Sunday 06/23/24 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: Chapter 3 "The Class Meeting: Moving into God's House: The Theological Foundation of the Class Meeting"
Sermon Series: (Part 3 of 8)

(Play graduate video before the Call to Worship 😊)

(Slides 1-16 will be listed in order throughout this sermon 😊)

(Slide 1 – (Class Meeting Book Cover Picture)
(Slide 2 – (Class Meeting – Chapter 3 - "*The Class Meeting*: Moving into God's House: The Theological Foundation of the Class Meeting")
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What a blessing it is again this morning to celebrate our 2024 graduates, and all the hard work they have done to get to the point of completing high school or college! What a blessing it is to honor the family and friends of these graduates, who also sacrificed a lot for these graduates. What a blessing it is further to have

this great church and the people in it, to honor and celebrate with our graduates and their families this morning!

(Slide 1 – (Class Meeting Book Cover Picture)

With this said, we are continuing our journey this morning through learning about "The Class Meeting," or "Small Groups." As we discussed on the first week of this eight-week sermon series, there are three main types of small groups that the author of "The Class Meeting" book, Kevin M. Watson identifies. These three types of small groups are "Affinity Groups," that are more social groups. "Information-Driven Groups" that are more focused on learning, head knowledge, and personal growth. Both "Affinity Groups" and "Information-Driven Groups" can have elements of spiritual growth, but "Transformation-Driven Groups" are focused more on spiritual and faith growth. These are the kind of groups we are learning about and walking through in this sermon series. I also hope that on the last three Sundays of July we will have testimonies from people in this church that have been or are in small groups. I hope to begin looking at trying to form some new small groups eventually, as well. These new small groups will not disband any of our existing small groups through this church, but I do hope to add even more small groups. This is not for us to just have another weekly obligation, but for us to grow closer to Christ, and closer to each other. Be praying about this and be praying for our church.

The Third chapter of the class meeting book that we have been talking about is called, “Moving into God’s House: The Theological Foundation of the Class Meeting.” Imagine if our lives here on earth and if our lives spiritual lives here on earth were like a house. If your life here on earth was like a house, what would that house look like? Would it be perfect and pristine? Would it be in need of a little work? Or does the house of your life need a lot of work? Now imagine your spiritual life here on earth. If your spiritual life were like a house, what would it look like? Would it look perfect and pristine? Would it be in need of a little work? Or does the spiritual life of your house need a lot of work?

For many of us, where we live physically is our place of peace and solace. How many of you find where you live to be your place of peace, renewal, solace, and safety? I have also talked to some folks with a lot of kids, and sometimes they have told me that their house is not that place, but the garage is, or the man cave, and I have now heard of the “she shed” for moms. If our lives here on earth were a house though, what would it look like? If our spiritual lives here on earth were a house, what would it look like?

(Slide 2 – (Class Meeting – Chapter 3 - “*The Class Meeting*: Moving into God’s House: The Theological Foundation of the Class Meeting”)

In being a pastor for a long time now, Melissa and I first lived in an apartment when we got married, then we bought a house. While owning that house, for a short time, we were also part-time in a church parsonage in the

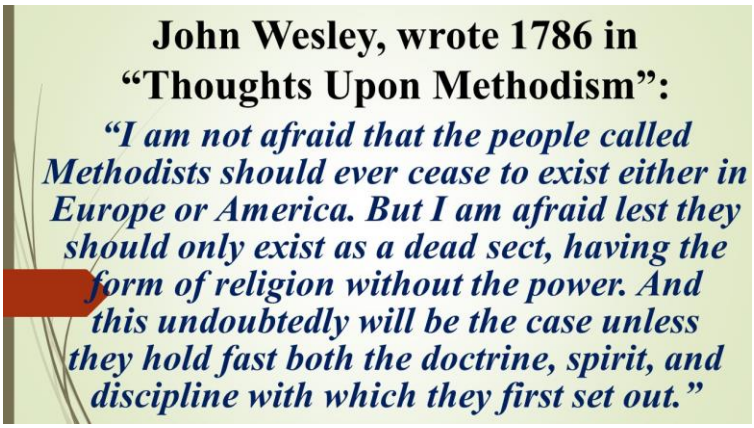
Adirondacks. Then eventually we sold our house. Since that time, Panama Methodist Church, is our fourth parsonage that we have lived in. I say all of this because we have seen and lived in a lot of houses! Some of the houses needed a lot of work, and some did not. Each house was built differently, had a different layout, and Melissa and I have found that each house that we have lived in was different. Melissa and I agree though, that the Panama Methodist Church Parsonage is our favorite. We are not just saying this to say it either, we really mean it!

The first house that Melissa and I bought about twenty-years ago now was definitely, and I mean definitely a fixer upper. Knowing what I know now, we do not know if we would have bought the house. I remember the first year that we had the house, we invited my mother Susan and stepfather Michael over for Thanksgiving dinner. During the dinner, my stepfather Michael informed me that a curtain on a window next to the front door entrance of the house was moving. It was moving, because the window was not properly caulked, and was leaking heat like a sieve, or leaking a lot. Our own lives, and our own spiritual lives can be like a house. How are our houses doing this morning?

In building and maintaining the houses of our lives and our spiritual lives, it is important that our lives and our spiritual lives are built on a sturdy foundation. What we believe and how live our lives and spiritual lives matter. In fact, the founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, said that we have to have stay

grounded in the teachings of our Christian faith, maintain the spirit of our Christian faith, and the discipline of our Christian faith. If not, our spiritual houses could decay or could even collapse. Wesley stated this fact in 1786 in his writing "Thoughts on Methodism" we he wrote this:

(Slide 3 – John Wesley Quote)



How many of us here have ever worked in a literal house before? I know I have worked on many houses. In getting deeper with this idea of the houses of our lives and our spiritual houses, here are some literal questions to consider about working on actual houses:

(Slide 4 – Building House Questions)



I have done all three all these. How many of you have done, if any? Whenever I have fixed or worked on a house, I have always also been overly optimistic. I would tell Melissa things like, “we can get this done in a couple of hours,” or “we can get this done in a week.” Sometimes two hours later, and three Band-Aids later, well I did not achieve my goals! Sometimes we also can feel like we are in overheads, and we decide that we will just take a break from working on the house! Then two years went by, and we did little to no work on the house.

I would argue that our lives and our spiritual lives are like this, as it takes hard work, prayer, reading the bible, learning, and effort to grow. For example, how many of you have ever bought a “fixer upper” house? How many of you would like to buy a “fixer upper” house? Well, I have good news for you. I can show just the right house for you. Here it is

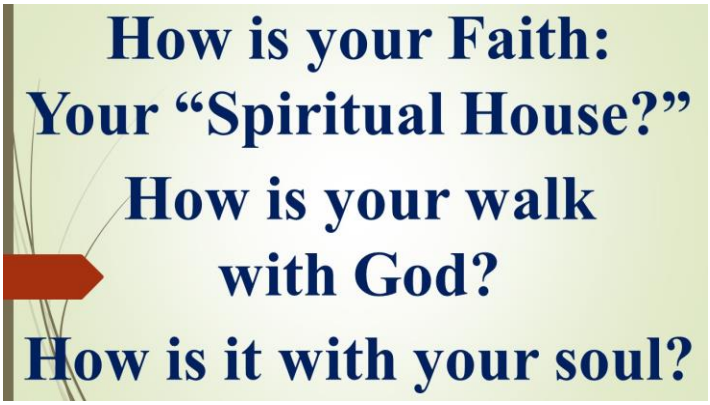
(Slide 5 – Run Down House Picture)



Anyone here work or have ever worked in real estate? I think that this would be advertised as “having loads of potential,” or “make it into your dream home!” How does the house of our life look? Are we beat down and run down, or are we somewhere in between?

In addition, how can we fix, work on, or renovate our spiritual houses? Some spiritual house questions to consider:

(Slide 6 – Spiritual House Questions)



So, there is the house of our lives, and the house of our faith. Once again, how is your spiritual house? Is it in bad shape? Is it in great shape? Or is it somewhere in between? Here is a picture of a spiritual house.

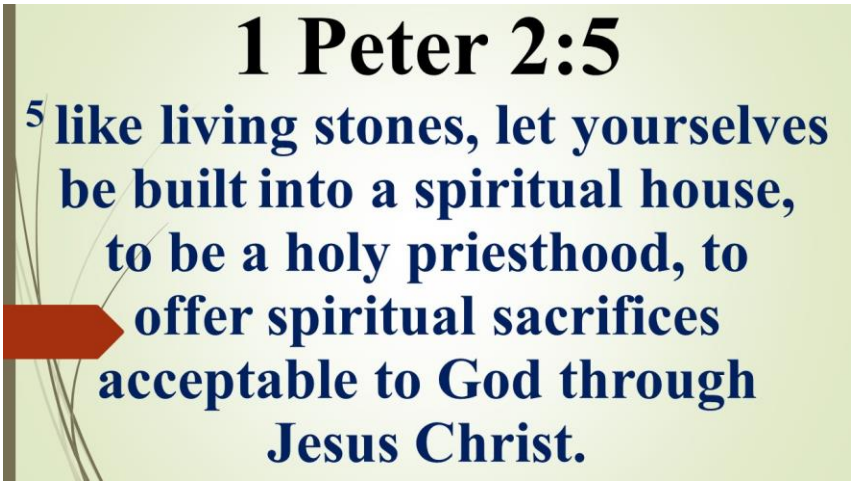
(Slide 7 – Spiritual House Pictures)



It is safe to say that we are all, on some level, under spiritual construction, renovating, and working on the houses that are our lives and our faith. One of the ways that we can improve in these areas is to be real with ourselves and to those we trust. How are our lives going, really? How is our spiritual life going, really? I am so grateful for the small groups that I am in, in this church, because it gives me and many others an opportunity to ask these questions and to grow closer to Christ and to each other. We are all works in progress, but it can be hard to grow or improve when we are not willing to admit and to own where we fall short.

In looking at our Bibles, in 1 Peter 2:5 we read:

(Slide 8 – 1 Peter 2:5)

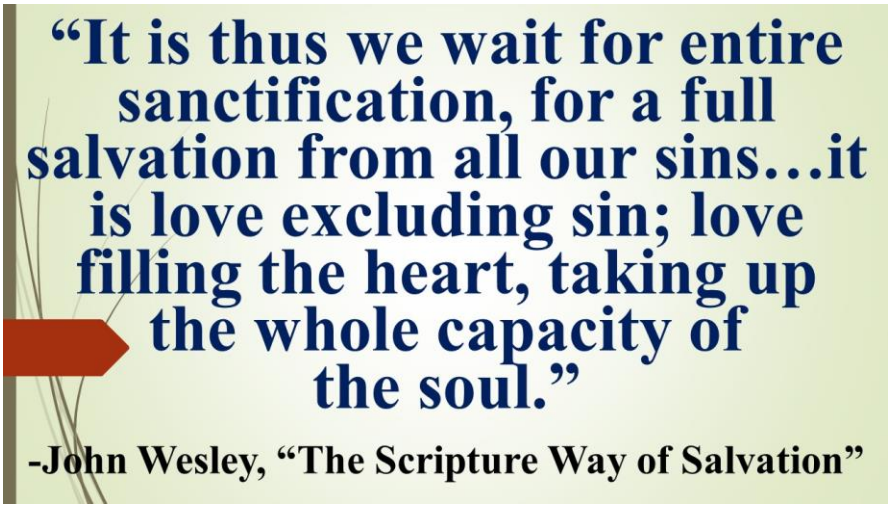


Running to God and to God's grace, to Christ and to his saving and sanctifying grace is how we grow, and how our spiritual houses are made stronger. It does not just happen, and growth and renovations can be hard. They can be hard both in our lives and with our faith in Christ. Yet how can we go deeper if we do not put in the

time, the energy, the reading of scripture, the prayer, the discernment, and everything that Jesus Christ has called us to be?

After we meet Christ, we need to keep renovating, keep fixing up, and keep improving our lives and our faith. In fact, the founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley said this:

(Slide 9 – John Wesley Quote)

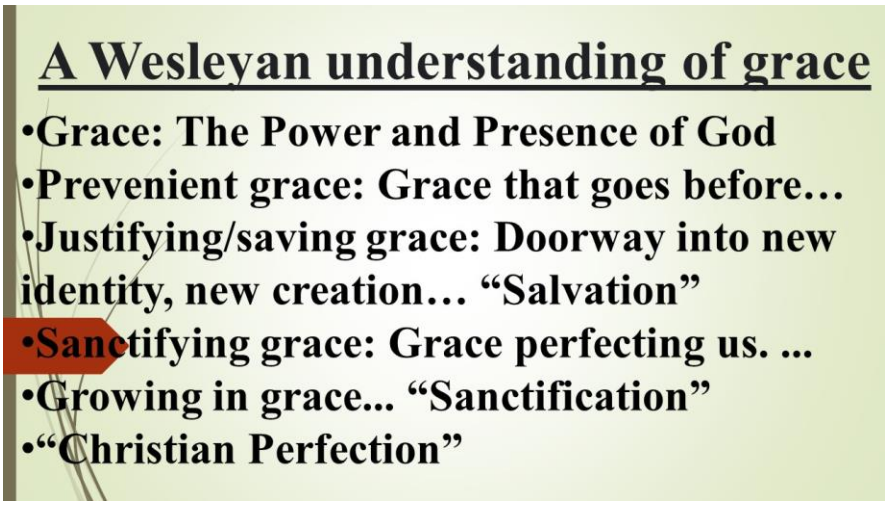


After we come to Christ, then the real journey begins. This journey is not a competition. There is no running lanes, no gold, silver, or bronze metals. What could be better than growing closer to Christ though? Don't we want our actual homes, the homes of our lives, and our spiritual homes to be the best we can make them? By the best, I mean God's best, and the most like Jesus. Living lives that we hope can lead us to be free of sin and perfecting us in love and hope.

If knowing God, coming to Christ, and becoming increasingly sanctified in Christ is the journey we all invited on, the how is this like a "spiritual house?"

Here is the Wesleyan or Methodist understanding of God's grace. I am giving you this example, because in book I am in part preaching on, we are given this example of how God's grace and faith in Christ works.

(Slide 10 – A Wesleyan Understanding of Grace)



Grace is the power and the presence of God. Prevenient grace is God's grace that reaches out to us even before we know God, or before we step on the front porch of God's Spiritual House. When we repent of our sins, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and savior, we go from the front porch of God's spiritual house, to crossing the threshold of the front door of the house. Since we know Jesus and follow him as our Lord and Savior, we are reconciled with God. We have been offered saving and justifying grace from God, and as a result, we can enter into God's spiritual house. It is like being able to enter the "Holy of Holies" in the great temple Jerusalem, that only the high priest could enter one day a year. That veil has

been torn, and through Christ on the cross, we all are now invited to enter God's spiritual house forgiven, justified, regenerated, and made spiritually new.

After we are saved, after walk from the front porch of God's spiritual house and enter God's spiritual house, we are invited for the rest of our earthly lives and beyond to venture through God's spiritual house. In doing so, we learn more about God and his kingdom. We grow closer to Christ, God is continuing to perfect us with Sanctifying Grace, and we hopefully become more pure, more righteous, more holy, and more and more like Jesus. In fact, the founder of Methodist Movement, John Wesley, believed that we should pursue sinlessness. John Wesley called this "Christian Perfection," and he believed that we can be made perfect in God's love in this life.

By perfect, I do not mean being better than each other, or superior to each other. I do not mean being a better Christian than other people. In fact, in Matthew 5:48 Jesus says:

(Slide 11 – Matthew 5:48)



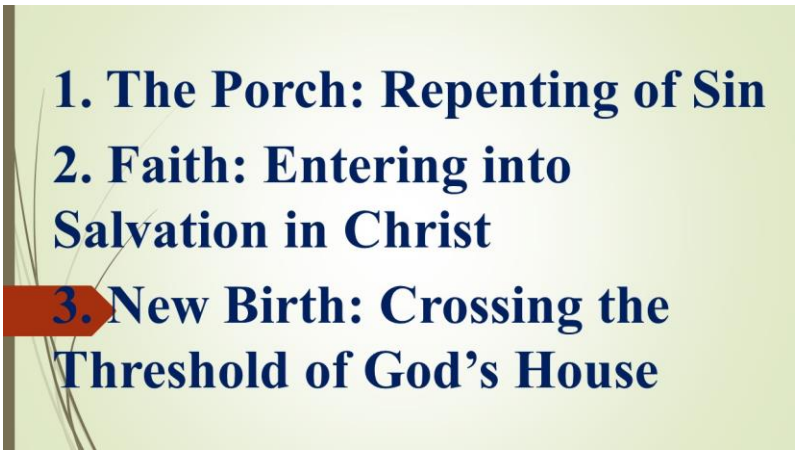
In this scripture, Jesus is not telling us to be superior to each other, but instead to strive to be perfect like God is. Some might hear this in the way of being superior to other Christians and other people, but this not what Jesus meant. This made me think of the character called “The Church Lady” from Saturday Night Live (SNL). This character was played by actor Dana Carvey, and in this character of “The Church Lady,” the character was always “holier than thou,” and acted superior to everyone else. This is not what John Wesley meant by “Christian Perfection.” He meant striving to be sinless and to be fully made into the image of God through Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. The character “The Church Lady” from Saturday Night Live (SNL) had a phrase that was often said that would really display the character’s “holier than thou” attitude. We might want to have the volume turned up for this ahead of time, as it is short; Here is that phrase:

(Slide 12 – Church Lady (SNL) Video)

I always laugh whenever I see this. It would be like me, or you are telling someone, I am hoping to become a "Perfect Christian" one day! The response from some might be "Well isn't that special!" Christian perfection, however, is striving to be without sin, striving to be fully made into the image of Jesus Christ, or what John Wesley called "Entire Sanctification." Becoming sinless and entirely like Jesus Christ, and this is a worthy goal for our faith walks here on earth!

Once again, the process of coming to Christ can be compared to a spiritual house. Here is the process once again of coming Christ in God's spiritual house:

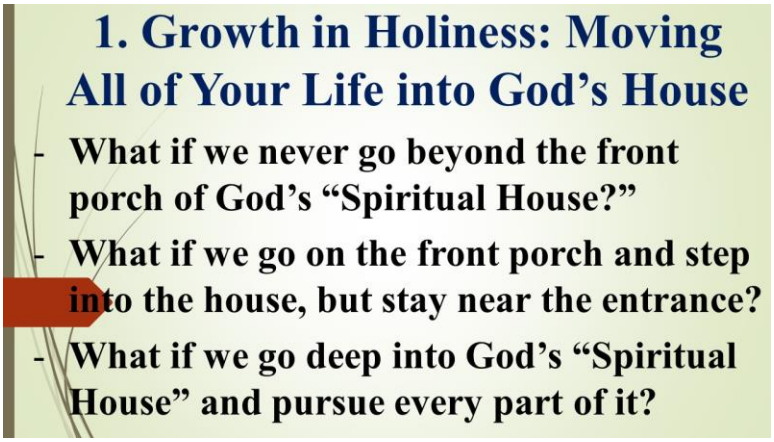
(Slide 13 – Porch and House of Faith)



After we are saved, and after we walk into God's "spiritual house," we are then called to explore God's "spiritual house." This means growing in grace, growing closer to Christ, and becoming closer to Christ. Yet, what if we get saved, and then stay in the doorway of God's "Spiritual House?" What if we never pursue God deeper, and what if we never pursue growing closer to Christ and going

deeper with Christ. This is the idea of what if we do not have "Growth in Holiness?" Here are some growth in holiness questions to consider:

(Slide 14 – Growth in Holiness)



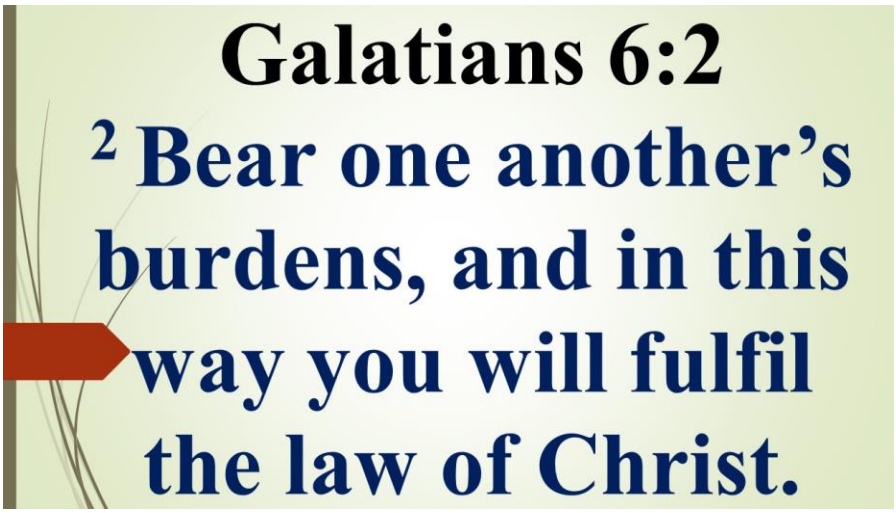
In connecting all of this to "The Class Meeting" book, Kevin M. Watson in chapter three of this book called "*The Class Meeting*: Moving into God's House: The Theological Foundation of the Class Meeting," Dr. Kevin M. Watson argues that small groups or "The Class Meeting" are the best way for us to grow closer to each other, to grow in faith, and to grow closer to Christ.

Once again, all of the current small groups we have in this church will stay intact, but developing weekly small groups, whether at home, a coffee shop, here at the church, etc. can and will change our lives. To prove this, in a few weeks I am going to ask people from some of the small groups in our church to tell you how small groups have changed them and have changed our church. Starting in mid to late July there will be opportunities to sign up for and begin planning small groups. So, pray for this and consider being part of a small group. If you are already in a

small group, I do not want you to leave your small group. I also ordered some extra Class Meeting books should any of you want to read through it.

In looking in our bibles at Galatians 6:2 it says:

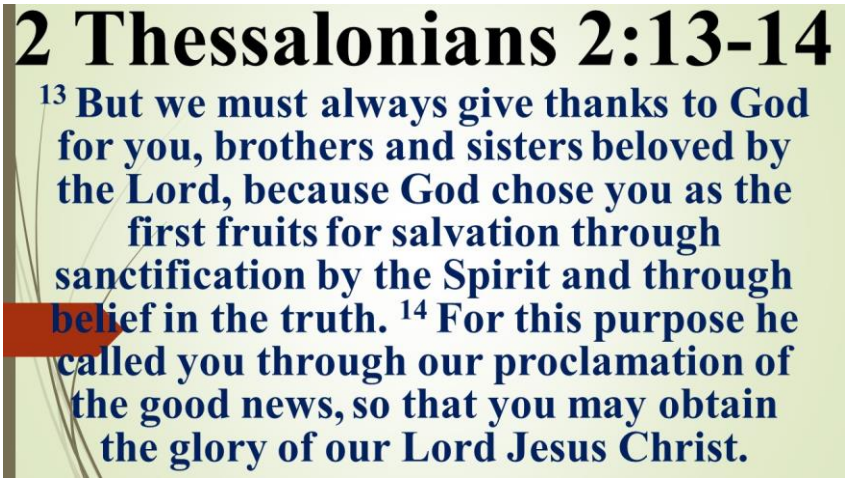
(Slide 15 – Galatians 6:2)



In pursuing and being part of small groups, we will grow closer to Christ, closer to each other, and we will "Bear one another's burdens." We will also "watch over each other in love."

Lastly, in closing, let us look at one more scripture from 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. This scripture 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 says:

(Slide 16 – 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)



May we love each other, may we give thanks to God for each other, may we realize the offer of salvation through Christ and Christ alone, and may we pursue sanctification in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. For as the Apostle Paul says once again in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, for this is the purpose God has called us all, that Christ came to die for us, that the Holy Spirit fills us, so that we all may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. May it be so. Amen.