

The Church of the Living God

*Commemoration of 125th Anniversary of the Netherlands
Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids*

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(Preached October 29, 1995)

- Psalter 368:1,2
- Scripture: Psalm 132; Matthew 16:13-20
- Belgic Confession, Article 27
- Text: Matthew 16:18b
- Psalter 275
- Psalter 367;2,4
- Psalter 247

Congregation, it was 125 years ago tomorrow (October 30, 1870) that the forefathers of our church and the forefathers of the Beckwith church organized a congregation with forty members. Some forty years later they adopted the name of *Netherlands Reformed*; later, *First Netherlands Reformed*, and more recently, We have, as you well know, selected the name *Heritage Netherlands Reformed*. Since 125 years ago our forefathers were organized as an independent church, tonight in our message and psalters we want to reflect upon the living God as Keeper of His Zion, His church. Let us sing Psalter 368:1-2:

*Arise, O Lord, our God, arise
And enter now into Thy rest;
O let this house be Thy abode,
Forever with Thy presence blest.
Thy gracious covenant, Lord, fulfill,
Turn not away from us Thy face;
Establish Thou Messiah's throne
And let Him reign within this place.*

Dear congregation, everything in this world crumbles and decays. In Greek times there were seven wonders of the world, many of which were structures that

stood for centuries. Well, *the wonder* of this world is that there is a church, an invisible Church that has endured from the beginning and shall endure to the end of the world. The only reason the church endures is because of the free and sovereign love and decree and safe-keeping of her King and her Lord. We have read that to you from Psalm 132: "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." That is the church's foundation. And you do not read one word in that of man, do you? "The *LORD* has chosen Zion; *He* hath desired it for *His* habitation. This is *my* rest for ever: here will *I* dwell; for *I* have desired it. *I* will abundantly bless her provision: *I* will satisfy her poor with bread. *I* will...clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy." The church is in God's hands; she is a chosen Zion, she is a kept Zion, she is a Zion who will endure, Therefore the psalmist said in Psalm 68: "Why leap ye, ye high hills? this is the hill which God desireth to dwell in, yea, the LORD will dwell in it for ever."

Tonight we want to consider in a more intimate and profound way the foundation of this church which endures from eternity to eternity. The words of our text you can find in Matthew 16:18b, only these words: "*Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"

With God's help we want to consider with you, "The Church of the Living God":

1. Established from eternity in Christ
2. Built in time upon Christ
3. Preserved to eternity by Christ

I repeat: The Church of the Living God -- (1) Established from eternity in Christ; (2) Built in time upon Christ; (3) Preserved to eternity by Christ.

I. Established from eternity in Christ.

"I will build my church." These precious words, my dear flock, from Matthew 16 have an eternal foundation. They are an eternal "I will" rooted in the decree of God from the never begun age. God chartered in His Triune Being from eternity and confirmed in the counsel of peace (or the covenant of redemption) that He would make and keep a church chosen to everlasting life for Himself, to His own honor and glory. He decreed from eternity that He would leave nothing to chance; He

would not leave anything in the hands of man or angel or anything of His creation. He will use means, but He will be the King and the Head of His church.

Why did the Lord decree to have a church? Have you ever thought about that? After all, boys and girls, you know that God was perfectly happy with Himself and in Himself from all eternity. God did not need to take one step outside of Himself to create anything. God did not need this vast universe, this "milky way" galaxy, this planet, this country, this city; He did not need your family, this church; He did not need you or me. Why did God decree to have a church, and why did He decree to create and to allow the fall in order to choose from fallen mankind, from all eternity, a people unto Himself? Why? God desired to glorify His own Name and to pour out His own intertrinitarian love onto His creation; to magnify, to exemplify His attributes, yes, to gather a church that may glorify His grace and mercy and love and compassion. And so He chose a church to everlasting life. But He chose that church only *in Jesus Christ*, and we must never think of the church apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Election is election *in Christ*. Christ is the *eternal* Rock upon which the Father, in consort with the Son and the Spirit, declared from all eternity, "I will build My church in Jesus Christ."

Our forefathers spoke of a *legal* union with Christ and of a *vital* union with Christ. They spoke of a legal union when referring to *justification* — that is, the church is washed and forgiven and justified and brought into a right standing or state with God through Jesus Christ, in time, but that state was decreed from all eternity. And therefore John says in Revelation 13:8 that the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world. From all eternity God decreed that His elect church should be in legal union with Him for Christ's sake; and that decree had to be worked out in time. But already in that decree, Christ was declared to be Mediator of His chosen Church; the Church of God was decreed and given to Him. The elect were passed under the rod of His eternal covenant as the great, good and chief Shepherd from eternity; they were bound upon His mediatorial heart from the stillness of eternity. And so this "I will" of our text is really an eternal "I will"; from the counsel of peace, from before creation, God declares in His own inter-trinitarian commitment, "I will build my church."

Now that union must be worked out in time, and when the church is justified in

time, is transferred from death to life, God also works a vital union in the way of *sanctification* whereby the church walks in holiness, follows her Master and is united with Him in a real and vital and spiritual way. And oh, what a glorious thing this is, congregation, that the church is made one in time with Jesus Christ! Like David looking down upon Mephibosheth saw Jonathan between him and Mephibosheth, so God can never look upon His elect people apart from Jesus Christ. From eternity He already looks upon them in the womb of His salvific decree, but in time He makes the transfer to salvation real. He takes His people who are as children of wrath, even as all others by nature, and transfers them into His marvelous light; He reckons them to be one in Christ forever. Oh what a glorious thing, is it not? Reckoned in Christ forever! And what is Christ for His people? He is the *Rock of their salvation!* He is the Rock upon which they stand, the Rock upon which they live, the Rock upon which they die, the Rock of their salvation.

Today, evolutionists are talking about rocks that are millions and billions of years old. Well, here is a Rock that far exceeds all their exaggeration. Here is a Rock that was established from eternity, even the Son of God. This Rock has always been there; this Rock is always there; this Rock will always be there. "Upon this rock," says Jesus, "I will build my church."

Now there are many different ideas concerning this text - what this rock really means. There are those, especially in the Roman Catholic tradition, that say this rock means Peter — because in the Greek language, you see, the word Peter is *rock* -- and Jesus says to him: Thou art Peter, and upon this "peter," upon this rock, I will build My church. And out of this interpretation, as a matter of fact, the Roman Catholic church has developed its incredible hierarchy of some seventeen different offices, and has built the entire papal system teaching that Peter was the first pope and that there have been popes ever since. Thus they say the pope has papal authority when he speaks from his papal chair, when he speaks *ex cathedra*; then he speaks infallibly for he is the rock of the church. He has equal authority with the very Word of God. Of course, that interpretation is altogether unbiblical and unacceptable to us.

There are others who say that this rock is eternal election. Though election is

foundational to the entire Christian church, this too misses the point of what Jesus is saying here. You see, Jesus had just asked His disciples, "Whom do you say that I am?" Some said, "You are Elijah"; some said, "You are John the Baptist"; but when He said, "Whom do *you* say that I am" as My own dear disciples, Peter spoke up and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter uses two Messiah titles - *Christ* and the *Son of God*. And by that he was saying as it were, "Thou art God of God; Thou art the foundation of salvation of all ages; Thou art the Rock of our hope; the Rock of our expectation; Thou art all our salvation." And Jesus answers, "Thou art Peter and upon this rock, Peter, that is, *upon the confession you have made*, I will build my church." So Jesus indeed uses the word *Peter* twice but He uses it as a play on words in the Greek language -- thou art Peter and upon this "peter" I will build my church. But He does not mean Peter with a capital "P," meaning the *person* Peter, but He means upon what Peter *said*, upon the confession of Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is upon the reality of this confession that the church is made and kept alive. It is upon the reality of this confession that the church has survived from the time of Adam and will survive to the end of the world.

Take Adam, for example. What did he say when God told him of the promise of the Messiah in Genesis 3:15, when God told him about his punishment and about the message of death? Even when God said to him in verse 19, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," Adam did not forget the promise of God in verse 15, but turned to Eve and said, "Thy name is Eve." Eve in Hebrew means *life, living!* But how was it possible? Did you ever think about what a wonder the conversion of Adam and Eve is?

Sometimes we speak about Manasseh or Saul of Tarsus as remarkable conversions, and forget that Adam is the greatest wonder of all, for Adam was directly responsible for plunging the whole human race into sin. But now, Adam believed the promise of God; even before he went out of the garden he turned to his wife and said, as it were, "There is hope, there is a future, there is a Rock upon which to build; I call your name Eve - *life, living!*"

So God was gathering His elect Church, saved by the blood of Jesus, already in Paradise. For after Adam named his wife "*Eve*," what happened? The Lord God

made them coats of skin; and the shed blood pointed again to the promise of the Messiah to come. So already in Paradise God was shedding blood pointing to Jesus, and gathering sinners to Himself. And that will go on, congregation, until the moment the last elect child of God is gathered in. "I will build my church" is not only from eternity, but "I will build my church" runs the entire gamut of time. The world today owes its very survival to this Rock and to Christ's preserving care, because the world is continuing so that the living church of God may be altogether brought in.

And that is why we have to be very careful not to predict the end of the world. From our perspective we cannot understand how God can remain patient with us and with the world, and why He has not destroyed this world long ago. Well, the answer is very simple. God has more souls to pick out of the floundering ocean of self-destruction and to place upon the Rock of salvation, even Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And as soon as all the elect are on that Rock, then the Son of God will come and the sickle will be cast into the harvest; the angels shall sound the great trump of God, and God shall gather all men to Himself. But until that day comes, until the last elect one is gathered, this promise shall stand secure — not just 125 years but thousands of years — "I will build my church."

God is pleased to build His church through means. He uses *sinful men*. This afternoon we had a student speak to us. Did you think about what this means, congregation? As God thrusts out men in our congregations to bring His Word, He is declaring, "I am not yet done with the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregations; I am not yet done with My church on earth. I have yet men to thrust forth because I have souls to gain - *I will build my church*." That is our hope, our only hope, our sufficient hope.

II. Built in time upon Christ.

We have experienced in recent years, and this church has often experienced in the last 125 years, that if the church is left to man it can only wreak havoc, division, destruction, disaster, sin, confusion, and disappointment. And yet tonight, here we are as poor sinners, as a needy congregation; yet we cannot deny that there is a growing remnant in our midst by the grace of God alone who are built upon the Rock of salvation, Jesus Christ alone -- *solus Christus*. God will preserve His

church despite His church, despite me, despite the office-bearers, despite the children of God in our midst. There is not one who can take the least credit for the building of this church. This is altogether Messiah's work, using sinful men, using His Word in the midst of the church, using all the means of grace. Messiah is the irresistible Builder, He is the able Builder, He is the wise Builder. He builds and He makes no mistakes in His building. He builds exactly that which His Father in heaven wants Him to build. He does not gather one too many or one too few, but He builds graciously and irresistibly.

Now it is an amazing thing *how* He builds. He usually builds a church slowly, bit by bit. He usually builds a church in such a way that when it goes forward a bit, it is attacked by Satan, nibbled at the heel, and so the church is sometimes going three steps forward, two steps back. The church is never static. The church is always changing for better or for worse.

How evident that is also in the local history of this congregation! On October 30, 1870 there were forty people who signed a charter membership; the church was organized that evening with two elders and two deacons under the leadership of Rev. C. Kloppenburg. But it was not long, just five months later, that the church was torn apart. So much trouble came between the minister and the consistory that the church decided to elect an entirely new consistory. The new consistory had only one elder and one deacon. Our church was almost extinguished at that time. The numbers dwindled to a couple dozen, but God blessed the labors of Rev. Kloppenburg and the church began to grow. The people began to meet in the Swedenborgian Church located on the corner of Division Avenue and Lyon Street. After a few years the house and lot on Division Avenue, between Bronson (now Crescent Street) and Bridge Street (now Michigan) was purchased. And in 1873, on December 7, Rev. Kloppenburg preached in the new building, the first building our forefathers owned, a dedication service on the words, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

Two years later the church faced another crisis. Rev. Kloppenburg was getting old, his health was failing and in 1876 he died. Before he died, he asked the consistory and congregation to affiliate with the mother church in the Netherlands, which at that time was called the *Christian Reformed Church*, which they did. A

few months later they received another undershepherd by the name of Cornelius Vorst. He was ordained into the ministry here in Grand Rapids in 1877 at the age of fifty.

In 1877 the first efforts were made by our forefathers to affiliate with others in North America. For those first seven years we were really an independent church. But in 1877 affiliation was established with a church in Lodi, New Jersey; these two churches decided to call themselves a denomination under the name of *Netherlands Reformed*. But the Grand Rapids church did not want to change its incorporated name, so our forebears agreed to call the denomination Netherlands Reformed while retaining the name of *Christian Reformed* for this local church.

Rev. Vorst was a very active minister. He sought new congregations with which to establish ties. In 1884 he went to East Saugatuck, Michigan and organized a church of thirty adults and thirty-nine children. That church lasted one year and disintegrated. He also established a church in Passaic, New Jersey in 1883. Our relationship with this church lasted for many years. Meanwhile, problems surfaced between the Lodi church in New Jersey and our congregation, which resulted in the Lodi church going its own way. Thus the denomination was reduced to the Passaic church and our church. Then in 1886 Rev. Vorst began to work with the South Holland church which still exists today as a very little congregation. For fourteen years Rev. Vorst served our congregation. He was known as a peacemaker and a builder of the walls of Zion. In 1890 Rev. Vorst accepted a call to Lodi, New Jersey, the church that had left the denomination, so he too left the small denomination he had helped to build up.

A few years later, in 1892, Rev. M. VanderSpek came to serve as pastor of our church. He was ordained into the ministry when he was sixty years old. He served for ten years in the Netherlands, came here, and served for about ten months before he died.

He was succeeded by Rev. Gerrit Wolbers in 1896. Rev. Wolbers was converted as a teenager. When he was sixteen years old, he began to speak in the midst of gatherings of God's people. When he was twenty years old, he was asked to speak in the churches. At twenty-five, he was ordained into the ministry. Rev. Wolbers was a spiritual man. He often would walk along the streets in his neighborhood,

praying aloud. But he was a man also of a very independent character. He tried to avoid all denominational ties. He wanted the church to remain independent. Rev. Wolbers served here for eight years, until 1904.

There was a two-year vacancy in the pastorate until Rev. Pieneman came. A few of our older members remember Rev. Pieneman. He served here from 1906 to 1909. He was certainly the most active of all our ministers in terms of establishing new ventures and new churches, both in Holland and here in North America. It was Rev. Pieneman who took the few churches over here, as well as the new churches he organized, and forged some family ties with the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* in the Netherlands, so that ministers could exchange pulpits in both denominations, Rev. Pieneman was converted as a teenager of fifteen years. He was brought into severe conviction of sin under one sermon, and three days later was delivered and justified in Jesus Christ. In three days he had a very sudden, strong and remarkable conversion. Rev. Pieneman served here only three years but in those three years he helped establish congregations in Sheboygan, Wisconsin and Paterson, New Jersey, which later resulted in the establishment of the Haledon Avenue Church, now the Franklin Lakes congregation. He also helped work on the Kalamazoo congregation and installed Rev. Beversluis in New Jersey.

Rev. Pieneman was also very active in commencing our Christian school. He also established a young men's society already in the early 1900s. Suddenly, however, after three years, he left our congregation and went back to the Netherlands.

Under Rev. Pieneman's ministry there were many who transferred their memberships from the Turner Avenue Church to the Division Avenue Church, which later was subsumed into our congregation. So Rev. Pieneman must be remembered as one whose labors were blessed throughout North America, but also very much in our congregation.

Two years after he left, Rev. Minderman came to our church as the minister of this congregation for ten years. He was installed in 1911 and served until 1921. He was a man known for careful exegesis. He would never allow anyone to come to visit him on Saturdays. He spent a great deal of time in preparing his sermons. Many people were converted also under his ministry as they were under Rev.

Pieneman's ministry. There are elderly people sitting here who remember being blessed under Rev. Minderman's sermons.

After Rev. Minderman's ministry, the pulpit was vacant for twenty-five years. Meanwhile, elders and deacons faithfully served the congregation, English services were commenced in 1922 in a rented hall on Leonard Street. In 1923 Classis approved the organization of an English congregation, and Rev. Wielhouwer organized the church in the Turner Avenue building. The new English-speaking congregation consisted of forty-seven members from our church (Division Avenue) and sixty-seven from the Turner Avenue congregation. And so now there were three churches in Grand Rapids of our persuasion -- Division Avenue, Turner Avenue and Ottawa Avenue.

Rev. Lamain came in 1947 and became known especially as an experimental minister in the area of experiencing sin and misery. And God used him also for many people. Shortly after Rev. Lamain came, the Ottawa Avenue and Division Avenue Churches merged. Our building on Crescent Street was built in 1951 and dedicated on May 9 of that year. Rev. Lamain preached the dedicatory sermon for this building on Haggai 2:9, "In this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts." The church addition was added in 1974 and by the grace of God, the Lord has preserved this church unto this very day. For thirty-seven years Rev. Lamain served you. The church was built up at one point to 1400 people, and then by the time Rev. Lamain's ministry had come to an end, it was back down to about 1100 people.

Through all these years, building up from a small group to well over a thousand, and now in the 800s, God has still kept the church of God. For the last nine years He has granted us the great privilege of bringing you, with many ups and downs, with many fears and in much weakness, the living Word of God. If we look back over those 125 years, congregation, then we have to say, "The Lord has not left us destitute." And throughout all those years He has always taken a remnant, sometimes fewer in number, sometimes more in number, and put them on the Rock of salvation, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And those who were put on the Rock became the core of the church by which the church received over the years an increasing missionary zeal to reach out to the world around us. Especially in recent

years, we are grateful that God has stirred up in our midst a concern that we cannot hoard to ourselves the heritage of sovereign grace we have received. Though God alone can bring people on the Rock, we are responsible to declare to the world of their need for the Rock and how the Spirit brings them to the Rock, but also to declare the Rock Himself, who He is and what He is willing to be for sinners, and what it means to live out of that Rock out of gratitude unto Him. Oh, let it be our prayer that almighty God who has preserved this flock for 125 years, despite a sad division in recent years, will still be the living God to keep us in the palm of His hands and to bring more to the Rock' here in this church and in Beckwith. One day He will bring many from these congregations to the shores of everlasting bliss where the Church will be one and will glorify God in holy embrace and enjoy with each other the everlasting fellowship of the Triune God. Then all the redeemed will sing the praises of God declaring mutually, without exception, "Saved only by the grace of God upon the Rock of salvation." Oh, the Church will be preserved — not buildings and not institutions, and maybe not denominations, for the candlestick can be removed from one place to another -- but the invisible Church, the living Church of the living God shall never die because Jesus said, "I will build my church", yes, He said, "Even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." What that means we will see after we sing briefly from Psalter 367:2,4,

God has blessed us, congregation. He has given two hundred elders and deacons in 125 years to serve this flock. He has given seven or eight pastors to serve this flock for ninety out of 125 years -- more than in any other church of the denomination from which we have been put aside. The Lord has given faithful men and women to put their hands to work in various ministries and despite all our shortcomings this church may still be a testimony by the grace of God in the midst of the earth to sovereign grace truth. And what shall it be, congregation, to be in this congregation with the history of God's preserving care, to hear the doctrines of grace, and still to be lost?

This past week I had to speak at the Conference of the New England Reformed Fellowship for a day and a half. There were many ministers there, many of whom find it difficult to believe that we have a church of this size in Grand Rapids which professes the doctrines of grace. Some are happy to have thirty or fifty people

come together who believe the doctrines of grace! Oh, what an opportunity we have; more and more it overwhelms me; what a calling rests upon this congregation! Do you realize that we are among the largest English-speaking congregations in the world that profess the doctrines of Reformed, experiential grace? I am speaking of Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, England, Canada, United States, and wherever else the English language is spoken.

III. Preserved to eternity by Christ.

We have a wonderful opportunity and solemn responsibility to carry to the ends of the earth the message of free and sovereign grace. And as we seek to do so in one way or another, in one ministry or another, the gates of hell will continue to attack us -- we may be sure of that. We ought not be surprised at that. Jesus did not say to Peter, "The gates of hell will not attack the church," but He said, "The gates of hell will not prevail against the church." Satan will take all his battering rams to buffet the church of God. Satan hates churches that seek to glorify God and call men and women to the necessity of the new birth in Jesus Christ. With such churches, it is true what Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon . . . Satan has desired to have you . . . to sift you as wheat." Satan wants to have this church, he wants to have you, my friend, he wants to have me, he wants to have our families, he wants to negate the testimony of the doctrines of grace in this city, in this nation and in this world. We ought not marvel that the gates of hell come against us. Luther said, "Cain will go on murdering Abel so long as the church is on earth."

Indeed Paul warns us to be prepared -- to be prepared for the gates of hell, for the principalities and powers and evil rulers in high places that shall attack the church of God. He says: Put on the whole armour of God and be ready to stand. You need the helmet of salvation, you need the breastplate of faith, you need the sword of the Word of God. Your feet must be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. You must be clothed in the armour of God from head to toe because Satan will seek to destroy the church of God. The gates of hell will not give up, but the gates of hell will not prevail. You know, we really ought not be overly discouraged when the gates of hell attack, because that is a sign that Satan has something to attack. But rather we ought to remember what Jesus said of His attacked people, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,

and . . . , say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake."

Dear congregation, we need to be *Nehemiahs*, By the grace of God we need to take the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other, use the means of grace, and seek to build the walls of Zion, defending the church on the one hand with the sword of the Spirit, and building the church on the other by the grace of God, with the cement of the blood of Christ that cements together His Zion in the midst of this waste-howling wilderness.

Now why is it that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church? Why is it? Well, it is not because of any effort of man; it is not because of any gifts of man. It is because of Jesus Christ who is the Head and King of the Church, because of Christ who died for the Church that she might live, because of Christ who rose for the Church and ascended on high with the Church in His loins. It is because of Jesus who ever intercedes for His Church, world without end. Satan will not win the battle because Christ is mightier than Satan. Gog and Magog shall storm Zion's camp as we draw near to the end of the world, but Christ will come on the clouds to judge the living and the dead. You know, really, the gates of hell *cannot* prevail against the Church of God not only because of Christ, but because of God the Father's faithfulness, because of the Spirit's sealing confirmations and His inward, undying grace in the hearts of sinners, and because of the firm, intertrinitarian covenant which must be worked out. If you had to ask me what is the bottom-line reason why the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church of God forever, I would have to say to you it is that *intertrinitarian covenant of sovereign grace* in which each Person of the Trinity is bound to the others to fulfill His end and obligations of that covenant, The Father cannot desert in His electing love the work of the Son or the work of the Spirit. The Son cannot deny His Father's sovereign electing will nor reject the saving work of the Spirit. And how shall the Spirit cast away the election of the Father and the redemption of the Son and not do His work in the heart of sinners? *God is bound to God* in and through Jesus Christ, and therefore the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of God.

On the walls of those who were brought to death through the Roman Inquisition one martyr wrote: "Blessed Jesus, they can kill my body and take me out of my earthly position in this church, but they cannot take me out of Thy true Church."

You see, the gates of hell not only will not prevail against the church in this life, but the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church in glory. Martin Luther was fond of telling the devil that. When the devil would challenge him, he would often say to the devil: "You are at the wrong address because my King and my Master is in heaven. There you have to go, devil, and there you can never go, devil, because my Master is now above your reach. He is above the nibblings on the heel of all your devices. My Head is in heaven, and with Him you must be if you want me because He has taken my heart and run away to heaven with it." Oh Satan, you are a defeated foe! And though you are yet dangerous, so dangerous, that Luther said, "If it weren't for the grace of God, the tail of Satan would knock my conversion out of me"- yet by the grace of God Satan cannot take my conversion away from me, because my salvation is sure and steadfast in Jesus Christ. And He will confirm what you read in Matthew 24, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." So the Church is safe in the hands of God Triune -- *the Church is safe*. The Father cannot desert her, the Son cannot desert her, and the Holy Spirit cannot desert her. She is safe. All praise be to God!

"Yes, but," as one of the old ministers asked one of his dying parishioners once, "are you not afraid that you will slip through the fingers of Christ?" "No, pastor," said that aged woman, "I cannot slip through His fingers because the Church is His body; by grace, I *am* one of His fingers. The Church is His body, and Christ will not crucify Himself again. He will not leave His Church to herself. The Church's salvation is sure. By His preserving grace every believer shall endure to the end."

We believe in the perseverance of the saints and the perseverance of the Church because of the perseverance of the Father from eternity, the perseverance of the Son on Calvary and at the right hand of the Father, and the perseverance of the Holy Spirit in God working out salvation in the heart of sinners. Therefore the believer and the Church shall persevere. God cannot forsake the work of His own hands, and He works such a love in the heart of His people for Him that they cannot forsake the work of His hands. And so faith cannot die, the Church cannot die. It is a two-sided coin, congregation – the whole doctrine of perseverance. The perseverance of God fosters the perseverance of the believer. Both are necessary, both belong together, and both shall be confirmed, for we love Him because He

first loved us. He loved His Church from eternity and His Church cannot help but love Him in return. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of God.

When the Emperor Julian said that he would destroy the church of God, one of the ancient fathers said to him, "If that is your goal, God will destroy you." And that happened very soon. He who lays his hand upon the Church lays his hand upon the apple of God's eye. Empires shall rise and fall, many in the world shall pass away, the very world shall pass away, but the Church of God shall never die, not even when this earth's elements are burned in fire. The Church shall be purged and shall be gathered to her Head. And therefore, dear believer, *never give up on the Lord*. He has enrolled you in His army. He calls you to perseverance. There are no pensions, there are no retirements, there is no quitting in the kingdom of God. You are called to endure to the end; you are enrolled in lifelong service. Do we speak now only of those who are in full-time ministry? Every true believer is engaged in "full-time ministry."

My dear unconverted friend, if you are not a member of the living Church, oh remember, your earthly church membership, if God prevent not, shall perish one day. These walls and bricks, this building and the outward church shall perish. But he who is built on the Rock shall endure forever. Are you built on the Rock? Is Jesus Christ your only hope, your only life, your only expectation? Has He shown you the horrible pit and miry clay within you, has He lifted up your feet upon a Rock, and has He established your goings upon that Rock (Ps. 40:2)? Oh, then you shall never perish! But if you are not on that Rock, the day is coming, if you are not born again, that you shall cry to the rocks and to the hills to fall on you to cover you from the wrath of that Rock, the wrath of the Lamb of God. All they who are in Christ have life; all they who are outside of Christ have the wrath of God abiding upon them. Oh what shall it be to be preserved all our lives in a church in which God has preserved the truth, and never know that truth ourselves? Oh my friend, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Amen.