**GOD’S HOUSEHOLD**

1 Timothy 3:1-16

Key Verse: 3:15

“What is the church?” Today, we’ll be asking this question and looking at this passage in three parts—The Watcher (1-13), The Household (14-15), The Mystery (16). May God guide and bless our study this morning.

1. **The Watcher (verses 1-13)**

Look at verse 1. This is the second time in this letter we hear, “Here is a trustworthy saying” (1:15). Whenever Paul says this, it’s like writing in all caps. It means, “What I’m about to say is really important; anyone reading this should think about it.” And, the saying is this: “Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.” What’s an overseer? The early church had used the term “overseer” as one of the words to describe what we consider today a “pastor.” The Greek word for “overseer” is *episkopay*, which was the word used to describe a “watchmen,” a “groundskeeper,” or simply, “the watcher.” The watcher of a property was the guy who would stay up all night keeping watch, walking around the grounds and looking around, making sure no one broke in and that everyone in the house was kept safe. So, in Paul’s really important message to Timothy, he’s defining the role of a pastor as one of these “watchers,” and says, “Whoever aspires to be an overseer (a pastor, a watcher) desires a noble task.”

Look again at verse 1. The wording here is really interesting. Why, “aspires?” To aspire for anything is to make it your dream, your hope, your ambition. So, Paul is saying, “Whoever’s dream it is” to be a watcher, a pastor, is going after something noble.

Noble—a pastor? When you think of someone noble, you may think about people who work for the Peace Corp, or who fight against sex trafficking or for equal rights, or people who volunteer at orphanages—all very noble things. But being a pastor? If you went out on the street right now and asked the average person in this neighborhood if they thought pursing being a pastor as something noble, I’m sure most people would shrug and say, “Meh… Maybe?” We’ve got a lot of versions of “pastors”—the intense and, sadly, condemning, close-minded, the depressed man who just does it as a job. Sometimes we hear about pastors of mega-churches and priests in the news with horrible scandals. Then there’s what pastors actually do—a lot of phone calls, budget concerns, meetings, Bible studies, things like worrying about what color chairs to get, or if they’ve ordered enough toilet paper for that month. So, is wanting to be a pastor noble? “Maybe…?”

I think we need to come back to what it means to be a pastor. Think again about the word “overseer,” or “watcher.” If you’re aspiring to be a watcher, to watch over people all night, you have to actually care about others. Paul describes this in Acts, where he says, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28-30). A watcher, a pastor, is a shepherd. A shepherd is someone who always watches over others, protects his flock, who sleeps lightly with one eye open to make sure his sheep are okay. I read somewhere recently that shepherds were really blue collar and actually considered themselves subservient to the sheep they were taking care of. A pastor thinks of himself that way too, as the servant of others. A pastor is someone who can’t but help care and love for the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of others, and for the sake of others, is always striving to do a better job of it. In short, aspiring to be a pastor is to want to be more like Jesus, who embodies this noble task. Jesus once saw a needy crowd of thousands coming towards him when he and his disciples were trying to get time alone, and is described as aching from within with compassion, because he saw, “sheep without a shepherd” (Mk5:34). Jesus said of himself, “I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn10:10) and that he “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk10:45). Pastors emulate Jesus, who, out of his compassion, couldn’t help but care for, serve, watch over and sacrifice for us; his sheep.

**Good character.** Let’s look at verses 2-3. Paul shares with Timothy a list of qualities a pastor is to possess. In verse 2: “is to be above reproach,” unable to fault with anything; “faithful to his wife,” not adulterous; “temperate,” emotionally stable; “self-controlled,” not reckless; “respectable,” engenders respect; “hospitable,” opens up his personal space and time for others. Then look at verse 3: “not given to drunkenness,” not addicted to alcohol, or any abusive substance; “not violent but gentle,” doesn’t go around punching people, but is gentle; “not quarrelsome,” isn’t argumentative; “not a lover of money,” which, honestly, you should get a different profession if you’re a pastor and love money.

Look again at these verses. There’s nothing about having a seminary degree, level of education, physical appearance or achievements. This is all about character. Is there anyone you can describe like this—without fault, completely respectable, always hospitable? If someone had this description on a dating website, it would be the perfect person. It’s almost too hard to expect anyone to have a character like this. So, why does a pastor have to be held to such standards? We may be like, “Thank God I’m not a pastor.” But each of the characteristics in verses 2-3, somewhere in the New Testament, is asked of every believer. We’re all supposed to have the outstanding character described in these verses. So, since we all should be trying to be like this, Paul is saying that pastors are no exemption. They’re not above the very basic ways Christians should be trying to live. Rather, they should exemplify what a gospel-changed life looks like.

**Able to teach.** The only ability mentioned in verses 2-3 is the ability “to teach” (2b). So, it stands outs. As we’ve seen in 1 Timothy so far, a lot of “false teachings” were being taught in the church in Ephesus. And, as pastors are described by Paul in Acts, they’re main task is to watch over God’s flock against wolves who distort the truth (20:30). What do pastors teach? It’s the Bible (2Tim4). The Bible should be the basis of a pastor’s teachings. And Paul says that a pastor should be “able” to teach. The ability to teach anything presupposes two things: that you understand something well, and are able to communicate that understanding well. There are some people who really understand the Bible, their theology is deep, their doctrine solid. Yet, sometimes these people have no idea how to communicate what they know. And then there are also people who have no problem communicating; who have what’s called the “gift of the gab.” Yet, sometimes, if you listen long enough, you realize, “Wait, what you’re saying makes no sense.” So, when Paul says pastors are “able to teach,” it means that they should both understand the truths of the Bible and at the same time are able to communicate in a way people can understand.

**Home life.** Let’s look at verses 4-5. Here Paul talks about a pastor’s life at home. He says that they should be able to manage their family well, he should be respected at home. And Paul says this is important because, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” (5). Say a pastor is really trying to be of good character at church, loving and teaching well, and then comes home, doesn’t pay attention to his kids, doesn’t take care of his bills or talks to his wife. Paul is telling Timothy that a pastor doesn’t stop being a pastor when he leaves the church; he has also be a good father, husband and manage his personal life well. This speaks to integrity. A pastor doesn’t act like a shepherd just as a job; a shepherd has to be who a pastor is all the time.

**Humility.** Look at verses 6 and 7. Paul says that pastors shouldn’t be recent converts, because it’s easier to become conceited, or what is better translated as “puffed up.” He also says that he must have a “good reputation with outsiders.” People outside the church should have a good view of a pastor, in any business dealings, is kind to his neighbors, is respectful and has friends who are non-Christians, otherwise Paul says that he will “fall into disgrace.” I think in these verses we see that it’s easy for pastors to become proud—in taking care of others, in an “us vs. them” view of non-Christians. And Paul mention’s twice in these verses how susceptible a pastor is to the “devil’s trap” (6b,7b). The devil especially wants to trap a pastor because if you take away a shepherd, all his sheep will scatter (Mk14:27). And, the biggest trap I think the devil has for pastors is pride.

So, why is Paul writing about all of these qualifications to Timothy? He wanted to encourage him; a young pastor in Ephesus. He wanted to reassure him that he was aspiring for something noble. He wanted to encourage the church in Ephesus to have pastors who were of good character. And we see how important it is not just to just expect from pastors, but pray for and encourage them, and also keep them accountable, encourage them to live with integrity as shepherds and overseers of God’s flock.

**Called to serve.** After learning a lot about pastors, each of us may again be like “Well, thank God I’m not a pastor!” But look at verses 8-13. Hear we see Paul’s requirement for “deacons” and for “deaconesses.” The word “deacon” comes from the Greek for *diakonos*, which means “person in waiting,” or, “servant of the house.” Whoever serves then, in the church, in whatever capacity—be it the person managing the money, or the person cleaning toilets—these are deacons and deaconesses. And not just anybody can serve in the church. Look at verses 9 and 10. Paul is saying here that if you’re serving in the church, you have to clearly know the truth of the gospel in your life. Churches usually have a lot of things they need done, and are begging for anybody to help out. But according to this, we should have standards for servants, we should see serving in the church as something special, something we want people of good character and influence to do.

So all this talk of watchmen, house servants, it sounds like Paul was watching too much Downton Abbey. In the next part of this chapter, we see why Paul is spending so much time describing different roles in the church like this.

1. **The Household (verses 14-15)**

When the average person thinks about the church, what comes to mind? A building? An organization? A certain demographic of people dressed up and singing together once a week? We have many versions of church. When I was a kid, church was setting up wooden folding chairs in my parent’s living room, with ten to fifteen (random) people gathering. For some, it’s stepping into beautiful neo-gothic architecture and sacred artwork, and others it’s a light show and fog and big projector screens and thousands of people. But aside from all that, what is the church?

Let’s look at verse 14. Paul share that he “hopes to come to [them] soon.” We see Paul the shepherd, how he misses his friends in Ephesus. So he shares why he’s writing these instructions in verse 15. Let’s read it together. “[I]f I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Paul wants to make sure, if he’s delayed in coming to Ephesus, that the community there understands what the church is. All this talk about the late night watchmen and house servants, we’ve gotten a glimpse of what Paul’s definition of the church is. In verse 15, Paul calls the church. “God’s household.” God’s household is where he lives, he dwells, his manor, where he’s the head of household. And the word “household” implies that the church is God’s family. As Christians, we’re a part of God’s family—we’re more than servants or groundskeepers; we’re his sons and daughters (Ga4:7), we’re brothers and sisters serving in our Father God’s house.

How does this concept of God’s household help us define the church? You know, when you go into someone else’s house for the first time, you have to sort of gage what is proper conduct in their living space. Some people like you to take your shoes off, some people think that’s gross. Some people don’t like you to eat their food, or to eat in the living room, while some people except you to “make yourself at home.” There’s a certain vibe to every home, a certain way of things. Imagine being invited over to God’s house. How would you act? What would you say?

It’s so important that we recognize that the church isn’t about behavior modification. Our conduct is a response to who God is. Look again at verse 15. Paul says that it’s the “church of the living God.” A lot of gods were worshiped in Ephesus. Worshipers of these gods would go to their temples, look at the stone figure of their god, and then go home. But Paul is reminding them that God is alive. And he dwells and lives in his household; the church, which isn’t a statue or a building, but is people. When believers come and gather together, God’s there too. So, we should act as if God himself were here. When we come to church, or when we gather together, God is actually here in fellowship with us. He’s living. So how we behave—how we act, what we say, our characters, and even how we study and teach the Bible—it’s all in response to the living God dwelling with us, his household.

Now, this might seem like a scary thing. “The living God is here?” The entire story of the Bible is that we were orphaned in sin, and in order to rescue us, God did whatever it took to get us back, paying this impossible ransom of giving his own life, breaking through sin and death to be with us again. By just accepting this, we’re brought in from the orphanage of our sins in the house of our Father, and blemished and imperfect, he adopts us as we are, as his own sons and daughters (Ga4:6). Through this love, we can come into the presence of the living God, not in fear, but “with confidence” (Heb4:16). So this is why God created the church—God wants to be with us. God wants us to gather together and enjoy him, draw close to him as our Father, worship him as God, live in unity with him and with each other. That’s why we’re here; we’re here in fellowship with the living God.

Look at the last part of verse 15. Paul describes the church as the “pillar and foundation of the truth.” Paul is describing the church here as holding up, like a building’s foundation and its pillars, the truth of the Gospel, securely grounded and elevated up. In Ephesus, there were so many religions, cults, and existential and spiritual followings. When Paul first came to this environment in Ephesus, he was in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years, where he shared the Gospel until people’s lives began to change and this church began. Today, truth is thought of as a thing of perspective, relative. But Christianity sees things differently. We believe that there is the one universal truth of the Gospel, that it exists whether or not we can perceive it, that it’s universally true yet uniquely transforms. And the church has this special role of being the solid support of the Gospel; of grounded in the Bible, holding up the Gospel for everyone to see. This is our task as the church; to share the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus. How do you view the church? Is the church the fellowship, the family, the pillar of truth? How can we?

1. **The Mystery (16)**

This entire chapter has been about how to behave as pastors, servants and members of God’s household. In that kind of environment, it’s easy to think of trying to “better ourselves” or to put on our “best behavior” as a ministry. But is that true change, or is it just acting?

Let’s read verse 16 together. “Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, / was vindicated by the Spirit, / was seen by angels, / was preached among the nations, / was believed on in the world, / was taken up in glory.” The mystery of our true change, changing from people all messed up inside and out from sin and living apart from God, is this change that “springs” from Jesus and the Gospel. When we turn away from our sins, our mistakes, focusing on ourselves and our character, and we instead turn to Jesus, we “fix our eyes on him” (He12:2), who he is and what he’s done, what he’s like, this mysterious change in us happens—as Paul says elsewhere, “The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2Co5: 17 ESV). This mystery, this miracle is that who Jesus is changes who we are, to become godly people, who live in God’s family, who grow to be more like Jesus, who live to love God and others. It’s nothing we do to ourselves, it’s just focusing on who Jesus is, what he’s done.

That’s what this is all about. That’s what we want to support through our fellowship, our serving, our dwelling with God and our standing on the truth of the Gospel, all of this is so that we can grow closer in love with Jesus, and let who he is and his love for us transform and compel us to love.