

Sermon - A Vision for 2022/23 - Scriptures not quoted are at the end.

Salvation is only through the cross! Not about work. What I am talking about today is our response (Romans 6:11-14)! I felt very strongly that we needed to set a firm direction for this season.

I will cut to the chase and then give you the reason why I am saying these things. I am calling our church to a season of spiritual discipline. I am calling our church to a season of getting back to the basics of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and how to practically cultivate this. I am calling us to take up a handful of practices and DO them. There are four things that I want to become a part of who we are. I want us to talk about them. I want us to preach about them. I want us to encourage each other in them. I want us to do them together. I want them to become part of our culture. I want them to seep into the lives of our kids and into our community.

Calling us to be People: of the WORD. Of PRAYER. Who GATHER. Who GIVE and SERVE.

I want these to be so ingrained in who we are that someone outside the church would recognize us because they see these things in us. They sound simple... perhaps some would say too basic... I would say that they are simple, but not necessarily easy to do because they will require sacrifice and work. How I got here?

1) THE CHURCH HAS A MISSION:

In Matthew 28:16-20,

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

... Jesus makes it really clear **what** we are to do - to make disciples. He even gives us a picture of **how** we do it - baptize them and teach them to **obey** everything I have commanded you.

But **why** do it? As I preached in a sermon months ago, I have looked at this passage of scripture many times and I've had a hard time coming up with "the why." And then I realized that the why is hinted at in the, "Then the eleven disciples" of verse 16. These are the 11 that were with Jesus during His ministry. They knew Jesus. They had experienced His love, seen His healings, saw Him raise the dead and so on. They had seen a taste of his glory, they had tasted his kingdom and saw God do His will. They knew **why!** So others could experience and know God through his Son Jesus.

Our purpose/mission is even seen in the Lord's prayer,. Matthew 6:9-11

9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread

Christ says that this is the way to pray. What is Christ praying for? For God's name to be glorified, for God's kingdom to come, and for God's will (what is God's will? anyone and everyone to be saved)

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

So Christ says to pray for God's will to be done **and** for God to provide for us what we need so that we can be a part of it or serve in God doing these very things.

What does that look like? **How** do we do this in our culture in this day and age. What role are we to play?

If this what, why, how talk has got you twisted around, just know this and I think you will agree, one of the reasons **God has placed us here for a MISSION.**

2) IN ORDER TO FULFILL OUR MISSION WE MUST KNOW GOD AND BE ABLE TO HEAR HIS VOICE -

Indeed how could we even begin to share God with others unless we, like the disciples, had spent significant time with God and actually know Him!

In Ephesians 5:15-17 Paul says: 15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

We are called to actively engage in the way we live our lives... our time is short! Unless we actively pursue God... we will never move into maturity. We must "make the most of what we have been given." If we do not engage... we will be swept away by the cares and agenda of this world.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul says, 19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Romans 12:1-3

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

In order to fulfill our mission, we must be transformed...and transformation requires us to act... there is a part that I must play!... indeed how can we tell others of the goodness of God and what His presence is like if we have not been there, if we have not been the people who cultivate his presence in our lives. If we don't know his word. If we don't know him. How can we do His will?

3) SANCTIFICATION/GROWTH/TRANSFORMATION REQUIRES DISCIPLINE:

I've been really into lifting weights since Covid first kind of hit us. There are 4 main lifts or exercises that are kind of the holy grail or gold standard in any lifting program. They are a measure of a person's raw overall strength. It's not important but they are the deadlift, the squat, the bench press and the overhead press. If you are strong in these four lifts, it's very likely that you would have no problem doing any other exercise - you would be strong. There are some people who try to complicate training with hundreds of different exercises, schemes and scams, but these just create busy work and probably don't accomplish much.

I think the same principle can be applied to our growth as disciples. We've over complicated things and gotten busy doing too much rather than focus on key spiritual lifts. The modern church is overrun with ideas, books, programs and sales pitches. Half of what we do is marketing the christian life. I think we require a reset. A back to basics. A dependence on the "key spiritual" lifts. I think that this is how we can best **be disciples and grow as disciples and it's the things we need to be imparting to others!** So the four things I am calling us to are the key spiritual lifts that, if we engaged in them, would help us to grow as disciples and to be transformed and sanctified - making us able to actually do Christ's mission. They are simple, memorable and uncomplicated. If you think I am nuts, check out 1 Timothy 4:7-16 (in the notes at the end) where Paul makes it clear that spiritual training is much like physical training. Here is verse 15 and 16 from that passage:

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Romans 6:19: Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

We have a role to play! But it is hard, it is challenging, it requires me to act. To sacrifice.

Here are the four things again (Taken from Acts 2:42-47, other scriptures and church tradition). Notice that I am giving you a standard to hold yourself to (in some ways arbitrary, but reasonable).

- People of the WORD (Bible Reading - 15 minutes a day).
- People of PRAYER (Prayer - 45 minutes a day).
- People who GATHER (Fellowship which includes breaking bread and worship/prayer - 2x per week.)
- People who GIVE and SERVE (Serve/Give - 1x per month each).

Too legalistic? Only if you make it. It's a standard to hold yourself to. I am not interested in religion... I am interested in spiritual rigor. **Something to measure up to, to strive towards, not because it is a law, but because I love my savior and I want to take hold of that for which he took hold of me! I want to honor him. I want to be transformed AND not only because there is a scriptural basis for these things but significant time spent on them in a busy world needs some kind of standard or strategy or reminder.**

Too Lofty? Maybe an hour of reading and prayer is too much... start with 1 minute of reading and 3 minutes of prayer. Work up to 5 and 15... You'll get to a point where time doesn't matter anymore! **(BENCH PRESS?)**

4) A TRANSFORMED ABUNDANT LIFE MAKES OUR MISSION POSSIBLE:

Many times we hear the Great Commission to go and make disciples and it feels burdensome, guilt ridden or we dismiss it because it's "not for us" or it just doesn't seem to work. I think this comes out because we are not spirit filled, we are not experiencing the sweet presence of Jesus, we are not anointed/growing... Perhaps the dove has left? We need personal spiritual renewal!

I believe these things will lead to personal renewal. And as Alan Hirsch says, "Personal renewal leads to corporate change." (And I don't necessarily mean organizational change). We need to be the people of God. We need to know and carry the presence of God. We need to know HIM! I believe that in order to **progress we need to first regress**. We have lost the personal relationship and experience of God. We are overrun with ideas and programs and busyness and the business of running the church - and we have lost God somehow in the process. **We must regress to progress**. We must get back to the basics in order to grow. And to be clear I think the person who practices these four things will be transformed and therefore able and empowered to lead others to Him.

If this sounds difficult or like it's your effort alone... remember: Romans 8:11:

11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. God is within us, ready to quicken our steps. Ready to strengthen weak hands.

A SPECIAL CALL TO MEN (Why a special call to men?):

Men, we must lead the charge. We are called to lay down our lives. To lay down foolish pursuits and give ourselves wholly first to our wives, our children, and then our community. We were made to bring glory to God... to be warriors. 2 Peter 2:11, "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul."

If we look at Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-10 (in the notes at the end), there is a high standard on men who lead and who oversee, but I think these apply to us all. There is a high calling... How do we achieve it? By God's grace and by our willful choice to pursue God and to practice spiritual rigor.

If all you did was practice these 4 things, you would be farther ahead than most. Don't take them lightly. There are some profound words in Isaiah 3... the Lord's judgment on a nation, on a people, is to take away their strong men.

Isaiah 3:1-3, 12

1 See now, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support: all supplies of food and all supplies of water,

2 the hero and the warrior, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder,

3 the captain of fifty and the man of rank, the counselor, skilled craftsman and clever enchanter.

12 Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. My people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path.

How do we become strong? Truly strong? By being men of God. Men of the word. Men who lay down their lives. And the path to this I believe begins with these 4 spiritual lifts!

TO EVERYONE:

Hebrews 10:23-25

23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

My joy and goal is to spur us on! I don't want any of us to give up our birthright! We, as children of God, were chosen by God to be His. To inherit his kingdom. To bring his presence to the world!

Hebrews 12:15-17

15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

There is more I could write. There is much that is racing in my head. But this will not be the last time that I talk about these things. We will be preaching, teaching and encouraging and cheering and trying to model these things. I believe they can change your life! I want these things to seep into our worship, into our kids program, into our board meetings, into the way the ladies quilt downstairs... I want this to be a time of increased intimacy with God... of pressing in! And as we do that I believe we can reach the lost and change our world.

Notes:

Romans 6:11-14: 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

1 Timothy 4:7-16: 7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. 9 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. 10 That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe. 11 Command and teach these things. 12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. 14 Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. 16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Titus 1:6-9: 6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe[a] and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

1 Timothy 3:1-10: 3 Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. 2 Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full[a] respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. 8 In the same way, deacons[b] are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. 9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.