

A PASTORAL AND CONGREGATIONAL CHARGE
AT THE INSTALLATION OF DAVID PALMER AS SENIOR PASTOR OF
KENWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH

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I am delighted to be a part of this momentous occasion. My charge simply stated is this: *Stay plugged into the power, or the light will not be on!* In Rom 1:16, the apostle Paul declared, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Pastor David, like Paul, you have been set apart for the gospel of God, the good news concerning Jesus Christ, the divine, crucified, and resurrected Messiah. Paul summarized some of what he meant by the good news in Rom 5:8–9: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”

Notice that for Paul, those who already have right standing with God—those who are already justified—*will be saved* from God’s wrath. Salvation for the apostle does not simply mean conversion; salvation covers all of life, past, present, and future. Those who have surrendered their lives to Christ as Savior, Sovereign, and Satisfier have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved. “By grace you *have been saved* through faith” (Eph 2:8). “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who *are being saved* it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). “Since . . . we have now been justified by his blood, much more *shall we be saved* by him from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9). Paul commands believers, “Work out your salvation with fear and with trembling” (Phil 2:12), and in Rom 1:16 he declares that “the gospel is the power of God for salvation—past, present, and future—to everyone who believes.”

The church of God bears a mission of salvation, and the gospel is the only power that can make it succeed. Your own statement of faith here at Kenwood affirms that the church bears the task of “evangelizing the world and advancing the interests of the Kingdom of God.” “Evangelizing” is the verbal form of the word for “gospel.” Kenwood must be a place that points people to the only power that can save them from their own sinfulness, the curse, and the certainty of God’s just wrath against all sin. I say “just wrath” because if God is a good judge, and he is, then he must punish the sinner or choose to pour his wrath on a substitute. In love, Jesus became the substitute, taking upon himself at the cross God’s wrath against every sinner who believes. “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

Pastor David, this world is dark, and there are many enemies against your faith and that of your people. Temptations to compromise are present with every click of the mouse and with every step through the checkout line, with every bill that you pay and every commercial that you watch. But the potential for dishonoring God with our lives goes even deeper, for “*all things* are from him, through him, and *to him*” (Rom 11:36). All of life is about worship. Even a spoon of oatmeal or a drink of orange juice is about God, for “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). No closets of our lives can be left uncleaned, for every bit of us is to declare, “There is only one God, and I love him with all.”

Pride and prejudice, bitterness and blame, laziness and lust, apathy and resentment, doubt and deceit—all these are enemies that Jesus defeated at the cross, and they are to be our enemies. In this broken world filled with broken people, what can rescue a husband from pornography’s entrapment or preserve a mother’s faith through miscarriage? What can reconcile an estranged father and son or overcome the plague of racism or sexism in the soul? What can defeat the arrogance of the human heart or move one into the messy and beautiful world of adoption? What can make a person take the radical step of leaving family, friends, and the comforts of the West to go abroad as a missionary for the fame of God’s name? The good news of Jesus Christ alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, and it is given without partiality to both Jew and non-Jew. Pastor David and all others who are a part of this church, may you press hard to make this ministry at Kenwood, all the preaching and all the programming, centered on and saturated with the gospel. If you are not plugged in, the light of Christ will not be on. The power of God that saves you and that will save others in this community is only the gospel. How does this work? How is it that the gospel is the power for past, present, and future salvation?

The power of the cross and resurrection comes to us first through blood-bought pardon. For the Christian, every step toward glory is built on the mercy of the cross that God is already being 100% for us in Christ. In our walk with God, the only sins that we can conquer are sins that have already been pardoned. You need blood-bought power to pursue holiness. As believers, we do not work to make God for us; rather we rest today, trusting that he is wholly for us already in Jesus. There is power in this kind of blood-bought freedom. “No condemnation now I dread.” We face opposition and confront temptation knowing that in Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth is working for us and is present with us, because wrath has *already* been removed, mercy has *already* been secured, sin has *already* been conquered, hope has *already* been gained, and present power is real. “If God is for us, who can be against us? ³¹He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:31–32).

The gospel is the power of God for salvation. David, if you need to be saved from pride, creating a ministry focused on the cross will remind you daily of your own sinfulness and neediness and crush all self-exalting boasting. If you struggle with discouragement, as many ministers do, being a pastor, parent, or friend who focuses on the cross will remind you regularly of God's amazing love and therefore will provide the antidote for battling despondency. The cross defeats fear of man, fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of lack, because at the cross the greatest enemy has been defeated and the Victor is our helper forevermore. Being a cross-centered minister, being a cross-centered people will remind you of how God's wrath-overcoming love conquered your own rebellion and hardness, and it will therefore fuel your love for the broken, the marginalized, and those just plain difficult to love. Pastor David, the reality of blood-bought pardon becomes an amazing power for your own salvation and for the salvation of your people. So be a gospel-centered minister.

But the power of the gospel comes also because pardon secures blood-bought promises. We live between the poles of past grace of pardon and future grace of promise. This week my wife Teresa had to do something she has never done before—write a “good bye” letter to a dear Christian friend in her 40s. She has terminal cancer, four children, and a loving husband, and she has been given just a couple of more weeks before she will see Jesus face-to-face. What has held her faith strong is her belief “that [God] exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb 11:6), her belief that even through suffering God is on the throne, that Christ is worth her trust, that he has prepared a place for her, and that he will take care of her family when she is gone. This good news, purchased for her in Jesus, has been the power to preserve her through every stage of salvation up until now, and it will keep holding her into glory.

What you hope for tomorrow changes who you are today. “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet 1:4). Blood-bought promises provide power, and every promise is already Yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). We wage war against lust, because “the pure in heart . . . shall see God” (Matt 5:8). We overcome bitterness in our soul and love those who have hurt us, because God declares, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Rom 12:19). We fight covetousness and nurture contentment, because the Lord says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb 13:5). And when we lose our job or face massive loss, we hold fast to the hope “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:19). Finally, when death's shadow draws near, we declare, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21), and “The LORD is my shepherd . . . [and] even though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are with me” (Ps 23:1, 4).

The gospel is God's power for salvation—past, present, and future. The gospel is power because of blood-bought pardon and blood-bought promises. Pastor David, other leaders, and all members of Kenwood Baptist Church, I charge you in the name of the resurrected Son of God to stay plugged into his power, so that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ may shine in this community, giving hope and help to you and to others. Amen.