

A Warning And A Word for 2018

I felt led to share this message today on the first Sunday of 2018. This isn't a typical sermon for me, but I just felt prompted to share my heart with you as we begin the year. Tonight I want us to join in a time of reflection and prayer as we head into 2018 together. I don't know what we will face throughout this year. I am expecting God's blessing and increase to continue even as we face some financial challenges. I am confident of his grace and His presence to be with us, to overshadow us, but I am also quite certain of the continual attacks and onslaught of the devil against us, the people of God. I never want to focus on the devil or give him more attention than necessary, however, it is important that you know the devil and the forces of hell are going to do everything they can to influence you, defeat you and separate you from God and his purpose for your life.

Consider how Jesus referred to the devil. He called him a thief, a liar and a murderer. **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10.** Let me warn you, the devil is a thief and a destroyer. Don't expect him to act any other way. He will do whatever he can to rob you and steal from you. He will steal your joy, your confidence in God. He will steal your peace, leaving in its' place fear and worry and anxiety. The devil never plays fair. His one goal is your defeat and destruction. You can't bargain with him and without Jesus you will never win.

Years ago when we lived next door in the parsonage, someone broke in and stole a number of things: Paula's wedding rings and other jewelry, a revolver that belonged to my father. The girls were little and they smashed a piggy bank and stole the money inside. The reason for the story, I had bought a new pair of Nike tennis shoes. As we looked through the house to see what was missing, I noticed in our bedroom this nasty, muddy pair of old tennis shoes sitting in the place where I had left my new Nikes. The thief or thieves had stolen my new shoes and left an old worn out pair in its place. That's how the devil will treat you. He is a thief and will steal from you, steal your joy and your peace and leave you nothing but misery and grief and pain. He will steal your confidence in God and leave you with doubt. He will steal your future by drawing you into sin and disobedience and leaving you with nothing but regret and the ashes of your hopes and dreams. He will promise you everything and leave you with nothing! He has only come to kill, steal and destroy. It's Jesus that has come to give you abundant life!

Let me warn you, the devil is a liar, a murderer and a thief. Jesus said of the devil, **“He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”** **John 8:44** The devil is the father of lies. Lying is the devil’s native language. What an amazing statement from Jesus. The devil is a deceiver. The truth is not in him. You can’t bargain with someone that never speaks the truth. Remember what they say about some people, “How can you tell that person is lying?” “Their lips are moving.” That’s the truth about the devil. I’m warning you that he is going to lie to you this year. He is going to tell you that you can’t trust God. He’ll tell you God is trying to cheat you out of really living. He’ll tell you that you can’t trust God’s word, God’s preachers, God’s people. “Those people at church don’t understand. Pastor Phil, Pastor Jeff, they don’t understand me, they don’t understand my generation.” That’s the kind of lies the devil tells.

He will tell you that you can’t afford to live God’s way. It will cost you financially. It will deprive you of pleasure. I’m telling you, the devil is lying to you! He is the father of lies. He will lie about who God is. He will lie about God’s plans and intentions and design for your life. If he can’t convince you how wonderful you are and that you don’t need God and God’s rules, he will lie to you and tell you that you are worthless, that no one cares about you, that God doesn’t care about you. He will tell you you don’t deserve God’s blessing. After he pulls you into sin and failure, he will cover you in shame and tell you you don’t deserve God’s love or salvation. He will convince you to cut yourself off from the church and from God’s people, from godly friends and family.

I’m warning you, the devil is a liar. He will lie about your possibilities and abilities in Christ. The apostle Paul said “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” **Philippians 4:13**, but the devil will lie to you and tell you you can’t possibly make it and there’s no point in trying. He will keep you paralyzed in self-doubt and defeat. He will lie to you but Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life.”** **John 14:6** Jesus doesn’t just speak the truth, He is truth! If you want to know the truth, get to know Jesus. Listen to him and his word. Trust him because just as the devil will only lie to you because that is his native language, truth is who Jesus is. That’s his native language. You can trust him and his word!

Let me warn you the devil is a schemer, looking for ways to influence you, to trick you and deceive you. Paul said, **“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand**

against the devil's schemes.” Ephesians 6:11 The word schemes suggests someone lying in wait, ready to trick you, to fool you, to attack you. He is plotting against you. If you know he is plotting against you...do you hear what I'm telling you? If you know he is plotting against you, then open your eyes, be aware, be on guard, be discerning and as the writer of Hebrews suggested, don't allow yourself to be entangled in sin and bondage. If I warn you someone is hiding around the corner, planning to steal your money, you should be smart enough to go the other way but some will walk right on with a big goofy smile on their face, money hanging out of their pockets cause they just don't believe it will happen to them! You don't want to be warned but I'm warning you. I'm begging you, open your eyes. Be aware and put on the armor of God so you can stand against the schemes the devil has planned against you!

Let me warn you, the devil is planning to blind you so you will take your eyes off of Jesus! The apostle Paul referred to the devil as the god of this age and said, **“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” 2 Corinthians 4:4** As surely as he has blinded the minds of unbelievers, he is endeavoring to blind the spiritual eyes of believers, to cloud our vision, to cause us to set our eyes and our affection on the things of this world rather than on the things of God. He will blind you to God's truth. He will blind you to what is truly important in life. He will blind you so you value money and fame over family and integrity. He will blind you so you will choose sin and pleasure over obedience to God and living a holy life. He will blind you to the realities of God's kingdom, the reality of eternity, the reality of heaven and the reality of hell. If the devil can blind you to those realities, if he can lie to you and deceive you into thinking it doesn't matter how you live your life, that there is no hell to fear, if he can blind you to the truth, he will win this battle for your soul. He is plotting and scheming against you.

Peter warned us, **“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...” 1 Peter 5:8-9** Be alert. Exercise spiritual situational awareness. If it looks like sin, leave it alone. If God isn't in it, if it goes against God's word, if your youth pastor and your pastor and your parents warned you about it, come on! You're smarter than that. Leave it alone. Stop poking at a roaring lion. You're going to lose a hand that way, or worse, lose your future and lose your soul! Stand firm in the faith and resist the devil. You can do all things through Christ. Wise up.

A warning and a word. I've warned you. Now let me share a word I believe the Lord has for us as a church. Four words, actually. Some of you know we have a new leader of the Assemblies of God in America. Doug Clay was elected General Superintendent in August at our General Council. Something he said in an interview in one of our church publications struck me and stuck with me. He said every day since his election in August he had been praying, asking the Lord for three things. I read these three things and they jumped off the page to me. Wisdom. Discernment. Anointing. I'm going to add one more word to his list of three, Clarity. I've been praying for these four things and I'm asking you to join me.

Wisdom. The bible says "**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.**"

Proverbs 9:10. Fear of the Lord means reverence, respect, knowledge of and understanding of the greatness of the Lord, an acknowledgement of who he is. To fear the Lord means we have an awareness of him and his presence in our life, a reverence for him, a desire and a willingness to obey him. I'm asking God for wisdom to respect and reverence him so I will live a life of obedience to Him. I'm asking for wisdom in order to obey His word, to live my life in ways that will please and honor him. I don't want to fail the Lord out of ignorance or willful sin. God grant me the wisdom to live for you and serve you and please you. Grant me the wisdom so that nothing I do will be out of your will, your plan, your purpose for my life.

I'm asking God for wisdom to pastor this church. Wisdom to shepherd the flock God has placed in my care and responsibility. Wisdom to know what to preach, the messages to prepare. I'm asking you to pray for me to have wisdom, but I'm asking you to ask God for wisdom. Wisdom to hear the word and put it into practice. Wisdom to fear God, to be eager to respond, to be obedient to all he has for you! Wisdom to be the person he has called you to be. To be the friend, the husband or wife, the parent or grandparent, the employee or employer, the boss the co-worker you need to be. In every aspect of our life, we need the wisdom of God. Show us Lord, how to live for you in this crazy mixed up world. Show us how to be the church you've called us to be, how to influence others to follow you.

We will have new technology in the church as we move back in. We need wisdom to know how to reach more people, how to use that technology to impact people for Christ, how to bring people to Jesus, to an encounter with God through image as well as the word. God give us wisdom is my prayer!

Discernment. The bible refers to the men of Issachar who came to join David at Hebron in this way, “**Men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do...**” **1 Chronicles 12:32** We need discernment. Webster’s dictionary defines discern or discernment as “**the knowledge or ability to separate, to divide, to distinguish between, to see distinctly, to see the difference between two or more things. To discriminate.**” Boy, do we need discernment. The lines have gotten blurry. We can’t seem to distinguish between the world and sin and God’s word and truth. We have lost the distinction between the holiness God calls us to and the worldliness the devil draws us to. There is a difference, at least there is supposed to be, between how the world lives and how the people of God live. The world should be able to look and see a difference between our conduct, our conversation, our commitment and that of the world. We are the people who have taken up a cross, denied ourselves and are following Jesus. “God grant us discernment to see how to live as your followers. Grant us the discernment to see the difference between what pleases you and what gratifies us and our flesh. Grant us discernment to know the difference between the holy and the profane, between the sacred and the secular. Give us discernment to recognize the schemes of the devil, to recognize his lies, his deceptions. Grant us discernment in 2018 so we won’t fall into the traps and snares of the devil but we will walk in the victory you have for us.

Anointing. When I talk about praying for anointing, I’m referring to the grace and power and presence and blessing of God. I’m asking God to allow his power and presence to work in and through my life. That’s not just for preachers, that’s for all of us. We need his presence, his power, his anointing in our lives.

I need God’s anointing to pastor. I’m excited about the technology we will have in the new sanctuary and I’m praying for wisdom on how to effectively use it, but technology can’t replace the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We can preach smarter, sing prettier, look better, but if we don’t have the anointing of the Holy Spirit and his blessing, we’re wasting our time. I know it. I’m not going anywhere or trying to do anything without the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It’s the only way I know to preach, or sing, or play, or pastor. God anoint us with your Spirit.

But listen, I don’t want to be anointed to preach or pastor without there being an anointing upon this church, to win souls, to give, to go, to minister, to impact our community and our world. I believe God is calling us to do that very thing. I believe he wants to anoint you to win your family, your friends, your school to Jesus. I believe he wants to anoint this church with

spiritual power and blessing like never before. If I stop believing that then I need to step aside and let someone that does believe take over. I'm still believing for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, for God to do what only God can do. I'm still believing for an anointing of healing and miracles and deliverance to happen in this church; for us to raise up and send leaders and ministers into the harvest fields of this world. Will you believe with me? Will you pray in agreement with me?

That fourth word is **Clarity**. Clarity means clearness. I'm asking God to give us clarity, clearness about who we are as his church and what our calling, our mission is all about. Seventeen years ago, as we moved back into a newly remodeled facility after the tornado, Billy Joe Daugherty and Ken Hagin Jr spoke to us and said they believed God had strategically placed us here on the Westside of Tulsa because God intended to raise up a significant work here. We aren't here by accident. God has us here, he has you here as a part of this church, for a reason. I'm asking again for God to give us clarity about who we are; clarity about reaching our community with the gospel; clarity about impacting our world with the gospel. "God give us clarity and clearness about your plans for us and what we are to do this coming year."

And I remind you of what the writer of Hebrews said, **"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."** **Hebrews 12:1-2** I'm asking God for clarity, a clear vision so I will fix my eyes, my heart, my attention upon Jesus and I won't look anywhere else. I won't look to anyone else. I won't allow the devil to blind my vision or my outlook. I've setting my sights on Jesus and on Heaven and I'm not looking to the right or the left or to anything or anyone else. Paul said in Colossians 3 to set your hearts on things above. Set your eyes, your affection on things above and not on earthly things. There is nothing here worth holding onto. "God, give us clarity, clear eyed focus on Jesus and on heaven and on heavenly things. Give us clear vision of your will and your plans for us and for your church at Carbondale."

We used to sing the chorus *I have decided to follow Jesus*. One verse said "take this whole world, but give me Jesus." That's the way I feel today. You can have the stuff this world offers but give me Jesus!!!

God, give me wisdom, give me discernment, give me anointing and give me clarity so I will keep my eyes fixed on you!

I shared a prayer a few years ago from *A Diary of Private Prayer* by the late John Baillie, a Scottish pastor and theologian. **“Father, you alone know what lies before me this year, grant that in every hour of it I may stay close to you. Let me embark on no undertaking that is not in line with your will for my life, nor shrink from any sacrifice which your will may demand. Suggest, direct, control every movement of my mind, for my Lord Christ’s sake. Amen.”**