

# THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

I recently enjoyed the privilege of a trip to Southeast Asia. The visit was wonderful in many ways, including a glorious gathering with a few of God's people on the Lord's Day. On that Sunday, the congregation consisted of myself and three other families. It was a record crowd. As ten of us sat in the living room of a rented flat, we did what we do every Sunday morning at my home church: We read Scripture, we sang songs of worship, we prayed, we listened to the Bible as it was expounded; and, yes, we collected an offering.

I have been in many different churches, in several parts of the world. I have been in very large churches whose congregations numbered in the thousands, and I have been in more modest-sized congregations of a few dozen to a few hundred. But on

this particular Sunday morning, I felt as much as if I was "at church" as at any other time. It really was a glorious gathering of the Body of Christ.

As I contemplated what was taking place, my heart was full of joy. As we stood to sing some familiar hymns, along with an unfamiliar local vernacular one, I raised my voice in praise and worship with this handful of believers. We sang about God as our solid rock and about how Christ will hold us fast. We joined our voices in expressing our heart's desire to seek God as a deer pants for the waters. We prayed as a congregation for God's blessings upon one of the families, and for the

spread of the gospel in that persecuted land. We said a corporate amen as we asked God to intervene and change the hearts of government officials in order that the door for gospel witness might remain open. Other needs, with specific reference to that small gathering, were also brought before the throne of grace.

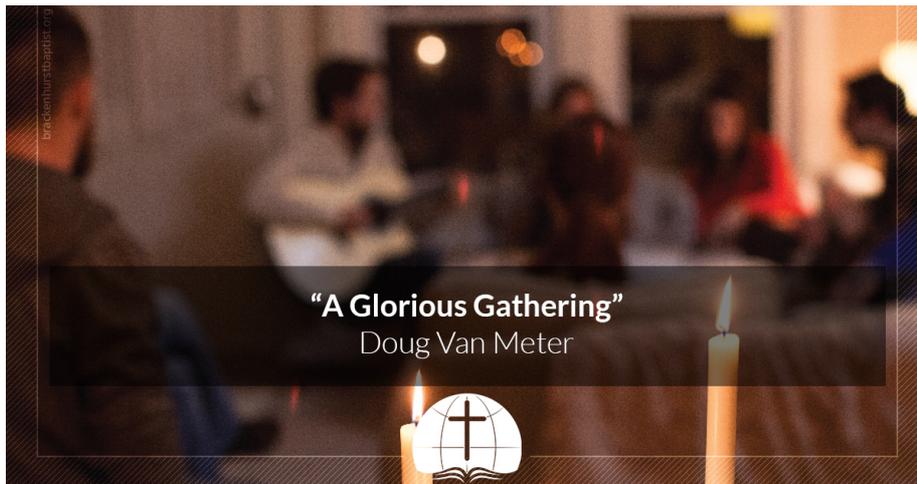
After praying, a brother from that country, who is being trained for ministry, pointed us to the Lord Jesus Christ as he expounded a passage from Mark 4. He preached a wonderfully clear, passionate, because Christ-centred, gospel filled message. I kept thinking

to myself, "This brother has a pastor's heart and I look forward with great anticipation to how the Lord will use him in this country in the days, months and in the years ahead." I was

encouraged by the thought that the gospel future of this country in Southeast Asia is as bright as the shining testimony of this dear brother and his godly family.

After the service, we did what all good Baptists do: We ate a hearty lunch! The food was sp icky, the fellowship was sweet, and it was all concluded with a delicious cup of that region's famed tea. In so many ways, it was a glorious gathering on the best day of the week: the Lord's Day.

I came away from that experience reminded once again of the glorious privilege we Christians enjoy as we gather together each Lord's Day. The size of the congregation is



irrelevant, for as we know from Hebrews 12:22–24, when God’s people gather, Jesus Christ and an innumerable company of angels gather with us. Though I regularly gather with some 350–400 people each Lord’s Day, this smaller gathering was just as meaningful. The prescribed elements of worship were observed within that small group, just as weekly they are exercised with the larger gathering. Both gatherings are glorious, for both have the presence of Christ and both are empowered by the hope of the gospel.

I recall a similar situation 25 years ago, in another part of Johannesburg. I was a much younger man and was involved in planting a new church. We too met in the home of one of the few families. My in-laws were visiting from overseas. To this day my father-in-law speaks of that glorious gathering. He often reminds me of how special it was to meet with a handful of believers in a home, worshipping God together. It was a glorious gathering made possible by the gospel of God.

The gospel of God gathers his elect into a body—the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). This, of course, occurs upon repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:32–47). But this same gospel *continues* to gather us together each Lord’s Day. When God’s people prioritise meeting together as a covenanted congregation, then, regardless of its size or location, what we have is a glorious gathering. Such gathering positions us to experience more of God’s glorious gospel grace. It is only when we lose something of the glory of the gospel as well as the glory of the church that gathering becomes minimised as a priority.