

Sermon Title: The Greater Levels of Faith – December 23, 2011 (Scripture is from ESV)

Introduction

The theme of the year 2012 for our church is “Increase.” There have already been sermons released in the church like, “Increase Your Capacity to Receive” and “God Wants to Satisfy You” that are encouraging the church to prepare for and to expect increase.

Tonight I’m going to share some of the things God has been putting on my heart in preparation for this next year. I’m also going to share some things that Pastor Robert Daniels and Pastor Benjamin shared with me, Sky, and Pastor Erin during their visit.

The title of tonight’s sermon is, “**The Greater Levels of Faith.**”

Pray

Transition of Leadership and Evil

2011 truly has been a year of transition, with Kim Jong Il’s passing seeming to be the final touch. Just this year Osama Bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, and Kim Jong Il of North Korea all died. Their former regimes of terror are in transition, as are so many governments in the Middle East. While North Korea is still under the reign of Kim Il Sung’s family, it’s clear that the former dictators and great villains of the 20th century have almost all passed away, with many of them being overthrown or killed in this year alone.

What does this mean? That world peace is coming? That there will be greater freedom and human rights for all? No, not at all. I personally feel that there is a transition happening for even greater evil in this world. I personally feel, and these aren’t the views of New Philadelphia Church but are just my own personal thoughts, that we are going to see new world leaders take control of different countries and regions with even more viciousness. We shouldn’t fear this, but we also definitely shouldn’t ever grow complacent in our prayers. Jesus said Himself that the world is going to get darker and darker. But we are ministers of His light and are called to bring His light to wherever He leads us. While there will be great oppression in parts of the world, we should always expect victory and manifestations of God’s Kingdom wherever He directs us.

When the Israelites took the Promised Land, idolatry clearly did not stop around them. In fact, the nations and empires around them plunged into deeper and deeper darkness. But for those who were faithful in Israel, God revealed Himself in mighty ways and was always faithful to deliver them.

Soon it got so dark for Judah that all they could do was solely rely on the Lord. Different kings would try and manipulate the world leaders around them with gifts and pledges, but God never blessed their own efforts because God was never included in them. It was only when the kings confessed, “There is nothing we can do, but our eyes are on you” (2Chronicles 20) that they saw God deliver them in mighty and miraculous ways.

I personally feel God is beginning to call us to walk in this greater faith where we HAVE to fully look to Him. He is taking us to greater levels of faith. And I believe soon the whole church will have to be walking at such greater levels of faith or we will be overcome by anxiety, fear, or temptation.

What do I mean by greater levels of faith? Let me give an example: If God put it on your heart to pray for a friend at church, obeying would require a certain level of faith. Probably not that much. Now if God put it on your heart to directly pray for a non-Christian friend, obeying would require a little more faith. And what if God put it on your heart to pray for your co-workers at work in front of people? And what if God called you to do a church plant in Seoul with the church? How about in Pusan? And what if God called you to drop everything and do a church plant in China?

Notice how each thing requires a different level of faith? Now how about the faith for living off of support money? Doing this alone requires a degree of faith. And then getting married and providing for two people off of support requires more faith. And what about kids? Did you know that the average missionary from North America requires \$6,000 a month in support, with some missionaries requiring as much as \$12,000 a month? The low is \$1,900 a month. I know we have a number of people raising support right now with a minimum goal of \$1,600 a month, but that amount will only suffice in the long run if you aren't planning on ever marrying or having kids or increasing your influence. There is a great difference in faith required for \$1,600 a month and \$12,000 a month.

Our church is not meant to stay at the \$1,600 a month level of faith. We are called to provide for nations! Amen? We aren't meant to stay at the level of faith of only praying for each other in the house. We are called to evangelize and reach the nations! Amen? As the world grows darker around us, we should expect to shine even brighter.

In the first chapter of John, Nathanael declared that Jesus was the Son of God solely because Jesus said that He had seen Nathanael under the fig tree. Jesus responded to Nathanael by saying...

John 1:50-51 – Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He said to him, “Truly, truly I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man.”

Nathanael experienced a level of faith when he first met Jesus. But that level of faith wasn't enough to defend Jesus when Jesus was arrested. His faith was only so much, and this was the same for all the other disciples. They clearly had faith, and even Peter walked on water, but their faith wasn't strong. It wasn't until after Jesus was resurrected and they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit that they were marked by true boldness. Their faith began to go to greater and greater levels. Soon Peter wasn't just healing the cripple, soon his shadow alone was healing people and handkerchiefs he had touched were being brought to the sick to heal them. And according to historical record all the disciples except one ended up being martyred for God, something they didn't have faith to do earlier in their lives.

Greater levels of faith. If you are called to feed a nation, then don't just ask for your daily bread. Expect more! Let your faith rise!!!

Now this next part I am going to share were some revelations that Pastor Robert Daniels and Pastor Benjamin had shared with us at a coffee shop a few weeks ago. I have already been wrestling over these things quite a bit, and so I was blessed to hear their thoughts about the future...

God Judges the Economy

Please turn your Bibles with me to Revelation 18:3-5...

Revelation 18:3-5 – “For all the nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.” Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven and God has remembered her iniquities.”

This is a passage of God passing judgment on Babylon. Babylon has many interpretations, but if you continue to read on that chapter it's clear that one of the main interpretations of Babylon is the world economy. It is clear that God is going to destroy the economy and we aren't to hold on to it. In fact, let me read Revelation 13:16-17...

Revelation 13:16-17 – Also it (the antichrist's false prophet) causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

From this passage it is clear that in the end times, the antichrist is going to have full control over the economy of the world. And later Scripture states that every person who has the mark of the beast will be tormented with fire and sulfur and will have no rest, day or night (Revelation 14:10-11). What this means is that in the end times any person who is looking to the world for their provision rather than to God will face eternal judgment. And what that shows is that in the end times the church will be at a level of faith like no other time in history. And just how will the church be provided for? Turn your Bibles to Isaiah 55...

Isaiah 55:1-2 – Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

The literal translation of these verses is that God will provide. That when the economy falters and we set our trust fully in the Lord, He will make a way. This is a level of faith that I feel God is calling the church to. He isn't expecting us to get there right away, but He is expecting us to head in that direction. And how do we get there? The best example is the contrast between Abraham and Lot.

Abraham and Lot

Abraham was given promises by God on multiple occasions that as Abraham would walk with the Lord and obey Him, God would bless him abundantly. And as Abraham obeyed and left his home country, he indeed became more and more blessed. So much to the point that **Abraham knew that his blessing was not dependent on the earth being fertile or desolate, he knew his blessing was fully dependent on God.** Abraham was independently blessed.

So in Genesis 13 when Abraham's flocks and Lot's flocks become too big for them to be together, Abraham lets Lot choose which land he will inherit. Lot's focus is on the land. He notices the land of Sodom as much more fertile, so he chooses to take Sodom, believing that the land will bless him. Abraham simply agrees and takes the less fertile land, not worrying about anything because he knows God will bless him. And immediately after Abraham makes this choice to trust in the Lord, God appears to Him and says basically, “Look around, I'm giving you everything... north, south, east, west... it's all yours.”

And what happens to Lot? In Genesis 14 we read that he and all his possessions are taken captive in a war that happens in Sodom. Abraham and a tiny army has to go rescue him. They are able to rescue everything of Lot's and of the region of Sodom. When the king of Sodom approaches Abraham after the war he tells Abraham, "Give me the people, but take the goods and possessions for yourself" (Genesis 14:21). Now listen how Abraham responds...

Genesis 14:22-23 – But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'"

Abraham straight up tells the king of Sodom that his blessings are fully from God. He will not even take a shoe strap from the king of Sodom because he will only allow God to receive full glory for providing for him. Abraham moves on, but Lot returns to Sodom. Lot obviously still believes the "fertile land" of Sodom will enable his family to prosper. Abraham will not let anything or anyone receive credit for his prospering but God.

And what was the fate of Lot? Lot became so engrained in the culture of Sodom that he didn't realize he was setting up his family for destruction. He even offered his daughters to be raped and ravished by the vile men of Sodom when they began threatening his guests. When the angels took him out of the city his wife couldn't help but look back and she turned to a pillar of salt. And let's look even closer to what happened. Turn to Genesis 19:17-20...

Genesis 19:17-20 – And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away." And Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lords. Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. Behold, this city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!"

Notice here that the angels tell Lot to run and never look back. They tell him to go to the hills and remove himself from the area. But Lot has become too engrained in the land and he can't let go. He begs them to let him just stay in a small city. He is basically trying to hold on to whatever he can. They grant him his wish. But do you know what ends up happening? Lot becomes so filled with fear that he and his two daughters end up living in a cave. And how do they procreate? The daughters feel they are so isolated that they choose to get their father drunk and sleep with him in order to have children. How ridiculous is that!?

At one point Lot was so blessed to the point that he and Abraham had to split up. Lot chose the fertile land. He believed the land would make him prosper. But his trust in the world soon led to immoral thoughts and compromise, then to rejecting God's command and begging to hold on to the world, and then to eventually losing everything, being overcome by fear, and the last words of his story being perhaps the most shameful part of the entire Bible. **As he began to love the things of the world more than God he soon became overcome by it all.** Let me say that again, "As he began to love the things of the world more than God he soon became overcome by it all."

The difference between Lot and Abraham wasn't that one was materially blessed and the other wasn't. The truth is, both were materially blessed. But one of them, Lot, chose to find

his provision in the world and he lost everything. The other, Abraham, chose to find his provision through the Lord, and he gained everything.

Remember how the first temptation of Jesus by Satan was to turn the stone into bread? Let me read to you Jesus' response in Matthew 4:4...

Matthew 4:4 – But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Jesus refused to turn the stones to bread because He knew it was the Father's job to provide. Let me say that one again, “Jesus refused to turn the stones to bread because He knew it was the Father's job to provide.” Jesus would not manipulate the things of the world for His own provision. Jesus would instead look to the Father. Even when He fed the 5,000, He first looked up to heaven and said a blessing.

What is Your Level of Faith?

So I have to ask you church, “What is your level of faith?” Do you trust more in the economy or in the Father? If you were to hear tomorrow that 50% of all English teachers in Korea would be losing their jobs, would you be nervous or would you be at peace? If I were to tell you that the economy would hit another recession, would you be worried or would you simply pray?

I have to say that what I am preaching right now are words that I personally must really take to heart. I am a missionary and I have lived off of support for six years now. I depend on other peoples' generosity in order to live. And now that I'm married, both Sky and I are now dependant on the giving of others. So when America began to experience recession I immediately began to experience concern that I would begin to lose my supporters and not gain anymore. Why? Because when a recession hits not only do some people lose their jobs and others experience pay cuts, but even those who aren't hit by it often begin to cling to their money out of fear that they too might be hit by the consequences of the recession. And sure enough, some of my supporters began to e-mail me that they could no longer give monthly. But amidst that time God began to convict me strongly that my fear was complete sin.

You see, my fear of the recession exposed my lack of faith in God as a provider. Sure, I had faith that God could provide a certain amount. But as my monthly budget increased, I needed to go to another faith level to believe God could provide even more, even in a time of recession. And if I couldn't believe it, then I would likely fall into the temptation of Lot and try to manipulate the things of the world in order to get my own provision.

Do you know how easily I could raise support if I wanted to? I could easily manipulate so many churches and people into giving to the orphanage ministry. I could tell all these dramatic stories from my children's home and about the situation in North Korea in order to manipulate a compulsion in people to give. And I could get my provision, my way. But how many of you know that Proverbs 16:25 says...

Proverbs 16:25 – There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

You choose to live in the world, then you will die in the world. You choose to make your own provision, then you choose to live as an orphan. You choose to look to the Father, and He will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches (Philippians 4:19).

So I have to ask you again church, “What is your level of faith?” Do you believe we will be in these small sanctuaries for at least another decade because real estate in Korea is so high? Or do you believe that God can provide the favor and the hundreds of thousands of dollars we need to get a large place of our own? Do you believe that when North Korea opens up our church will be able to make a small church and orphanage and reach about 100 people? Or do you believe when North Korea opens up God will provide all we need and we will take the nation? Because if we don’t, then who will?

In Psalm 2:8 God tells us that if we ask, He will give us the nations as our inheritance. In Isaiah 61:6 God says we will eat the wealth of the nations and in their glory we will boast. Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, Mordecai, David, Abraham, Joshua... they all received their inheritance without manipulating a thing. They simply walked with the Lord and obeyed Him. Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai became the #2 of three of the greatest empires in the history of the world, and for each their promotion happened within a day.

Victory of the Church

Church, the Bible is clear in saying that the world is going to become more and more immoral in the last days. The Bible is also clear in saying that the economy will be judged and those who are attached to it will face eternal judgment. But we aren’t of this world. And the judgments this world will face are not for those of the kingdom of God. We will take what God leads us to take and we will take it victoriously. And we will walk in prosperity with every step. In the book of Acts the apostle Paul knew not to go to Asia because the Spirit of God would not let him. Paul knew that his steps were only victorious if they were led by the Lord. We need to have that same understanding and confidence.

This is what I know. New Philadelphia is not meant to be confined to Hillside, Itaewon, and a small church plant in Pusan. We are meant to bring a huge shift in this city, and spread revival to the nations. We need to expect and pray into God opening doors of favor and influence. We need to expect our budget to go from \$400,000 to 4 million to 40 million to 400 million. We need to EXPECT this and pray into it **God, increase our faith!**

This is what I also know. Sky and I are not meant live off of the amount of support we are currently receiving for the rest of our life. If we are to bring revival to North Korea, we need to expect and pray into greater influence, greater favor, and greater provision. We need to go from expecting offerings of \$100 and \$1,000 to \$10,000, \$100,000, and even in the millions. But we will not fall into the trap of Lot and manipulate relationships for such provision. We know it is God who will provide. God’s desire is for the deliverance of North Korea and for the provision of His children there. And God will provide for His children and for His work. We need to EXPECT this and pray into it. And we already are. **God, increase our faith!**

Church, our identity is New Philadelphia, as in, “God is doing a new thing” and “I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut.” As we go into this year of increase, we need to be praying first and foremost for God to lead us into the greater levels of faith. He is indeed about to do a new thing in our lives and in this church. And He is indeed about to set open doors in front of us as individuals and as one body. But we first need the increase in faith in order to live out these things God has for us. We need to let go of our trust in the world and no longer be limited by the world’s provision. We need to grow in believing in the truth of just how much of a provider our loving Father is. I believe this is the first step to receiving the full inheritance God has in store for us...