

Title: Reflecting His Glory
Text: Ephesians 3.14-21
Theme: Why the Church matters so much
Occasion: Vision Sunday 2017
Purpose: To remind us of what we are about

To guests, this message is not usual, but it probably is helpful.

Read Text:

Presumption #1

I preach this sermon based upon two presumptions. This sermon presumes that the gospel of Jesus Christ is all that it claims to be. I believe that all those who come by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, are the only ones who are forgiven of their sin, declared righteous in the eyes of God and are able to spend eternity with God in heaven. That means that all those who do not come to faith in Christ the way the Bible explains it do not have that hope. There is no salvation outside of Christ. There is no rescue of sin apart from the real gospel. There is not a plurality of religious belief that is equally valid. Those who come to faith in Christ are true followers of Christ who will live forever with God in heaven. Those who are not true followers of Christ will die in their sins without God, without hope, without a second chance. They will suffer in hell for eternity. The gospel that has saved us is the gospel that changes us. It changes us from being people who seek our own glory and our own comforts to being a people who seek the glory of God and who are committed to the good of others. Therefore, it is the gospel that calls us to community and it is the gospel that sends us to reach others.

Presumption #2

I presume that the church is what Jesus called her to be. The church has never been a building. The church has never been a pope, a papacy, a council of bishops, a corporation or a business. From the moment of her birth in Acts 2 she has always been people who by faith alone in Christ alone have been saved from wrath and saved to God by grace alone, to the glory of God alone based on the Word of God alone. The first part of the book of Ephesians explores this amazing reality that God has called a people out of this world to be followers of His Son and citizens of a new nation that is called the church. In 3.14-15 Paul speaks of how God the Father names every one of them and that (v.16) according to the riches of his glory we are strengthened with power through the Spirit so that we can not only be reconciled to God through faith, but so that we might know and experience the love of God that is impossible to fully know and impossible to fully experience. In other words, there is always more to know and more to experience. So, do not lose sight of this now. Our lives together as believers are to be characterized by our growing in our knowledge of God's love and our growing in our experience of it. All of this is a set up for chapters 4-6 which call us to walk in unity, to be humble, to be forgiving, to be kind, to be patient, to be pure, to put away anger, to be hard working so that we have extra in order to give to others, ... in other words, our lives of caring well for others are intended

by God for us to reflect God's glory, for us to experience God's love and for others to experience God's love.

The people of God have always been marked by their faith in Christ, and their commitment to one another in local churches. The church is to be an embassy of the kingdom of Jesus in a foreign land. We are the representatives of another government. We fly the flag of Jesus in the midst of this world. And in so doing we are telling the world about her rightful ruler, returning King and kingdom without end. But, we are doing more than telling the world; we are also showing the world a preview of what life is going to be like under the King and in the kingdom. In that day, there will be no war, no injustice, no bribes, no terrorism, no hatred and no strife. It will be absolutely joyful. It will be all-soul satisfying. We are not there, yet. But, as we live out the implications of the gospel in our lives and in our relationships, we experience a taste of what is to come. And we not only experience that, we provide that for others to taste. To the degree we do that, we display God's glory. In an effort to summarize our purpose as a church, several years ago, we formulated this sentence and our statement of purpose was heavily influenced by this text.

I. **Our Purpose is doxological.** (loving God)

Cornerstone Baptist Church exists to *glorify God* by leading believers toward maturity through worship, instruction, fellowship and evangelism. Loving God and loving others is what Jesus said summarizes the law and the prophets and is to summarize our lives.

II. **Our purpose is Christo-centric.** (loving others)

Leading believers *toward maturity* simply means helping people look more and more like Jesus. The more we look like Jesus, the more God is reflected in our lives. So, I need to preach this sermon for the purpose of helping you follow Jesus better. I need to have conversations with others for the purpose of helping them follow Jesus better. I need to be here today in order to help our church look more and more like Christ.

Think about this with me. What are the questions that you tend to ask one another about church? What did you think about church today? How did you like the sermon? Was it witty, engaging, practical, too long, or just right? How was the music? Was it too fast, too slow, too loud or too soft? Did you have fun? Were people friendly? Did anyone notice your new glasses, or new shoes? Did the kids in the youth group talk to you and invite you to their parties? How was the coffee? Were you greeted sufficiently? Was the bulletin too expensive appearing or too cheap? Does the church try too hard to be trendy or to be stuffy? Do you see my point? If these are the questions that you are asking, then you are asking the wrong questions. I want to help you ask better questions, because I want to help you think better about the church. The questions you/I need to ask are first of myself. How did I point people to Jesus? How did I help others follow Jesus better? How did I encourage a brother or sister? How was I helped and encouraged to follow Jesus better? How did others point me to Christ? Do you see the difference?

III. **Our purpose drives our practice.** (loving others)

A. **Worship** – all that we are responding to all that God is and does

We gather every Sunday morning in order to give attention together as a family of believers upon our Father. We are called, by our Father to gather weekly. This gathering, this weekly event is a priority for us because we are followers of His. We set this time aside when we could be doing other things, but we make this a priority because the gospel has changed us from being people who seek our own glory to being a people who seek his glory, and one of the fundamental ways in which we do this is by making the worship of God with our church family a priority. I know that going to church is not convenient. That is not the point. If we all wanted convenience we would never follow a King who calls us pick up our cross and follow him. If we wanted convenience, we would stay on the road to hell. Therefore, we should not labor to make the worship of God as convenient as possible because that would completely miss the point. If you do not leave here spent mentally and physically and emotionally, then you are not responding with all that you are to all that God is and does. If you're holding back your worship from God, then who are you holding it out for? Our Sunday morning service is our weekly family gathering in order to do what we were saved to do and what we will be doing for eternity – worshipping God.

For many years our Sunday morning gathering held no joy for me. I felt the pressure to perform and I felt the pressure to meet all of your expectations of what the service and sermon ought to be. I slowly realized that I cannot do that. I cannot be that person. Only Jesus can be all that you need, all of the time. And He is. My calling isn't to be what I think you want me to be, but to point you to Christ. As I've realized that, my enjoyment of our gathering on Sundays has grown exponentially. This gathering is my favorite time of the week, and while I've learned to enjoy preaching more and more, what I really love is to hear you sing. When I look around and see you sing (not just hear you sing) but see you sing, I see people who by faith, who by resolve, are committed to making much of Jesus in joy or in pain, in blessing or in trial, in health or in weakness and I am so driven to follow Jesus. Our worship of God, our attention to his Word, our engaging and thoughtful singing and praying, our loud and thunderous singing are all not only good and necessary for our souls, but together we help one another follow Jesus better. So, if you asked yourself the question, how did I help others follow Jesus better? One of the ways you can answer that is by giving attention to the Word, by singing boldly and passionately and by praying with focus.

B. **Instruction** – learning and applying the gospel to all of life

We teach the Word. We proclaim Christ and teach everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ (Colossians 1.28). We are a teaching church because, we are a church. We have to do this and we make a big deal about this because it is a big deal. We teach in our Adult Bible Fellowship classes on Sunday morning. We teach in our elective classes on Wednesday evenings. We teach in our Sunday am service. We teach in our counseling ministry. We teach in our Recovery ministry. In all of these

settings we are seeking to help each other learn more about God and the gospel and learn how to apply that to all areas of life. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10.17).

But our instruction is more than lecture. Our learning is done in the context of relationships because relationships reveal what we really need to know. For example, I tell people that being married may not always make you happy, but it will make you holy. Why do I say that? Because when you actually live with someone else, you discover how selfish you are. The same thing is true with the church. If you are a member of this church you are in a family with a bunch of other sinners, many of whom are going to rub you the wrong way. What does that mean? It means that they are going to reveal how self-centered and self-righteous you are. That is so good for you! You need to see this about yourself so that you can repent of it. If you don't repent of that, you are going to be a miserable jerk and miserable jerks do not look like Jesus.

I know that I can challenge you on some of this, but I see so many reasons to commend you. We have a church where men and women love to learn the Word, teach the Word and listen to the Word. Good grief, you come Sunday after Sunday knowing that I can easily go 60 minutes. Our Wednesday classes are well attended. Our ABF's have some good teaching in them. There is a commitment to learning the Word – thank God!

C. **Fellowship** – helping others follow Jesus better

This is an area that has really been picking up momentum in recent years. The small group ministry has helped some in this, the newly formed health and wellness ministry has been a catalyst for this, the Good Samaritan team has been useful for this, but while I am grateful and commend those ministries, the bottom line is this. Many of you are being more intentional about speaking into one another's lives. We have a long way to go, but this issue is finally on the dashboard of many of you. Recently one of our ABF teachers asked his class to stand and asked how many of them had another brother or sister intentionally speak into their lives to help disciple them? Out of the class, there were only a handful who could say that. But I was so jacked up when I heard that he did this because that concept was a truth that he now owned. And if he owned it, it was only a matter of time before the people that he influences would own it. I am responsible for you. I am responsible to help you follow Jesus better. Therefore, fellowship is spending time with a brother or sister in Christ in order to help them follow Jesus better.

D. **Evangelism** – intentionally sharing the gospel that others may know Christ

Making disciples is our mission and in order to help a person follow Jesus better that person must first become a follower of Christ. When Jesus gave the great commission in the end of Matthew 28 he said, Make Disciples – as you go. It is an imperatival participle – meaning it is a command that describes your action. As you go to work, make disciples. As you go to the store – make disciples. As you go to the doctor's – make disciples. As you go to your kid's soccer game – make disciples. As you care for your infant – make

disciples. What are you doing this week? Look at your calendar. Look at your task list. Everything on your calendar and your task list is to be an expression of “making disciples” of Christ. Making disciples is why you have a calendar and a task list. It is why you are breathing. Pray to see and look for opportunities to make disciples.

IV. **Our Purpose is reflected in our Vision.**

Simply put, we are to be a church that displays God’s glory by fulfilling our purpose and by reproducing churches around here and around the world. Not only are we to be people who think about and care for others, but we (together) are to be a people who think about and care for others. In our men’s breakfast yesterday, we discussed “how can I be prepared to be inconvenienced in order help others follow Jesus (or follow him better). What is true about us individually is what ought to drive us as a body of believers. Our vision as a church (that is our goals) should reflect our preparation to be inconvenienced in order to help others follow Jesus better. So for example, in 2015, we established as a vision to “plant and/or replant 10 churches in the area by 2025.”

To plant a church means to start a church. To replant means to revitalize an existing church. Now, in order to do these things we need to have guys prepared to do this and funds to accomplish it. We do internships here for a variety of reasons, but part of that is so that we will be a church that is investing in other people in order to help reproduce churches around here and around the world. I mentor 4 guys who are planting churches. We partner with a number of local churches in order to encourage church planters, encourage pastors, and help local churches. Our ministry staff does more than oversee our ministries here; we regularly help people from other churches. This is what we ought to do. Just as I want you to think more and more about others, we as a church need to think more and more about others as well. As we worked on this, the Lord has connected us with many opportunities to help churches get established or revitalized. But, one of the things that has limited us is the fact that we are not yet able to put some financial muscle to this until we pay off our building. Therefore we came up with another initiative called our 20/20 vision. Let me explain. Our giving goes toward 3 areas:

- 1) General Fund expenses like salaries, resources, utilities, building and grounds maintenance, equipment, etc.
- 2) Building Loan Repayment
- 3) Missions

We currently owe about 2.1 million dollars on this building. We pay around \$450,000 every year and therefore will pay off this building at this rate in a little over 4 years. This is a big step forward from where we were at a couple of years ago. But, we would really like to pay this whole thing off by 2020. If we did that, we would be able to take the \$450,000 that currently goes toward the mortgage and apply it to other areas.

Our plan is to do this:

- 1) Increase our Missions Budget to \$500,000 a year.

- 2) Establish a Strategic Ministries Budget in order to help fund church planting and other ministries that we determine are strategic and necessary for the gospel.

For example, I know this young man David who is planting a church in Lincoln Park. I not only know him, I know his parents, I know his training, I know his theology, and I know his life. He is a great guy and he is planting a church in a difficult place. He needs a sound system for his church. I know another young man, named Michael who is moving here from NC with a team of people who are going to plant a church in Ann Arbor. We don't have a place in our General Fund for something like this, and our Missions Fund is focused on cross-cultural missions. We need a category in our budget so we can fund things that do not fit into either the General Fund or the Missions Fund but are important and strategic for gospel purposes. But, right now, the General Fund is tapped out and so is the Missions Fund. But, if we can pay off this building then we can create this Strategic Ministries Budget.

- 3) The third thing we can do is to fund some ministries and projects around here that need to be addressed.

We have some exciting projects like keeping the parking lot fixed (that was a joke), replacing our aging busses, and building a kitchen. In fact, the Finance Team has identified a number of worthwhile projects that have been put on the back burner until we pay off the building. We keep the belt a little tighter than what we would like in order to pay off the debt. It will be good when we get this paid off.

We live within our means. We adjust our budget to match our giving. I do not beat this drum very much because I really believe that your treasure will follow where you put your heart. And if you really follow Christ, then you will treasure the church because Jesus died for the church. So, I aim to help you treasure Christ above all. But, some of you may need to be challenged in your giving and be intentional, regular and generous. In fact, that would be a good question for you to ask yourself. What does my giving to the church say about my love for Christ? Is it intentional, regular and generous?

We are designating December 17 as a day for a special building fund offering. I am asking you to give a special offering this Christmas to help us pay down our indebtedness.

Finally, in your bulletin is a piece of paper. Here is what I would like for you to do. On the one side, write down the name of a person in your life that you need to share the gospel with. Keep that paper with you all week and pray for that person every time you see that paper. Pray that God gives you an opportunity this week to share Christ with that person. Next Sunday, I am going to be preaching on the gospel. We will have many students here from China who will be observing our service and we want them to hear about Christ. It would be a good opportunity for you to invite others who need to hear the gospel to be here as well.

On the other side, write the name of a person that you can help follow Jesus better. In other words, identify another member in the church that you can encourage to grow in Christ. Again, as you see that piece of paper, pray for that person and pray that God will give you an idea and opportunity to help them.

You see, if we pay off our building but we are not a people who share Christ or help others follow Jesus better, then we've missed the point. And after today, I hope that you know the point. We exist to glorify God by leading believers to maturity through Worship, Instruction, Fellowship and Evangelism. To him be glory in the church, amen.