

Landing the Balloon
Ephesians 3:20-21
November 14, 2010 (Kit)

I like GPS for driving. Instead of the traditional map, which is very helpful, it looks down from way up above. The advantage of this view point is that all can be seen from the sky, and seen as it is. And then, with the GPS, I can orient myself, and know where I am in relationship to the big picture.

And so, I have a situation when I drive where, because of the GPS, I can see a very big picture; much more than I need to actually. That can help me on the ground where I can see very little; only what is in front of me. But because of the greater view I can navigate the nuts and bolts of my journey.

Since September, the subject of our sermons has been an answer to the question: What is the mission of our Church? What is it that we are to do? The way to answer that question best is to see it from above, not from below. In other words, ***if we want to orient our church in the right direction and get our bearings straight, we need to look at the question of our mission from high above us, from the point of view of God.*** We must look at the big picture.

For that reason, this series has NOT focused on the nuts and bolts of what we are actually doing. Rather, it has focused on looking at the Bible to find what the Church is meant to be and to do. The Bible is our GPS, if you will. It's as if we have been floating above the world in a hot air balloon, looking down on ourselves and our situation so that we can get a proper perspective. But you can't get much done on the ground from inside a floating balloon. At some point, you have to land it and apply what you have seen in a much more tangible and practical manner. What I'd like to do today is land the balloon. We want to put this thing on the ground, all get out, and begin to look at the landscape from the ground. All that we do is on the ground. Then, to make sure we will get it right, we must always have the view from above. We must start with defining the Church from the Bible and defining the Church's mission from the Bible, so that when we do the nuts and bolts of life, we don't lose our direction. With this in mind, we are saying this: According to the Bible, the answer to the question, "What is our mission?" the answer is, largely,

We exist to increase the health and size of God's church, everywhere.

We've spent months explaining this. Now it is time to land the balloon and get back to concentrating on getting that done. And so, imagine we are in a giant balloon, and we have been flying around in it together for week after week. Now it is landing. The ground is coming up. We are about to tether to the ground and open the door and get out. It is time to do what we are called to do. And in doing this, Paul, who has led us in our journey to understand the church through the book of Ephesians, gives us a blessing to take with us.

Ephesians 3:20-21 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

As we seek to build the Church of Jesus Christ, we can know from this text several things:

1. We are not asking for enough, because God is able to do far more.

When we go to prayer and ask God to expand the health and strength of His church everywhere, and when we lay before Him our requests that He give success to what we are doing, we can never ask for more than He is able to do.

Churches die because they stop risking, stop dreaming, stop reaching, and stop believing that where there is nothing, something can be. They stop saying, "Let's reach everyone in our city" and start saying, "We must protect what we have and can only do what we can afford, and that's not much." We not only must pray about everything we attempt, but we should always tack on a little more to the request than is in the plan.

2. His power works in us, therefore we have the power to work

("We can't" has no place in our vocabulary)

As we seek to do the work, we need not seek the power to do it. The power is already within us. In other words, fearing failure should not be known among us. God is the power working within us, so as we seek to do great things to build His church, He will get them done.

If we attempt things that don't get done, then we need to see that God didn't want them done how we wanted them done, or it would have happened. We never have a power outage. Even what we think is failure is just a wrong way of measuring success for us. God's power works in us and so we will succeed in our endeavors to do His will in the church. We must never fear failure and never say "We can't."

3. He will glorify Himself in the Church in our generation.

The Church will bring glory to our God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This was not the intention just for some past golden age of the church, or just for the church in a certain place. This is His intention for the Church in all generations. Therefore, our part in bringing Him glory is in our generation, in our time.

Well, then, we have the mission we are to do: we exist to increase the health and size of God's church, everywhere. We have the power to do it, in Christ. We have the confidence that we will succeed. What is stopping us then? Nothing except unbelief can stop us. There is always trial and always suffering and always cost and always hard work in doing the will of God. We will always be opposed by Satan himself. But nothing can stop us except unbelief and/or fear. What I'd like to do today is make some mental connections between ideas, or better, to explain how the nuts and bolts fit together in the working of the church.

From a leadership perspective, from the point of view of the elders, the means for us increasing the health and size of the church is primarily in making disciples:

Jesus told us to make disciples who observe all the He has commanded. Therefore, we seek to make disciples who are able to worship, to build community (in family and the church), evangelize, plant churches, and do good deeds in and out of the church.

The disciple behaves like the teacher. In our case, the Teacher is Jesus. Therefore, we as the leaders of the church want to train disciples who act like Jesus in that they worship God first, that they love one another and build community in their homes and in the church.

They also reach out to the lost within their reach and invite them to join us in Christ. This is evangelism in its simplest form. We say to others, “Come and join us, come to the Savior.”

The disciple will also seek to find his role in the greater sense of spreading the church to other places and even other countries, whether he is to go himself, or pray and send others. And finally, the disciple of Jesus is so other centered, like Jesus, that he goes about His life doing good deeds. Disciple-making is important lest we begin to think that making the church grow in health and size is the job of just a few leaders. It is not. We all have a part to play.

We have various mottos and here is where they fit:

“To Know Him and to Make Him Known”

We say that we want to Know Him and Make Him Known. Why this motto? It sums up the aspect that we are to be growing internally and also externally. A church that concentrates only within will lose its way and become unhealthy and stagnant. A church must focus personally on Jesus. Knowing Him is the agent of health within. But He is also the solution for the rest of the world. We want to declare Jesus to a dying world so that the church members who are yet to join us can be saved and come.

“A Community Church with a Worldwide Vision”

Similarly, we say we are community church with a world-wide vision. This deals with geography, pointing out that we have a responsibility not only to the church within our local reach, but worldwide. We will not have the argument here that asks, “Why are we bothering with the church on the other side of the world when we have enough problems right here?” We will not be asking that question. We have settled it already. It’s who we are. It is who we have been from day one. Furthermore, it is who we believe God mandates for us to be, for He said to make disciples of all nations. We can’t do everything, but our focus must be both local and global church health and size.

There are two kinds of ministry that each of us is to be involved in:

Church leadership directed, and self-directed. The majority of the ministry of the church is going to be in the self-directed category. What do I mean by that? Each disciple, each church member, living in the context of their ordinary lives, has dozens of opportunities a day to grow the health and size of the church through doing good deeds, building community, teaching others, etc. Whereas, organized ministry, though often reaching more people at one time, can only do a few things. This is

very important to understand. Church members become very immature when they see themselves disconnected from the mission of the church unless they are partaking in Sunday services, Sunday school, and planned events of the church. Let me give you some examples:

I often talked to moms who say, "I want to do more for the church but my children take up all of my time. Between them, the house and my husband, I don't have the time or energy to do anything else." Here's what's being missed. The kids aren't just keeping you busy. Those are the little lambs that God has given us to evangelize and to teach. The best way to increase the health of the church if you are a mother of little ones is to invest your time in them as your second priority (after loving your husband). If you are a single mom, then they are your first priority.

By making disciples of those little ones, you are building the health of the church. Some of the most exciting people I deal with are the teenage adult children of long time Christians. They have invested in their children, and now the church has young adults who love Jesus, have character, tithe, serve and worship. If you are a single parent or the main breadwinner in your home, the reason you go to work is two-fold. First, you go to disciple and provide for your family. It is for love of family that you are making money. It is not for your ego. It is for them. If you work and bring home money, then they get the benefit of that income, and they also learn the proper way to provide for themselves. The second reason you work is because God wants you as a missionary in the place you work. When you go to work, your mission is to increase the health and size of the church. That's why you are there. You are there to represent Christ in the way you work, in your honesty, in your friendships. Someone, some way, should be hearing the gospel because you have a job.

So, if most of your time is at work and taking care of kids, then most of your time should be devoted to building the health of the church. Furthermore, if you don't first disciple your kids and provide for them, you are hurting the church, for your kids and you will become a burden that you should not become.

If you are married, you increase the health and size of the church by loving your spouse as God says. You are to pray for, encourage, and be kind to your spouse. Husband, if you are not first growing in your service to your wife then you are making the church less healthy, not healthier. Wives, if you are not respecting your husbands, then you are making the church less healthy, not more.

If you are single, then you build the church by providing for your own physical needs, avoiding sin, and loving and serving those near you.

In all cases, without the help of the church putting together a program, the church grows when one church member cries with another, prays with another, builds community by hanging out with another, helps one another, loves one another. The Church grows in health and size when the millions of little good deeds that are available to you every day are acted on by you.

You don't need leaders to organize anything for you to grow the church daily. Attending to your own spiritual health and taking advantage of the opportunities around you, this is church ministry. Why? Because healthy spiritual individuals make up healthy spiritual families which make healthy individual church members which makes for a healthy church.

Now let's examine the organized stuff. All of it is designed to increase the health and size of the church. There is too much to mention it all, but the big pieces look like this. We assemble weekly to worship, pray, and teach the word. This assembly on Sunday mornings is ancient and consistent local expression of the church. This time of worship and prayer and building up in the word makes us healthy and unified.

We gather in smaller groups called community groups. These are organized and scheduled so that the maximum number of people can attend. They focus of these groups is community building by relationships and focused time together.

We plan educational events so that we can grow in knowledge. We have membership classes, Harvest Institute Classes, various Bible Studies, etc. We keep a book store to help bring in good educational material. All these things are done with the view to growing you as a disciple of Jesus so that the church will grow and build itself up.

We have various other events. We have retreats and simulcasts and women's teas, and men's game dinners. We have stuff planned for children, for teenagers, for young adults, for older adults. Just about everything we do in an organized fashioned at Harvest has in it two components: we want to build up Christians, and reach out to the lost. We want to build up Christians from Harvest and from other churches.

We want the lost to feel welcomed here and to have a chance to hear the good news that Christ died for sinners. We have healing ministries and outreach ministries. We have jail ministry and recovery ministry and evangelism. All these things have the goal of making for healthy disciples and calling the lost to faith. We also invest in missions, in church planting, locally and around the world. We partner with other people planting churches. We are reaching out with other campuses of Harvest.

So the big picture is that we do many ministries in an organized fashion, and we do even more as individual Disciples of Christ without the need to be organized by church leaders. But all that we do has a unifying goal to increase the health and size of God's church everywhere. And at the center of that health, is the cross. So let me end this series at that place.

The cross of Jesus is at the center of all we do, because the health and size of the church comes from the cross. The church is formed by a message: Jesus died for sinners. That message brought us into being. The church marches forward on a message: Jesus is strong, we are weak. The grace and kindness of God at the cross, the power of the resurrection, is the nourishment for each disciple on a daily basis. The growth of the church comes in bringing this message to our community and the world.

The growth and health of the church depends on the moment by moment reality that we are loved based on the work of Jesus, not the goodness of the people of the church. We stand in a state of favor, forgiven, guiltless, righteous, and holy because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We overcome evil and advance the kingdom not through our effort and brilliance, but by the power of the

cross and the resurrection declared. The gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. We are not ashamed of this.