

Title: His glory is our Joy
Text: Psalm 67; Romans 1.1-6; Eph 3.20-21
Theme: Giving is in the DNA of Christ and his church
Occasion: Update on vision and challenge to pay down building debt
Date: September 19, 2010
Prop Stmt Giving is the means that God uses to open our hearts to another

This morning, as promised, I am taking a one week break from our series in Hebrews in order to dream with you a bit about some ministry that is on our horizon for which we need to be ready. My aim is to inform you of some of the priorities that the elders have established for us. If you do not know who the elders are, I am going to have them stand. These are the men who have been charged by you, the congregation with the leadership of this church. The office of an elder is a Biblically mandated position in a local church. I am certainly the most visible one of this bunch, but I only lead together with these men. My accountability to you as a congregation is carried out practically in my relationship to these men as we work together, pray together, listen to each other, submit to one another, in order that, before God, we may protect and promote the gospel and his flock by doing all that we can to help provide for a healthy church. This mission is carried out by these men by being responsible for the doctrine, the direction and the discipline of the church. My preaching ministry is the primary means by which we guard the doctrine. Today, I want to speak to you about the direction of our church and specifically seek to answer the question; “What are some important matters that we need to address?”

Some of these I have written about in recent weeks in my blog. And the three or four of you who read it are familiar with some of this. But, seriously, when we need to do a check-up on the health of the church or take a fresh look at our priorities, we do not start with a blank sheet of paper and ask everyone their opinion. It is such a relief to have the Scriptures. God has already established the agenda for the church. Our task is to understand and follow it.

Read Psalm 67

Here is an Israelite who is thinking globally. Instead of asking God to protect him and promote his nation so that they are better than everyone else, he cries out for God to be gracious to his people in order that God’s fame may be spread abroad to the nations. Be gracious to us, O God, so that other nations can see that you are a gracious God and that you can save them too. This guy is thinking way beyond himself and way beyond his family, tribe and even nation. This big-heartedness is a mark of God upon this person’s heart. He wants (3) the peoples to praise God. He is not demanding to be first in line, but rather, he finds his joy in the glad worship of God by many nations. Here is a guy who knows God’s plan. Here is a guy who is crying out for the gladness of the nations and is desirous to see the day when they sing for joy! (4)

He knows that the heart of God is so big and so generous that God has enough capacity to bless people from every nation. This man is not threatened by the blessing of God being poured out upon others because he knows that for God to bless others does not mean that

God has to take away blessing from him. There is enough room around the throne for all of us to fit in. Therefore,

1. **People who “get it” live for the glory of God being advanced in the joy of others.**

Now, how is God going to do that? In the Old Testament, God’s throne was in the Tabernacle. His purpose was to use Israel as an example to the nations to show them what kind of God he is and how great their joy could be when living in faith-driven obedience to him. But, God’s throne did not stay in the Tabernacle, because God’s plan for the glad worship of the nations went global and it went global because of Christ.

Romans 1.1-6

Christ came to this earth in order to live for us and die for us on the cross. His death paid in full the payment for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the sins of every single person who will trust him. His life provides the perfect righteousness that credits every believer with it so that we can stand in the presence of the Father, spotless and without blame. When Christ ascended to take his throne at the right of the Father, his Father said, “Sit here until I make the nations a footstool for your feet.” Sit here while I get things arranged on the earth, because your throne is not going to stay here, your throne is going to be there. You are going to rule over the world that has been made and with the people that you have purchased for your own. What is that re-arranging? Obviously, part of it is the spread of the gospel to the nations in order to secure the joy of all peoples in their glad worship of God. We live and breathe and go to school and go to work and raise our families and press on as pilgrims through joy or sorrow and spread the gospel for that day when we stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ from all over the world around the throne and declare, “Worthy is the Lamb.”

2. **People who “get it” live for the glory of God being advanced in the joy of others through the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Ephesians 3.20-21

This doxology comes at the end of the 3rd chapter of Ephesians. These three chapters lay out for us the amazing purpose and mission of the church. We are the means by which God is making himself known in this world. We are the means by which God is establishing his kingdom. We are part of his people that he is raising up as a witness to his fame. We, in this country are part of the nations that sing for joy because of the grace of God. We are part of the fulfillment of the cry of Psalmist in Psalm 67 and we are also the means by which other nations and other people will add their voices and lives in whole-hearted, glad-surrender worship of God. That is why the church exists

3. **People who “get it” live for the glory of God being advanced in the joy of others through the gospel of Jesus Christ displayed in the church.**

Do you see the relationship between the glory of God and the joy of people? We will only be at rest when we are in relationship with Him. Christ secured that rest because Christ secured our redemption and salvation by his death. The Father loves you so much that he GAVE his Son for you and for people all over this world. God gave Christ for your joy. Your joy in him makes much of Him. Christ came to secure your joy and make much of the Father and to accomplish the Father's plan.

That, in a nutshell is the big picture. God is right now calling people from all over this world, by means of the preaching of the gospel to be a people of his very own possession, with whom he will live and through whom he will reign and of which, we are a part – right now and forever and ever. The advancing of the church and the advancing of the plan of God and the kingdom of Christ are one and the same. But, this kingdom is not advanced by armies or politicians. It is advanced by the church. It is advanced by healthy churches. It is advanced by the glad worship of God's people who have been brought by faith alone to trust in Christ alone. Christ gave his life for you to be part of this enterprise, so that you would have something to die for and live for – for ever.

Therefore, our mission is not only to have a healthy church but to help establish healthy churches. We cannot reach this world by ourselves. We cannot even reach our city by ourselves. We need others. If there are only a few healthy churches in the entire area, then we lose the witness war. In order for us to continue to pursue health here and elsewhere, we all have to do our part. And you know what – many of you do. But some of you don't. You have yet to really own the priority of the church as God does. We are in this glorious task together. In a moment, I am going to challenge you about something that is very, very dear to your heart. Do you know what that is? It is money. It is so easy to accuse the church of always asking for money. But wait a minute, who is the church? You are. We are. And what's more, we should thrill to be part of this seeing that the church is the most glorious enterprise on the earth and the only thing that you can be part of that is going to be forever! I would be an idiot to not call you to invest your life in her. We are the very bride of Christ. So, I am not apologizing for this. Jesus died for the church. So, for Christ's sake we can certainly support the gospel in a manner that is consistent with her mission.

Brothers and sisters, I say this for your joy. God is the most glorious and joyful being and it is directly related to the fact that he is the most giving and the most generous being. Look at what he did. He gave to you and for you, the greatest treasure, the greatest gift, when he gave His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. When you give to something or someone, it opens your heart up. Your heart goes wide open when you give sacrificially. Can you imagine how wide the heart of Christ is? No wonder Paul prayed like he did in Ephesians 3 for us to understand it. It is beyond measure. And we are called to be like him. We are called to be generous people. Part of my responsibility as your pastor is to teach you to be like Christ. Look at him. Look at his wide-hearted generosity. And then look at your own attitude toward the support of the gospel in the church. Giving is the means that God uses to open our hearts, which is why where your treasure is, that is where your heart is. Here is why I bring this up. Some of you need to reflect the priority of the gospel in your giving. We are not behind, but we are held back because lesser

things have a hold on some of you. The challenge that I am making to you this morning comes from the Elders and the Finance Team. But it is a challenge that really is from our hearts and we trust that you are receiving it as such.

We still owe on this building. That means that every month money goes to a mortgage payment. We want to take a bite out of that. In other words, if we pay off a portion of what we owe, then we will have reduced some of our monthly payment for the building loan. The total amount that we owe is based on two loans. One is bigger than the other. The challenge that we are presenting, is to knock off the smaller debt by January 2012. That means that we have 15 months to do this. The practical reason for this is because January 2012 is when that loan is up for renewal and we have been told that we will not get that interest rate again. But, an even more important reason is so that we can free up some resources to go toward some other needs such as:

1. Fill open staff position

When Jerry left, we never replaced his position but instead, spread out his work on three other guys whose plates were already full. We need to address this, but we live within our means.

2. Expand internship ministry

This may not sound very exciting initially, but let me explain it this way. Right now, we have a number of guys who are preparing for pastoral ministry. Evan Whiteaker, Tim Schloss, John Hicks, Jeffrey Pearson, Jeremy Pearson, Brandon Meagher, Mark Griffin, Joel Benge, Ryan Gasparatto, and Jeff Chamberlain. There are others who are related to this church through marriage and through other close relationships. If these ten guys are reflective of national statistics, then within five years of their graduating, eight of them will no longer be in the ministry. An 80% failure rate within the first five years for guys entering into the ministry is pretty intimidating. This is not new. Ministry life is challenging. Why? It is so challenging because it is so important. Everything in life that matters demands a great deal of preparation and perseverance. Should we be concerned with that? Yes! Can we help do something about it? Yes! Now, combine that statistic with the fact that we need some more healthy churches in this area. And combine that with the fact that these guys are from here and they know this area. I do not think that it is really selfish, I think that it is both strategic and wise for us to say, we want our boys coming back here. We would love to help them re-plant some struggling churches, or plant churches in an area where there is a clear need of a healthy, gospel church.

3. Help plant and re-plant churches

Planting or re-planting churches is like having more kids. God uses that to make your heart bigger and the multiplication of churches is the means that he has established to spreading the borders of kingdom into the hearts of people. It is difficult to put an exact time-frame on this. But my best guess is that it will take us from this point about 3 years to get a pastoral apprenticeship program established and funded and another 2 years from

that to have our first guy complete it. Following that, I think it is realistic to help plant or re-plant one church every two years, so that within 15 years, we will have helped establish 5 churches in this region. There are two other obvious areas that increased funding could help with.

4. Increase missions support

The need for healthy churches around here is great, and the need of the gospel in other areas is in many cases much more urgent. There are always more needs that we can meet. There are some of our own who are looking at church planting and other gospel-based ministries in a cross-cultural setting in order to see the nations be glad in God. For those that come from our own church, we, as their home church, want to provide at least 25% of their support. As they prepare to go, we need to be ready to make that happen.

5. Pay down the fixed-rate loan sooner

We (elders, Finance Team, leadership) are aware of the realities our economy. We know that some cannot do anything about this right now, but you can certainly pray. But, many of you can. In fact, I am really hoping that some of you will use this as an opportunity to establish some good giving habits for you and your family. I say this for your joy. I say this in order to help cultivate a culture of giving and generosity that comes as an overflow from the gospel. Here is the challenge. Would you be willing to pray about what you could give beyond your regular giving for the next 15 months “4 Ministry”? It is important that this be beyond your regular giving. The goal is 1.375 million. If a 1000 people committed to just \$10 per week (and some of you do that in two days at Starbucks) and were faithful with that for those 15 months, that would be about \$650,000.

A guy I’ve known for a while was pastoring a church here in Michigan that had gone through a substantial building program and was having a service to both acknowledge God’s goodness to them and to encourage the congregation to take care of the remaining indebtedness. The service was planned accordingly including music and other things. So, the musicians were rehearsing when the order of the service at the last minute was changed, and whenever you do that, it can make musicians a bit nervous, so they were told that the reason why the service emphasis was changed was because someone had just turned in a check for \$2.5 million and paid off the debt. That, of course got the choir excited and talking, wondering who it was that did that. They narrowed the list down to about 6-7 different people who could probably afford to do that. Brothers and sisters, more than likely that is not going to happen. This means that this area of responsibility rests upon each of us, as it should. Have you ever said, “I could do some amazing things if only I had \$10 million”? Well, let’s see what you do with \$10.

4 Ministry Team members will be in the Gathering Space to answer your questions.

By the way, it wasn’t any of those 6 or 7 people who gave the gift. A few years later they found out it was a widow.