

## Anniversary Message 2026

**Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 10-Jan-26; Sermon #1854c**

Well, this is January the 10th, which means tomorrow is January the 11th and January the 11th (notice my math skills; add one) is the anniversary of Church of the Great God. This is our thirty-fourth year of existence, as Craig was talking about in the sermonette. "They were founded in the 90s!" Yeah, 1992. That seems like a lifetime away. It is 34 years. That is a long time.

You know, we started small with only 19 there at that first Sabbath service down in Laguna Niguel, California, at my uncle and aunt's place. It was quite different from being in Worldwide Church of God, but we left Worldwide because they were beginning to change the doctrines right and left, and we just could not agree with them anymore. My dad decided to leave when they came out with the doctrine that demoted the gospel of the Kingdom of God down below the gospel of Jesus and the gospel of grace. And that just did not square. I mean, you might not think that that was a big thing, but at the time when we were going through all these doctrinal changes, that just was kind of a final straw.

But what my dad saw in all that was that when you take away the goal that Jesus set, because He went, according to Mark 1:14-15, into Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. That is kind of our base scripture for what the gospel is all about. He did not say, I'm going to preach you a gospel about Myself. He did not say, I'm going to preach you a gospel about grace. He said, I'm going to teach you a gospel that will allow you to go along the path toward the Kingdom of God and reach it. And this is what My Father and I have prepared for those who believe. And all the other facets of the gospel then work into that.

**Mark 1:14** Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.

But He came preaching another government, another world, if you will, another way of life, and when the Tkachs', Mike Feazell, Bernie Schnippert, Dr. Stavrinides, and all those others started changing all these things, that one especially grabbed our minds and we said, "No, they're obviously now heading in a completely different direction." And so Dad decided to leave, I decided to leave, Martin and Sue decided to leave, and many others joined us, many others. We had 19 that first Sabbath, but soon more came.

And what is interesting is that we have not grown much. I mean, we have more than 19 people. Obviously, this roll call shows that we have more than that, but we have almost the entire time of our history have had about what I would call about 400 or so core members. People have come in, people have left, and God has left it there. I mean, it is not that we have not tried. But we never went into, I will just use this, it sounds so dumb, "the church business" to get more members. That was never, from the very beginning, a part of it at all. My dad said, "Well, I want Church of the Great God to be a resource for the churches of God."

He knew that one of his greatest strengths was teaching and studying, digging out the truth and presenting it in a very logical and very deep way. And so he decided that he would continue to do that. As a matter of fact, if you read our history, what my dad says in there: He never wanted to be any more than a pastor. He did not want to be an evangelist. He did not want to go out there, like on a radio broadcast or a television broadcast and try to preach the gospel to the world because he felt very strongly that he was not called to do that.

And so we have always had an underlying principle that this church is not designed to preach the gospel to the world. It is more designed to feed the flock. And we actually inverted what Worldwide did. That organization was always preach the gospel, preach the gospel, preach the gospel, and then feed the flock with what is left over. That is the way it seemed to me. Like I said, my dad inverted that, saying that the breakup of the church in the late 80s and early 90s was indicative of the fact that we were not actually ready to preach the gospel.

We had declined so much in terms of our commitment to the truth that those changes were set up in the church and, you know, a high percentage of the church just gobbled them up. And so he said, back in '92, we have to change that. We have to make sure that our membership is highly convicted of the truth. And so the church's purpose, then, from the beginning has been to feed the flock. And people ask us, why do you not have a radio show? Or why did you not have a TV show? And we just shake our heads and say that is not our purpose.

Our purpose is to be a resource to the church and help them grow spiritually, and whatever people God brings to us, we will happily embrace them and teach them. And so that is what we do. In the mid to late 90s, we got on the Internet and it has proven very helpful to actually do that leg of the work of God to preach the gospel to more people than are in our ranks here and elsewhere where we have our small groups. But we use the Internet and all those resources on it to feed the flock and then if it works to preach the gospel, well, that is value-added. That is something that we will take.

I do not know why I am rambling on about this, but we have newer members who may not know or remember those things going on back then. And we have always had that core principle of feeding the flock, not trying to be wowed by numbers, not trying to get so many members that we can preach the gospel on CNN or WGN or WOR or whatever those places were. That has never been a goal. And I think God has put His stamp of approval on that by, I mean this may sound strange, keeping us where we are in that range of about 400 core members. They are very convicted and support us well. And we have three ordained ministers. That is all we need to do this work and 34 years of what we have done has proven that it works, that it is sufficient.

And you know, other people might think that we need to grow. I do not think that is the case. I mean, grow numerically. That has, like I said, never been one of our aims. And in its place our aim has been to study, to seek the truth, to practice it, and to explain it. And we would much rather see a small number of people understand the truth of God and live it out and really be committed to God than spread out pabulum or just the basics to thousands,

because God says He has a little flock and He wants that little flock to be prepared for the Kingdom of God. And thus one of our mottos, the tagline of *Forerunner*, "Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God."

So I guess you could say we are committed to that path. We are not going to change that path unless God makes it very clear that we should do something else. As the late Charles Whitaker says, "We have to learn that when God zigs, we zig, and when God zags, we zag. We don't want to zig when He zags or zag when He zigs." So, we just want to follow the Cloud, as it were, and do what God wants us to do. And if He wants us to do anything different, He will make it plain. And hopefully, we will be watching for the Cloud to move if that should occur.

But I hope this helps a little bit to understand why we do what we do. I know this goes out to a fair number of people beyond just Fort Mill and our regular congregations. We are not trying to compete with UCG or COGWA or Living or any of the other ones. We feel we have a separate work to do, something that God ordained for us to do. And we are very happy to do it and try to glorify Him in the way we do it.