson Taylor and George Müller. Hudson Taylor was a missionary to China, who God blessed greatly. He pledged "to move man through God, by prayer alone" (Hudson Taylor, *The Growth of a Soul*, p. 135). Indeed, he did, in reaching many for Christ in China.

George Müller was a man of similar convictions. When describing why he began the orphan houses, he wrote, ...

"I had constantly cases brought before me, which proved that one of the special things which the children of God needed in our day, was, to *have their faith strengthened*. I longed to have something to point to, as visible proof, that our God and Father is the same faithful God as ever He was; as willing as ever to *prove* Himself to be the LIVING God, in our day as formerly, *to all who put their trust in Him*. ... I longed to set something before the children of God, whereby they might see, that He does not forsake, even in our day, those who rely upon Him. Also I longed to be instrumental in strengthening their faith, by giving them not only instances from the Word of God, of His willingness and ability to help all those who rely upon Him, but to show them by proofs, that He is the same in our day. ... Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained, *without asking any individual*, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan House: there would be something which, with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God, besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was the primary reason for establishing the Orphan House. I certainly did from my heart desire to be used by God to benefit the bodies of poor children, bereaved of both parents, and seek, in other respects, with the help of God, to do them good for this life; ... but still the first and primary object of the work was (and still is), that God might be magnified by the fact, that the Orphans under my care are provided with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked by me or my fellow-labourers, whereby it may be seen, that God is FAITHFUL STILL, and HEARS PRAYER STILL". (Autobiography of George Müller, pp. 80-81).

George Müller did that. He cared for thousands of orphans. God was faithful to provide for all of their needs. Many sinners were converted by reading the accounts that were published in connection with Müller's work. The hearts of many saints were strengthened as a result of his ministry. I wish someday to have some great stories about God accomplishing great things in my life through faith and prayer alone like these men have. All I can offer before you is this church as proof that the Lord is faithful to answer prayers. The Lord has built it. I certainly have prayed much for it. I have seen the Lord answer prayers. There are things going on in this church that I could never orchestrate or plan or coerce people to do. The Lord has built this church. I am trusting and praying that He will continue His work for the glory of Christ.

Rather than talking about prayer, let's pray. ...

"Lord, you tell us, 'And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive' (Matt. 21:22). I pray now for Rock Valley Bible Church.

-- It's Your delight when Jesus Christ is glorified (John 17:24). So, I pray that our lives would reflect His glory.

-- It's Your delight when people are rooted and grounded in the faith (Eph. 4:15, 16). So, I pray for those in this church to "grow up in all aspects into Him."

-- It's Your delight when Christian are spirit-filled, depending upon you for every breath they take (Eph. 5:18). So, I pray that your spirit will dwell within us to give us hearts of praise, that always give thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:20).

-- It's Your delight when Christians walk pure, sanctified lives (1 Thess. 4:3). So, I pray that you would sanctify us entirely and establish our hearts unblamable in holiness before you and (1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23).

-- It's Your delight when we share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13). So, I pray that we will "keep on rejoicing" in our suffering (1 Pet. 4:13).

-- It's Your delight when brothers dwell together in unity (Ps. 133:1). So, I pray for the unity of this church.

-- It's Your delight when the church demonstrates love to a watching world (John 13:34-35). So, I pray that we would demonstrate our love toward one another.

-- It's Your delight when those who are lost come to faith in Christ (Luke 15:7). So, I pray for You to use Rock Valley Bible Church as a means for reaching the lost.

-- It's Your delight when we trust completely in Christ's sufficient sacrifice (2 Pet. 1:3). So, I pray that all of us might rest completely in the fact that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).

-- It's your delight when the hungry are satisfied, the strangers are invited in, the naked are clothed, the sick are visited, and the prisoners are helped (Matt. 25:35-36).

I pray that Rock Valley Bible Church would be a means for accomplishing all of these things. Lord, I believe these things, as they are clearly given to us in your word. So, I pray that we would receive these things for Your glory alone (Matt. 21:22)."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 17, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
