

Unleashed Celebration Sunday
5/16/21
Colossians 1:28 | Numbers 13
Sunday AM

Good AM! What a glorious day of celebration for our church. Let me begin by saying that whether you've been here for yrs or for weeks, I'm honored to serve alongside of you. I love our church – and I'm thankful for the privilege of serving the Lord w/ you

As many of you know, I just completed my 1st book. It was something I felt called to do over 10 yrs ago – and this year, I finally completed the task. I can tell you (2) things about the process: (1) Even though I felt called to do it; it took longer than I thought it'd take. And (2) the hardest part of the process for me was knowing when to conclude one chapter and start the next.

I believe this is where we are today as a church. This past chapter may've taken a little longer than many of us thought – and certainly there've been a few surprise twists along the way – yet today, we're closing out one chapter to start a new one.

I believe at a time like this, it's critical we remember the wise words of Solomon...

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Pr. 29:18

While this passage is often misused/misunderstood – there is a basic, fundamental truth that can't be missed.

vision (*chazon*) refers to a prophetic word from God for His people – the ***revelation*** of God.

perish (*pawrah*) refers to a woman's hair left to flow out from its covering. Unconstrained in the wind, her hair is blown in all directions – *directionless*

POINT – Where there's no clear direction from God, God's people flounder b/c set adrift w/ no direction to be driven by the winds of self and tossed by the waves of culture.

IOW – when God's people bend their knees/bow their hearts to His revelation, God gives us His direction. We no longer have to be tossed by the whims/desires of self/culture – instead, we can engage in finding and accomplishing His will for our lives.

The good news is – we don't have to conjure up a vision since Jesus left one for us in Matthew 28 – it's called the G.C. It is when God called His followers to go into our world to ***make disciples of all nations***. Our task is to discover how God wants us to accomplish this mandate thru our church in PTC.

As a church, we've based our ministry decisions on Paul's version of the G.C. stated in Colossians 1:28

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone w/ all wisdom, so that we might present everyone fully mature in Christ. Colossians 1:28

Everything we say/do as a church is based on this passage – our ***mission***, our ***motives***, and our ***methods*** – all pointing to God's vision for our church.

God's vision for our church is simple – it's to be a ***catalyst church leading a disciple-making movement*** across SW Atlanta and around the world.

We're to be more than a PTC church, more than a Baptist church – we're to be a global disciple-making catalyst who plants, re-plants, and revitalizes churches and ministries all over the world.

To do this, we must be clear in our mission of making disciples by ***influencing all people into intimate fellowship w/ Jesus.***

WHY? B/c the Bible is clear – God wants all people to experience a satisfying, significant, and intimate relationship w/ Him...

HOW? By relationally *making, maturing, mobilizing, and multiplying* disciples who regularly experience God.

So, as we look to the future, I want to encourage us to Aim Higher/Dream Bigger. Let's seek God asking for a bigger vision, a broader touch – and let's be willing to step out in faith as God's Spirit leads us.

As I've been praying for today and our church's future, God has impressed a story from **Numbers 13** upon my heart – the story of Joshua/Caleb and the (10) spies.

If you don't remember it. The Israelites had escaped the Egyptians and were standing at the edge of the Promise Land ready to enter into the land God had sworn to them.

In prudence, Moses sent (1) spy from each of the (12) tribes to scout out the land. Upon their return, they offered a report where 10 of the spies saw only w/ eyes of flesh – while Caleb/Joshua saw w/ eyes of faith.

They came back to Moses/Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to the assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They said to Moses – “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow w/ milk/honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.” Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” But the men who had gone up w/ him said, “We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are like giants. We saw the Nephilim there – and we were like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” Numbers 13:26-33

Sadly, ***b/c they listen to the majority instead of to the Godly*** – they missed crossing over. Instead, God allowed them to wander for 40 yrs until that gen. had passed. I wonder... what if they had listened to Joshua/Caleb?

As we open a new chapter, as we stand on the banks of our Jordan looking over into promise – **I can't help but wonder** – will we have eyes of flesh or eyes of faith? Will we be nearsighted or far-sighted? Will we be strong/courageous or weak/fearful?

I believe God has called us to be something special for His glory – He's gifted/blessed us! The only thing that can hold us back is our own fear/disobedience.

W/ this in mind, I believe God has (6) objective for us in the next 5-7 yrs. I believe God is calling us to:

- Shine Brighter
- Think Smaller
- Live Bolder
- Build Stronger
- Go Farther
- Share Wider

I SHINE Brighter

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16

As a church, we must shine brightly in our community if we're to shine brightly around the world – and to do this, there are a few items we need to address at home.

British missionary C.T. Studd said it best – *the light that shines the farthest shines the brightest at home.*

There are (2) ways we can shine brighter. ***We need to continue refocusing how we engage the generations.***

Not only must we effectively reach young families and their children w/ exciting, relevant, and Bible-centric ministries, we need to engage our older generations w/ equal passion/fervor. To do this in a post-covid, post-Christian culture will require rethinking our come/hear models of ministry to instigate a new go/tell relational strategy that meets people at the point of the need.

Next, after 15yrs of pressing to get out of debt, ***we need to address a number of deferred maintenance issues and changing ministry needs.***

1 – Renovate Preschool/Children's area/Playground

2 – Address the Exterior of Our Church

- Pressure Wash/Paint Exterior
- Address Landscaping/Upkeep
- Re-pave Parking Lot
- New Roof

3 – Address Seating in the Worship Center

4 – Continue Improving Security/Technology

WHY? B/c if we're to be a city on a hill shining brightly to impact the world around us, we need to shine brightest here at home.

II THINK Smaller

Yes... I know this sounds counter-intuitive, yet ***big things are always born from small beginnings.***

Isn't this what Jesus modeled – to have a bigger, greater impact, it's imperative we get smaller/more relational. Thus, ***we need to continue leaning into Jesus' model of making disciples by getting smaller and more relationally intentional.***

In fact, a cursory view of Jesus' ministry reveals that He spent increasing amounts of time w/ decreasing amounts of people. He modeled for us the critical nature of doing ministry life2life rather than in bulk.

This means while we're **one w/many**, we also need to be **one w/ some**, **one w/ few**, and **one-on-one** w/ God.

The things you have seen in me and heard from me – these entrust into reliable men who will be qualified to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2

III **LIVE** Bolder

Living bolder is about all of us living daily on mission where we live, work, and play.

It'll be an initiative to not only challenge us to live go/tell lives, but it'll be a new conviction to connect us to relevant opportunities to be salt/light here in PTC.

For we are His workmanship created in Christ to do good works which God has planned for us. Eph. 2:10

IV **BUILD** Stronger

Have you ever heard the phrase – *to whom much is given much is required?* It comes from Luke 12:48 – the rest of the verse says – *and from the one who has been entrusted w/ much, much more will be asked.*

Folks, we've been given so much! We're so incredibly blessed in so many ways. I have a great conviction God wants to use our church, as imperfectly healthy as we are, to help other churches to get healthy.

DYK – Coming out of Covid, Barna estimates as many as 60k of the 300k protestant churches in the US will close their doors or merge w/ another church in the next 18 mo. That's over 3,300 churches a month.

I'm convinced that a church like ours must come alongside of pastors/churches to help stem the tide. No... we're not perfect, but we're healthy enough to help other churches/ministries to continue on.

This will require a new/different mindset. We must be Kingdom-centric more than we're church-centric.

Even right now, we've already begun assisting other churches in our area in their time of need – one church who's bigger than us and one that's smaller. But each one needing assistance in their time of need.

V **GO** Farther

In Acts 1:8, Jesus told His followers *when the H.S. comes upon you, you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world.*

This same calling applies to us. We're to be a church on globally mission as we pray, go, and give.

It's my conviction, b/c of the unique abilities and connections of our church members to the airline industry and to the ministry world, that God is calling us to be a church on mission 24/7/365 w/ strategic mission partner in every time zone around the world w/ the next 10 yrs. Literally, the sun will never set on our church's missional engagement.

Pastor Mark/Missions Team have already begun making connections to partner w/ ministries on every continent to begin sending smaller, specialized tactical teams to assist our them in accomplishing their calling. So, if a medical team is needed, we'll send a medical team. If a sports team, then we'll send a sports team – a construction or teaching team – then we'll send it.

VI **SHARE** Wider

If we've learned anything over these past 18 mo. w/ Covid – it's that technology is critical to the church's future. And we're engaging.

In the past few months, we've been re-visioning our technology plans and have built a studio, hired an expert in communications, and assembled a team of very competent men/women to weaponize our website and digital ministries for G.C.

As we look to the future, we're launching new technology initiatives to minister/equip our church families, and opening new pathways to plant/support new LIFE Groups we hope will become church plants all around the world. And we're just beginning to scratch the surface on what God wants to do thru us.

So, there you have it – a snapshot for the next 5-7 yrs. No – it's not going to occur in a week. And as we've seen over these past 18 months, things can be altered quickly – yet no matter the challenges – the G.C. will still move forward. But as for me..., I'm excited! And I believe **our future as a church is exciting**. So, as we close this chapter. I can hardly wait to see what our next chapter holds – and I'm looking forward to becoming the catalyst church God is calling us to become who leads a disciple-making that'll impact SW Atlanta and the world around us.