Meditation

Twenty years of God’s faithfulness is something to remember and rejoice over.

This year we commemorate PRTS’s twentieth year of training men for ministry and service in the church of Jesus Christ. Nearly one hundred men have graduated and are laboring throughout the world as teachers, pastors, theological instructors, or missionaries. We have transitioned from the small classroom in the Heritage Reformed Church to the house on Leonard Street to the first building and now the new addition. We’ve seen the progression of offering a Master of Divinity degree to a Master of Arts and Master of Theology degrees and soon, we hope, to doctoral degrees. We see men from all over the world coming to PRTS and, after a few years, leaving with a greater sense of call and understanding of the faith, eager and ready to be used by God to build up the church in their homelands.

Friends, rejoice with us as we witness the glory and the salvation of our God. PRTS is a remarkable testimony and evidence of God’s hand. As I thought about this, my mind went to the stones of Joshua we read about in Joshua 4. Two chapters (Josh. 3–4) are written to record this marvelous act of God. After the Lord led His people out of Egypt and through the wilderness, they came to the Jordan River. Joshua called the people to sanctify themselves for the day when God would perform a great wonder. We too have been amazed at the wonders of God through these past twenty years, and we look forward with godly expectation to what He will do in the future. We should set aside a day of thanks to Him.

The children of Israel passed over the Jordan by faith; only when the priests put their feet into the water did the waters on one side rush away and on the other began to heap. They walked over on dry ground! Just imagine how the Israelite walking over this riverbed with his family must have praised God for this marvelous grace. Likewise, we ought to praise God for His faithfulness to PRTS, in spite of the sins we have committed, just like Israel. God was gracious to His church in the Old Testament and He is faithful to His church today. The fact that God has inclined so many people to give to the cause of training men for ministry throughout the world and provided instructors faithful to the Word of God is humbling.

When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan, God Himself told Joshua that a man from every tribe was to take a stone from the middle of the dry riverbed. They were to take them to the other side of the Jordan and set them up as a reminder of what God had done. This would encourage them as they pressed on in the conquest of the land of Canaan and would be a testimony of God’s faithfulness and power. This was a memorial of the mighty and glorious acts of God. Is it any different today? There are many who are still outside the kingdom and there is much conquest to be had; but we are confident of this, that He who has begun a good work will continue this work as well.

We know that what has transpired in the last twenty years is of God. These are God’s glorious and mighty acts. Let us set up our stones of remembrance before Him so that we will be encouraged to press on, so that our children see what things have taken place by His grace, and so “that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty” (Josh. 4:24).

—Rev. Mark Kelderman
Dean of Students

BUY A BOOK AND CHANGE A LIFE

Ministry in the church of Jesus Christ—whether preaching, teaching, counseling, or administering—must be theologically informed. To assist in this endeavor, the PRTS library staff is working to build a noteworthy resource collection for its faculty, staff, students, and public patrons. To participate, you may donate specifically for the purchase of requested books. Currently, the library is looking for help purchasing A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation, by Lee Palmer Wandell. The cost of this volume is $215 USD. If you would like to make a donation for the purchase of this book, please send a check to PRTS, 2965 Leonard Street, N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49525 or go online to prts.edu and make a donation today. Thank you for helping us as we train today for service tomorrow!
It is a great joy to be back at Puritan Reformed Seminary, and to be here on this auspicious occasion of the graduation of these fine young men. I've reached that age where everyone is a young man relative to myself. Let me congratulate all of you who are graduating this evening. I congratulate your wives and families who have borne much of the burden of the last number of years, and I pray the Lord’s richest and most profound blessing upon you as you embark on years of ministry for Him.

This evening I want to draw your attention, speaking particularly to the graduates, to the church of Jesus Christ. I fell in love with the church over forty years ago and I have loved it ever since. The text I want to speak about is a familiar one: Matthew 16:13–20. As you know, as scholars, this is a turning point in the gospel narrative in the unfolding of the story of Christ’s life and ministry. From this point onward, Jesus sets His face to go to Jerusalem. From this point onward, He speaks more openly that He will be handed over to the scribes, chief priests, and elders and be crucified and, on the third day, be raised again from the dead. This is a turning point in the ministry of our Lord.

There are all kinds of viewpoints in the background here as to the identity of Messiah. Inter-testamental Judaism was rife with all kinds of speculations regarding the kind of Messiah that was prophesied. Part of the reason for what we refer to as the “Messianic secret” is perhaps to keep at bay some of those false ideas. But now He is asking His disciples, “Whom do men say that I am?” There are all kinds of ideas. Some are saying about John the Baptist that he had returned from the dead after his execution by Herod; others say He is Elijah, and there was belief, because of the empty chair at Passover, that Elijah would return. Others thought He was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. This is just a little glimpse of the various viewpoints and expectations with regard to Jesus. If you go out into the streets of Grand Rapids, New York, San Francisco, or any large city and ask the average person, “Who is Jesus?” you will get all kinds of answers. What is He? What is His identity? Why has He come?

Then Jesus asks Peter this question: “But whom say ye that I am?” And Peter, in this extraordinary moment, answers, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus introduces a concept here, an idea that is absolutely central to His mission. He says to Peter, “I will build my church.”

This will not be a full exegesis of the passage, but I want to focus on these three things: (1) Christ, the church’s builder; (2) Christ, the church’s defender; (3) Christ, the church’s multiplier.

1. Christ, The Church’s Builder

Jesus says, “I will build my church.” Where did this word “church” come from? Until this point in the gospel, there has been no mention of church. It has been about the kingdom of God. Then suddenly Jesus is talking about church. Nobody among the disciples is saying, “What does church mean? Ekklesia—where does this word come from?” It is, of course, deeply related to several other words in Hebrew and Greek. The word “to call” is related to the word “synagogue.” It is a concept that the people of God, the assembly of God, the gathering together of the people in God in an assembly, are called out of the world and called into fellowship with each other and into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. “I will build my church.”

If you are a Christian, church has to be central; it must be center-stage. That is not to say that there are no other ministries valid, in and of themselves, but core and central in the ministry of the Lord Jesus is church. Individual churches may differ—country churches, city churches, urban churches, small churches, big churches, churches with history and tradition. When we think about church and what is central and core to the idea of church, we think of saints and their children, we think of officers, deacons, elders, ministers. We think of means of grace, preaching the Word, singing the Word, reading the Word, praying the Word. The sacraments are as the visible Word. We think of the church in terms of its marks and distinctiveness, as one holy, catholic, apostolic church, or perhaps Reformation distinctives of preaching, sacraments, and discipline. But when it all boils down, Jesus is saying to His disciples, and especially to Peter, “I will build my church.”
As you embark on the beginnings of ministry, some of you will go to other parts of the world. You perhaps will fly down to Brazil tomorrow or the next day. All of your future is before you. Now what is central in God’s providence, and by God’s grace? It is the church, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the building of which He is the foundation. So we have Christ as the church’s Builder.

2. CHRIST, THE CHURCH’S DEFENDER

Notice what He says in verse 18: “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Where does Jesus build His church? Not in Eden, not in Paradise, but in enemy-occupied territory, right up against the black gates of hell where powerful forces of demonic hatred and opposition are palpably discerned. Jesus says, “Right there, I will build my church.”

So our blessed Lord and Savior is calling you and me to a lifestyle of cross-bearing and self-denial if we want to be part of this success story called The Church of Jesus Christ. People are writing off the church. There was a piece in the Wall Street Journal writing off Christianity and writing off men and women of faith. Some of you might have read it. It wasn’t terribly enlightening, nor was it very well written. But it was typical of the kind of pessimism that pervades the Northern Hemisphere in particular. Jesus is saying to you who might believe such prophecies of doom and gloom, “The gates of hell will not prevail; they will not be victorious.” As we live in the tension between the “now” and “not yet,” as we live in these days, yes, take up the whole armor of God so that in the evil day you might be able to stand.

There are things that you must do to persevere, to pray, and read the Scriptures, and keep a wall of defense about you and your family and your ministry. These are things that you must do! But there is a promise here, Jesus, the church’s builder, is also the church’s defender. What is the reason the Son of God appeared? What is John’s answer? Notice what He says in verse 18: “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Where does Jesus build His church? Not in Eden, not in Paradise, but in enemy-occupied territory, right up against the black gates of hell where powerful forces of demonic hatred and opposition are palpably discerned. Jesus says, “Right there, I will build my church.”

It is a little like Spurgeon when he was asked to defend the Scripture, and he said he “would sooner defend a lion.” You are called upon to defend the church in the face of opposition—the opposition of unbelief, the epistemological idolatries that surround us in our day and age. Here is the Lord Jesus whispering in your ear, “The gates of hell will not prevail against my church.” This is no guarantee that when God calls you into ministry you’re going to have a megachurch with thousands and thousands of members. There is no such guarantee. God may call you into the ministry where you will only have a dozen, or maybe twenty or thirty faithful souls, and you work, labor, and toil for Him and for His glory in whatever situation God has placed you. But it is a guarantee that you are on the winning side. You are on the victorious side because King Jesus Himself, from the triumphs that are His, having spoiled principalities and powers, has made a show of them openly in the cross.

3. CHRIST, THE CHURCH’S MULTIPLIER

Do you see what He says in verse 19? “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Jesus is saying to Peter and the rest of the disciples: if you want to know where the key is to be found that unlocks the prison gates of the hearts of men and women, it is in your pocket. All along, it is in your pocket; it is the gospel! Preach it, proclaim it, because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. He is the church’s Multiplier.

You have been taught in a way that few have been taught, with the shape and contours of the gospel from these learned professors whom you have grown to love, admire, and respect, and whose thoughts you will no doubt carry for the rest of your lives. There will come moments twenty, thirty, forty years from now when you will remember something you learned back in seminary.

Sadly, for some students at seminary, seminary has a negative experience on them, and the flame and passion that they once had in the gospel has been eviscerated. I trust it has not in you, but rather grown so that you have this burden on your heart—a burden to make Christ known, a burden to proclaim Him, a burden to see men and women, boys and girls, come and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, a burden that understands that God in His infinite mercy uses His vessels of clay, like you and me, to proclaim that gospel! Oh, what power it has, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, to bind and to loose! The power is His! You are but its instrument, you are but its vehicle, you are but the broken jar that He uses for His glory in the advancement of His kingdom, as Jesus marches through the corridors of time and space to build and defend and multiply His church, so that one day everyone who has been given to Him shall come to Him. What an absolutely glorious day when He shall present His bride to His heavenly Father, who will say to His Son in return, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” And to think that you had a part to play in that! Can it be that you would have a part to play in that most glorious narrative of all, as Jesus gathers His church to Himself?

Forty years ago, my dear friends, I fell in love with the Church of Jesus Christ. Odd and peculiar—and yes, the King James Version has a nuance to it when it says, “Ye are a peculiar people!” There are some very peculiar people in the church. But I love it still, with all its quirks, because she is the body of Christ. She is the bride of Christ, the building of which He is the foundation. Love the church!

Do you know what Jesus is saying to you tonight? “Love Me, and love My church, because My church is an extension of Me.”
When did you graduate from PRTS, and where are you presently laboring?
I graduated from PRTS in 2013 with a Th.M. After planting a church in Akron, Ohio (thirteen years ago), I have been the senior pastor at Hardingville Bible Church in southern New Jersey (outside southern Philadelphia) for one year.

Can you share with us something about your family?
My wife of sixteen years is Mary Beth. She likes to hunt and has bagged six bucks, one of which is stuffed and on our wall. I have five wonderful daughters, ages three to fifteen. We like to visit the beautiful South Jersey shore together and ride the waves.

What encouragements have you received in your labors?
It was a blessing to see a small group of believers organized and planted in Akron, Ohio. It was a visible confirmation that the Lord is still building His church. I am encouraged how God’s grace saves the worst of sinners and turns them into serving saints. Some that I would not think would amount to anything for Christ have gone on to be bright stars for the Lord.

What kinds of challenges have you faced?
I am my own biggest challenge—keeping my eyes on the promises of the Lord and not my circumstances or feelings. The biggest pastoral difficulty is maintaining the balance between teaching God’s people to be discerning in a world of pseudo-gospels, while at the same time helping them to keep a gracious and hopeful spirit.

Do you have particular ministry goals?
By God’s grace, we would like to see many biblical churches planted in the South Jersey-Philadelphia region. I would also like to begin a ministerial training program for the interested men in the church.

Are you engaged in other forms of ministry aside from your local church?
I am the pastoral overseer of Gloucester County Christian School. I also serve as an executive member of the American Council of Christian Churches.

What did you learn in seminary that you have found most helpful now that you are in the ministry?
The most helpful instruction I received at seminary was how to live out my theology in my own mind, heart, and church, and how to preach sound theology in a simple way that even children can understand.

What have you been preaching recently? And what commentaries have you found most helpful?
I have been preaching through Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 13. Jonathan Edwards’s *Charity and Its Fruits* and Octavius Winslow’s *No Condemnation in Christ Jesus* have been so helpful.

Have you been studying anything in particular, aside from your regular exegetical studies?
I’ve been trying to memorize names at my new church! I am learning how to surf fish in salt water. Since I am now near Philly, I am trying to locate the various places where George Whitefield preached.

Can you recommend any good books or articles you’ve read recently?
Do you attend any pastors’ conferences to recharge and re-inspire you?
I attend the annual American Council of Christian Churches convention, the Banner of Truth Conference, conferences hosted by Westminster Theological Seminary, and the Puritan Reformed Conference when I can.

Have you been listening to any contemporary preachers of late?
I enjoyed John McArthur’s series on Discouragement from 2 Corinthians 1 and his series on the doctrines of grace. I enjoy listening to Peter Masters, as well as pastors at the Banner of Truth Ministers’ Conference.

Are you able to find likeminded Reformed or Calvinistic brethren in your area, with whom you can fellowship?
Not sure of the New Jersey scene yet, but I had some interaction with some of the independent Baptists and Orthodox Presbyterian Church men. I have also had good fellowship with a pastor who is a recent grad from Master’s Seminary. I am close to the Banner of Truth Ministers’ Conference, so I plan to attend this each year.

What are you and/or your congregation doing in terms of evangelistic outreach to the community? What discouragements, lessons, or encouragements have you gleaned?
We do monthly neighborhood visiting and gospel-literature canvassing. The visible results are not always the most encouraging, but it seems that as we seek to reach sinners, the Lord always brings in new folks one way or another. Our annual VBS is quite well attended and that has a big emphasis here. We are also making plans to target a local community for church planting. We stay encouraged that God’s Spirit is still able to awaken sinners and draw them to find peace and forgiveness in Christ.

CURRENT PRTS STUDENT SERVING NEAR AND FAR
Joel & Heidi Weaver and their three children are in eastern North Carolina this summer as Joel serves as the summer seminarian at Covenant United Reformed Church in Pantego. Covenant is the only URCNA congregation in the state and one of only a few confessional churches in the area. Covenant is blessed with about 40 families and has been served by Rev. Calvin Tuininga for the past 16 years.

PRTS ALUMNUS SERVING
Rev. Brian Kamwendo is an ordained minister in the CCAP Nkhoma Synod in Malawi, a Reformed Presbyterian denomination with jurisdiction in the central region of Malawi. Their membership is close to two million, with seventeen presbyteries localized in 173 churches; the average membership ranges from two to eight thousand in each congregation. The denomination currently has 170 ordained ministers. Rev. Kamwendo serves as a Trustee and an executive member of the Synod. He is also serving his third term as the Senior Synod Clerk. Rev. Kamwendo has served three congregations and is a moderator emeritus of Chilanga and Nkhoma presbyteries. Apart from his senior position in the Synod, he is currently serving as a Vice Principal of the Synod’s official seminary and heads up the Dogmatics and Historical Theology department.
DR. MICHAEL BARRETT | Itinerary:
September 6: Kinnelon, NJ: Heritage Reformed Church
September 13: London, Ont.: Free Reformed Church
September 20: Plymouth, WI: Heritage Reformed Church
October 11: Bradford, Ont.: Heritage Reformed Church

Recently Published: *The Next to Last Word: Service, Hope, and Revival in the Postexilic Prophets* (RHB)

DR. JOEL BEEKE | Itinerary:
September 14–16: Jackson, MS: Reformed Theological Seminary—chapel and Missions Conference
September 19–20: Hull, IA: Heritage Reformed Church—wedding and preaching
September 25–27: Kansas City, MO: Reformed Conference and preaching in Redeemer PCA and URC Covenant Reformed
October 11: Bradford, Ont.: Heritage Reformed Church—Parenting Conference and preaching
October 17: Woodstock, Ont.: FRC-HRC Office-bearers Conference
October 17–18: Clarkston, MI: Redeemer Puritan Reformed Church—Conference and preaching
October 29–30: Wake Forest, NC: NCFIC Conference on holiness
October 31—November 1: Audubon, MS: Reformation Conference and preaching
November 1: Jackson, MS: preaching for First Presbyterian Church (eve.)

Recent Publications:
*Fighting Satan: Knowing His Weaknesses, Strategies, and Defeat.* Grand Rapids: RHB.
*How Should We Develop Biblical Friendship?* (with Michael Haykin). Grand Rapids: RHB.
“First Vision: Christ Amid the Seven Candlesticks.” *Gospel Trumpet*, no. 20.
“Letters of Samuel Rutherford.” In *You Must Read: Books that have shaped our lives*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust.

DR. JERRY BILKES | Itinerary:
September 7: Hamilton, Ont.: Seminary Day
October 15-16: Woodstock, Ont.: Ministers’ Conference

Writing Project: *Grace Changes Everything: An Exposition of Philemon*

REV. MARK KELDERMAN | Itinerary:
September 27: London, Ont.: Free Reformed Church
October 5–7: ACBD Conference on Homosexuality
October 17: Woodstock, Ont.: Ministers’ Conference
October 18: Chatham, Ont.: Free Reformed Church

Project:
Working on a Doctorate of Ministry degree from Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

DR. DAVID MURRAY | Itinerary:
September 25–26: Ontario: Niagara Bible Conference
October 9-10: Elizabethtown, KY: Reformation Preaching Conference

Recently Published:
Five eBooks.
- *The Christian Life*
- *The Christian Ministry*
- *The Christian Faith: Teaching Outlines from the Westminster Standards*
- *A Bundle of Joy: Six Books on Christian Happiness*
- *God’s Mobile Home: Stories of Grace from the Tabernacle* (also in paperback)

DR. WILLIAM VAN DOODEWAARD | Itinerary:
Writing Projects:
1 & 2 Peter, Evangelical Press.

356 CALKINS UPDATE
Over the last several months, many improvements have been made to 356 Calkins. No part of this Grand Rapids home has been left untouched. Mr. Henry Kamp Sr., who is leading the project, has been busy repairing the infrastructure of the home by rebuilding damaged walls and bringing everything up to code. Both the front and back porches were completely rebuilt. In the last few weeks alone the plumbing and electrical have been installed, as well as a new furnace. Drywall has been hung throughout the home and each room has been painted. The exterior of the house will be painted as soon as possible. If you live in the Grand Rapids area and are interested in helping out, contact the Seminary at 616-977-0599. “Many hands make light work.”
Thank you for faithfully supporting PRTS with your prayers and financial contributions throughout the 2014/15 academic year. The Lord has graciously and abundantly met our every need.

—CHRIS HANNA