

Christmas 2013
Build Your Kingdom Here
December 15, 2013

PRELUDE – Build Your Kingdom Here

Worship Songs – O Come All Ye Faithful (3rd Day) / Offering (Baloché)

Feature - Shout For Joy / Offering

Good morning everyone.

It's hard to believe but it's only 10 days until Christmas. I hope you're enjoying the season so far. I hope you're looking forward to experiencing a great time with family and friends. And I hope that's exactly what happens for you (and for me, too – starting tomorrow we'll be hosting out-of-town members of my family for 10 days in a row! So, feel free to say a prayer for us.) But more than my hope for your enjoyment of this season, I hope that this Christmas you will understand and appreciate more than ever before what God was up to when He came to this Earth in the form of a baby boy – Jesus of Nazareth.

Theologians call that “the incarnation” – God literally wrapping himself in human flesh and became one of us, subject to the limitations of humanity yet still maintaining the essence of divinity. As to how that happened – as to the mechanism by which the Holy Spirit of God was able to become one with the flesh of a young woman by the name of Mary and produce a being who was at the same time 100% God and 100% human – it's one of the greatest mysteries of all. And for centuries that mystery and its implications have filled the minds and writings of theologians and philosophers and even skeptics.

But, for me personally, whenever I think about the mystery of incarnation, it's not the “God side” of the equation that fascinates me so much; it's the human side. It's not so much how God arranged for Jesus to come *to* us as it is who He arranged for Jesus to come *from*.

Let me show you what I mean.

When you open the very first book of New Testament (which is the story of Jesus and his followers), Matthew – Matthew who was with Jesus while he walked on the earth – Matthew doesn't start with the *birth* of Jesus; instead, he starts way before then with something that even the most dedicated Bible scholars are tempted to skip over because, frankly, it's kind of boring and hard to read.

Matthew begins ...

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And Matthew continues ad nauseam until he has named 40-plus ancestors in Jesus' family tree – from Abraham through David and all the way down to Joseph, the husband of Mary the mother of Jesus.

So, why would a guy who is about to tell the most amazing *story* of the most amazing *person* in all of human history start with something like that – something so bland and mundane?ⁱ

It's because Matthew was Jewish. And he was writing to men and women who were also predominantly Jewish. And he knew that if he was going to tell them that Jesus was the Messiah – the long-awaited Savior who had been prophesied to come and rescue Israel – he knew that, at some point in his story, everyone would be thinking, "OK, what you're telling us about this Jesus of Nazareth guy is all well and good. It's fascinating. It's a moving story. But ... *is this guy related to David – King David – from the Old Testament?*"

And they would ask that because every Jew knew from Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah was supposed to come from the family line of David.

So, Matthew begins his story with a genealogy to make it very clear that even though Jesus was conceived through a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit on the "God side" of the equation, on the human side he was also from the line of David *because Joseph – his adoptive father – was a direct descendant of David*. In fact, if the Romans had not been occupying Israel at the time, Joseph would have had a rightful claim to the throne. And Jesus, as his oldest son, would have eventually had that right to the same position as well. Both of them were in line to be kings of Israel. And Matthew wanted that to be clear right from the very beginning.

"Those People"

But there's something else Matthew wanted to be clear from the very beginning. It's not very obvious to us since our culture isn't all that interested in genealogies but, in those days, whenever kings and emperors would commission biographers to write their story (which was a common practice) those writers went to great lengths to ensure that every listing of a ruler's family tree was scrubbed clean of those who were criminals, or traitors, or mentally ill or involved in some sort of scandal in their life. Their names were never mentioned in the official history. If they were an embarrassment in any way, they were completely omitted.

But, in Matthew's genealogy – once you bring yourself to read it closely – it appears that he's doing exactly the opposite. It seems as if he actually goes out of his way to let *everyone know* that the family tree of Jesus included some of "those people" – people who would have been left off of any other list of any other person with a claim to a throne.

Let me show you what I mean. Matthew writes ...

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham ...

Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah.

And then he mentions the first of those names that probably shouldn't be mentioned.

Their mother was Tamar.

And, of course, all the Jews who were reading Matthew's story knew who Tamar was.

- They knew that she was a foreigner – not of the Hebrew bloodline.
- They knew that she had been married to two of Judah's sons (not at the same time, but in succession) and that both died soon after marriage leaving her a childless widow at a young age.
- And they also knew that following the death of her second husband, at a very low point in her life, she had pretended to be a prostitute in order to trick her *father-in-law, Judah*, into having sex with her so she could get pregnant ... which she did ... and gave birth to Perez and Zerah.

It was a great scandal; a big dark blot on the heritage of the Hebrew race. But not just because of Tamar. It was also scandalous because Judah, a married man ...

- a) had sex with someone he believed to be a prostitute who
- b) turned out to be his daughter-in-law because
- c) he hadn't provided for her in the way he should have as her father-in-law.

According to Jewish law he should have required his remaining son (he had three) to take Tamar as his wife. But he didn't, which left her completely defenseless. (In those days, there was not a worse fate for a woman than to be an unmarried, childless widow.) So she did what she thought she had to do ... and two more sons were born to Judah. The whole situation was as messed up as anything we see in pop culture today.

So, why would Matthew put her name on the list? I mean, he really didn't have to. He could have just run quickly through Judah and Perez and on to the next in line. But by stopping to point out that Tamar was related to Jesus the Messiah, he brought the whole sordid affair front and center again.

Then he continues:

*Perez was the father of Hezron.
Hezron was the father of Ram.
Ram was the father of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.
Salmon was the father of Boaz.*

And then Matthew does it again. He brings up the second of those names that you might not want to mention in the genealogy of a king.

He writes ...

His mother (referring to Boaz) was Rahab.

And every Jew who read this would have immediately remembered her. Actually, they would have remembered her nickname. They didn't call her "Rahab the housewife" or "Rahab the woman of purity." They called her "Rahab the prostitute" because in the seven references in the Old Testament, she is referred to in those terms five times, "Rahab the prostitute." And unlike Tamar, Rahab was a *real* prostitute. It's what she did for a living – in the temple of the Canaanite gods, no less.

Now, she *did* become a worshipper of Yahweh, god of Israel, and her life *did* change after that. (You can read about it in the Book of Joshua). But again, the question remains: why is she included in this list? This seems like something you would want to downplay.

But Matthew says "no, let us pause in this recounting of the family tree that leads up to the birth of the Messiah and remember the prostitute, Rahab."

Then he picks up the genealogy again:

*Boaz was the father of Obed
(and don't forget - his mother was Ruth)*

She wasn't a prostitute, but she was a foreigner – an outsider to the nation of Israel.

*Obed was the father of Jesse.
Jesse was the father of King David.*

Finally! If you're Jewish and looking for the Messiah, we're getting to the important part – King David! The greatest leader Israel ever had.

But when Matthew continues the genealogy he writes:

*David was the father of Solomon.
(His mother was the widow of Uriah). Matthew 1:1-6 [NLT]*

She's not even named but she doesn't have to be because everyone reading knew that Solomon's mother, the widow of Uriah, was *Bathsheba*. And everyone knew the story. King David – the man who God once called “a man after my own heart” – committed adultery with the wife of one of his best friends and most loyal soldiers, Uriah. And when she turned up pregnant, David staged Uriah's death on the battlefield so he could take Bathsheba as his wife. Talk about scandal!

But instead of downplaying it – there was no need whatsoever to mention Solomon's mother in this list – Matthew takes pains to stop and put this big red flag beside her and this whole sorry story as if to say, “*look who else* shows up in Jesus' family. *Look who else* is in the family line of the special one, the one sent from God, the one who *is* God.”

List Logic

But, why? Why does Matthew keep doing this? Why not try to clean up the family tree of Jesus like they do in all the other ancient genealogies and leave out the bad apples?

Actually, if you go back and read the Old Testament, it's clear that Matthew *does* leave some people out of his list – just not the people he probably should have! So, why do *these* people make it in?

I think there are several reasons.

First of all, I think Matthew wants it very clear – right from the outset – that God is a god of grace.

I think Matthew is setting the stage for the story of the One who was known as “the friend of sinners” by reminding everyone that God has *always* taken people *just as they are and not as they should be ...* which is so counterintuitive to what most people believe.

Most people believe that when it comes to God we have to play up our strengths and successes and play down our weaknesses and failures. We think we need to approach God with a self-justifying list of all the good things we've done. “Hey God, check out the 29 good things I do in my life. I know I'm not perfect, but I'm certainly better than a lot of folks.

- I work hard and I pay my taxes.
- I go to church.
- I try to be a good parent
- I keep at least 8 or 9 of the 10 commandments (most of the time).
- I give to the Salvation Army bell ringers at Christmas.
- I try to protect the environment.

- I'm taking steps to reduce my carbon footprint."

But, I think Matthew wanted to point out before he got into the story of Jesus and his life – before he even got to the part that we call “Christmas” – that this story was not going to be about lists or our attempts to put our best foot forward. “No,” Matthew says, “look at some of the people who are in Jesus’ family. A lot of them don't have a list worth presenting to God. They don't have a best foot to put forward.”

And quite frankly, even the best of the people in the lineage of Jesus – even the guy known as the man after God's own heart – don't deserve to be there. But God is a god of grace – favor that we cannot earn and do not deserve – and that's why they are.

Secondly, I think Matthew wants to remind everyone at the very beginning that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

I think Matthew was setting the stage for the story of how Jesus connected with people who seemed to be too far gone – the tax collectors, the prostitutes and other notorious sinners – by reminding everyone that God's grace has *always* reached beyond what people believed to be possible. Otherwise, how could a woman like Rahab get to be in the line of the Messiah? How could an irresponsible womanizer like Judah get to be part of it? How could a murderer like David get in?

No one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

I think some of you here today need to hear that because you've convinced yourself that God doesn't want to have anything to do with you. You're thinking “I've done too much bad in my life. I've been too long away and too far away from God.”

But, friend, this dry-as-a-bone genealogy is proof that nothing could be further from the truth. Matthew exposes the dirt in the family tree of Jesus because he wants us to know – he wants *you* to know – that as much as God hates sin, He loves sinners even more. He wants you to know that even though your sinful nature is far worse than you would ever imagine, God's grace towards you is far greater than you would ever dare to hope. And he wants you to know that God saves sinners while they are *still* sinners, not after we get our act together.

And we've read this scripture so many times this fall, Paul said, “We are saved not by works of righteousness – not by getting our life turned around – but by grace through faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross and in His resurrection.”

Friend, if you're far from God this morning, what that means is that He is simply asking you to change the way you think about Him and change what you believe about Him. Instead of believing you have to clean up your act so you can measure up to some impossible standard that you never could measure up to, God is simply asking you to believe and receive. Believe that Jesus died for you (to atone for your failures to

do and be what God intended you to do and be) and believe that he rose again on the third day after so that, one day, you too would rise again when He returns to renew, restore and regenerate this whole creation. God's asking you to believe *in what He has already done* and to simply say "yes" to Him – to receive Jesus as your savior.

And then *He* will work on cleaning up your life however it needs to be cleaned up by changing you from the inside out. That's what grace does. And that's why no one is ever beyond its reach.

I think another reason why Matthew wanted to include the less-than-presentable people and stories in the lineage of Jesus is that ...

He wanted it clear right from the outset that God's grace actively pursues those who are "outsiders" to the faith.

I think Matthew was setting the stage for the story of the One who constantly drew those who were considered to be "spiritual outsiders" into His inner circle by reminding everyone that God has *always* pursued outsiders.

In the world of the ancient Middle East (and in many parts of that world even today), if you were *a man* ... and you were *of the right race*, you were considered to be on the inside. If you were a woman you were not. In fact, you were considered to be little more than property. If you were from another race or culture you also were not. You were thought of as a dog ... which is why many devout Jewish men of Jesus' time would begin their day with a prayer thanking God for not making them a woman or a Gentile.

So Matthew goes out of his way in his genealogy to say "look at all the women – *non-Hebrew* women, *Gentile* women – that God included in the line of the Messiah." Matthew wanted it clear that even though it seemed radical to the religious leaders of his day for Jesus to invite "outsiders" (women, especially) into his inner circle, God's grace has *always* been pursuing them. In fact, that was the whole reason He had called the nation of Israel into existence in the first place. They were meant to be a light to the Gentiles, to the outsiders.

They had simply forgotten that.

And that's not to be critical of them because, even today, God's concern for outsiders is so easy to forget once you become an insider. Just last week I was telling the folks who attended the membership class about a time not too long ago when we, as a church, forgot this concern for outsiders.

For almost eight years, North Heartland was a mobile church. We met for five years at New Mark Middle School and for three years at Park Hill South. We set everything up and tore it down every Sunday and sometimes in the middle of the week. And when we were doing that, it was very clear to us why we were going to all that trouble. *We were the church for people in the Northland who didn't go to church because they didn't think church had anything to offer them.* And, we organized and prioritized that in our thinking and resources and, amazingly, a bunch of “those people” came to our church and became believers in and followers of Jesus.

When we bought this building in 2002 – which was a miracle by any sense of the word – and transformed it from a mental hospital into the configuration we have today, it was clear that God put us here so that we could do that even more effectively. And for the first couple of years, that's what happened. We worked hard at reaching outsiders and as a result we almost doubled in size as a congregation.

But then a not-so-funny thing happened to us. Little by little, the focus shifted from “out there” to “in here.” I (and by default, our leadership team and then, I think, our entire church) became overly concerned with whether or not people who were already part of NHCC were happy. The driving questions became “are we meeting the needs of everyone already on the inside? Are we doing what everyone thinks big churches ought to do? What cool churches ought to do?” And we put a lot of effort and resources into that.

Now, please don't hear what I'm not saying. Taking good care of the people you already have is important whether you're talking about a church or any kind of business. But the larger an organization becomes and the longer it exists the stronger the pull becomes to focus more and more attention inwardly on the already convinced and already committed and what they need and to lose sight of the people on the outside and what *they* need. That's exactly what had happened to the Jewish religion by the time Jesus came on the scene. And it's what's happened to so many churches and entire denominations of churches since the Reformation.

Closer to home, as I said, it happened to us. And I remember very well the moment I realized it in the fall of 2009. I remember I was driving out of the back parking lot here one Sunday after church and it hit me. Our attendance had been slowly declining and, more importantly, we were not baptizing any new believers in Jesus. I've never heard God speak audibly but that day as I was driving out of that parking lot He made it very clear to me the reason why. We had lost sight of the reason we were here in the first place. We had become inwardly focused.

So I stood up here four years ago almost to the day – in December of 2009 – and gave a message in which I told everyone, “Friends, I have failed as your pastor to keep us focused on the reason why we're here in the first place.” I said “when God called us to plant this church in 1994 it was clear that whatever else this church *might do* the one thing we collectively *must do* is to be His ambassadors to the people of this community who are not spiritual insiders, i.e. the 85% of the people in our neighborhoods who, this

morning, felt like any other option was a better option than getting up and going to church somewhere.”

I said it was also clear when we started this church that “the business this church is to be in is the business of ‘spiritual lifesaving’ and that *the one thing* that absolutely has to happen and has to keep on happening at NHCC is for *spiritually drowning men and women in our local community to be pulled out of the water of sin and separation from God and brought to the safety of Christ and his people.*”

“Therefore” I said, “if more and more of those 85% in Autumn Ridge or Parkville or Liberty or Gladstone or Smithville who aren’t going to church today don’t ever show up at NHCC or if they do show up and don’t connect with what we’re doing, we should think seriously about closing our doors and doing something else with this place.”ⁱⁱ

At the time I gave that message, people were a little stunned and didn’t quite know how to take it. Everybody loves a vision message but I don’t think people realized how self-focused we had become as a congregation ... which is why it took almost two years from that point to turn things around. And it wasn’t easy. We lost people over it. It was a hard time.

But, in the fall of 2011, we were finally ready as a church to take the next step to becoming more effective in reaching more people on the outside. And in December of that year, two years ago almost to the day, many of us gave our first offerings to a two-year financial campaign called *Accelerate*, which was designed to allow us to continue our existing ministry while expanding and remodeling this auditorium and planting a new congregation in Johnson County so that more and more “outsiders” could be reached.

One year later ... 2012 ... on this very same Sunday last year, we held our first service in this newly remodeled auditorium and we followed it up with a five-month run of intentional, directed outreach into our community. The result, as I said several weeks ago, is that we’ve added almost 250 people to our congregation of whom almost half *were not going to church anywhere.*

And over the past year many of those folks – many of you – have come to understand the truth of who Jesus is and the amazing grace of God and have received Him as savior. This year we’ve baptized 40 people, which for a church our size, puts us in the top 5% of evangelical churches nationwide.

That’s why we did the *Accelerate* campaign. That’s why we gave what we gave. That’s the reason we as a church are here in the first place.

(pic) And I have to tell you that it made me so happy yesterday to see us leverage this building for the sake of the folks who came to Santa’s Workshop.

We didn’t have as many as we had hoped because of the weather but of those 400+ who did show up, 60% said they were not currently involved in a church. That’s awesome. They’re the reason we do it. They’re the reason we’re here.

(Pic) And as happy as I was to see all of them, I was even happier to see so many NHCCers volunteering their time.

And not just people who've always volunteered (who we are very thankful to have), but people who've never done it before, people who became part of the church last year and who are now becoming part of our mission to reach outsiders.

Now, the reason I'm telling you all of this is that I think it's a good illustration of how easy it is for God's people to lose focus on "outsiders" and also because I am glad God has allowed us *to regain that focus*. And I want to say a few things about how we're going to continue with that focus going forward from today but, before I do, there's one more thing that I want to point out from Matthew's genealogy.

Remember, we've learned so far that Matthew likely included the "tainted" people of Jesus family tree to remind his readers before story even begins ...

- That God is a god of grace.
- That no one is beyond the reach of God's grace.
- That God's grace has always pursued those who are "spiritual outsiders" to the faith.

But there's one more reason I think Matthew includes the black sheep of the family in his list.

4. Matthew wanted to remind us that God has always used imperfect people to get His work done.

Again, this is counterintuitive to what most people think. Most people think that God only uses men and women who have it all together or who have grown to a certain level of spiritual maturity or who have a certain set of spiritual gifts to be his representatives. But Matthew makes it clear from the very beginning that God used a bunch of messed up people to get His Son here in the first place. And therefore, He is willing and able to use messed up people to get the message of Jesus out.

One of the most vivid examples of this is recorded later in Matthew's writing and fleshed out in even more detail in Luke's Gospel. One day, Jesus was teaching near a lake and he got into one of the nearby fishing boats, the one belonging to Simon Peter and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything."

But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

Luke 5:4-7 (NIV)

And, this blew Simon Peter away. He knew who he was sitting in the boat with. He knew he was sitting in the boat with God incarnate. And that's why it says:

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. Luke 5:8-9 (NIV)

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." Luke 5:11 (NIV)

And that's exactly what happened. Simon and his partners quit the fishing business and became fishers of men and women who needed to know the gospel.

Jesus was saying, "Yes Peter, you are a sinner. But you are not beyond the reach of grace. I have come for people just like you – people who think they are outsiders and I will take you just as you are. *And I want you to help me reach others just like yourself who are on the outside.*"

As Matthew pointed out at the beginning in his genealogy, that's what God has always done. And that's what God is still doing today. That's how NHCC is even here in the first place. God has somehow used a bunch of messed up people for 20+ years to do some amazing things so that some other messed up people could hear the good news of God's grace.

And what I want for you more than anything else in 2014 is to be part of that with us at NHCC. If this is your church, if you love this church, more than anything else in 2014, I want you to figure out where you fit in what we're going to do to reach our community and I want you to experience the joy of being part of that.

So, what are we going to do in 2014 Rick? Pretty much we're going to run the same play we ran last year with a few tweaks here and there ... which means that from Christmas Eve thru Memorial Day we are going to put a heavy emphasis on connecting with people in our community who do not attend church, particularly in the content of our Sunday morning messages. Let me give you an overview of how it's going to flow.

Great Christmas Eve service planned.

We've got a great service planned. It's going to be an awesome experience. And as you know, this is like

the number one time during the year that people who don't go to church will actually come to church, especially if someone who goes to church will invite them.

This year we're making it even easier, we're expanding our childcare at all three services to go up to pre-K so that, hopefully, more young families will be able to join us.

Then, moving into January I'm going to do a series which right now I'm calling – for lack of a better title –

“Christmas is over and your life still sucks; why and what you can do about it.”

I'll probably shorten it or tweak it a bit to focus a little more, but that's how it works, right? You go through this big build up for Christmas and it's so wonderful and holly jolly and all that stuff and then what happens when you get to January, you go, “I've still got the same problems I had before.” Well, why is that, and what can you do about it? That's what we're going to talk about, and if you've got a better title, help me.

Then, in February, we're going to do a movie series. If you've been around here a long time you know how it works. We're going to take four or five popular movies and we'll show clips from those movies and use those movies to teach the truth, the gospel, the good news of grace.

Then, going into Easter, we'll deal with some of the questions that people have about God, and reality, and scripture. A “why it makes sense to believe” kind of series.

After Easter, we'll do a family/marriage type of series going into Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day.

And, we're going to spend a lot of money on getting the word out. We're going to produce printed materials that you and I can use to invite friends. We're going to do some direct mail marketing. We're going to let people know what is going on here in the first five months and invite them to be part of it.

The whole thing is going to kick off with “Outreach Preparation Sunday” on the first Sunday in January (January 5th).

That's the Sunday before the “Christmas is over and your life still sucks” series. Here's what we're going to do that day, and if this is your church I want you to be here that day, we're going to use that day to prepare ourselves as a church for God to use us in 2014. We're going to worship together, pray over this building in a creative way, and have some simple family-friendly outreach activities that we can do.

Plus, we're going to baptize some folks that morning because, since our last baptism in August (we baptized 30 people that day), I know that quite a few of you (during the Amazing Grace series) came to the point where you understood the gospel and you for the first time in your life truly believed and received Jesus as your savior. And that day in January is the day I invite you to be baptized. And I know some of you are going, “Well, I was baptized as a baby. Do I really need to do that?” No, you don't really

need to do that. But let me tell you what's going to happen. I've seen it so many times. People come to this point in their life where they understand the gospel and they pray and receive Jesus and then they kind of get away from that. Then they go "did I really pray that? Did I say the right words? Did I really mean that?" They play this little game of "maybe I'm not really saved." So they pray it again, "I'm going to pray it again and maybe I'll get it right this time." Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. Here's the problem, you have never done anything to nail it down. And that's what baptism does. Baptism takes all the subjectivity out of it because here's what you do. If you prayed to receive Jesus this fall, on that day you'll have the opportunity to get in the big tank we've set up here and you're going to get dunked under the water while the band is playing and everyone is singing. It will be one of the most celebratory services that we ever have. And when you come up out of that water that day is going to be marked in your mind and you're going to go "I did that, why?" Why did you do that? Because you have received Jesus as your savior. And you don't go back to the subjective stuff, you go back to this day when you followed Jesus in baptism like he told us to do. So, I just want to let you know if that's where you are and if this is making sense to you, what I'm telling you, then you need to sign up and be involved and you can do that on the communication card in the program and turn it in at the end of the service when we leave.

Beyond the strategic outreach plan, in 2014 ...

- We're going to have some expanded options in our small group ministry – you'll hear more about that in January.
- We're going to add the Easter Eggstravaganza in the spring and we're going to do Santa's Workshop again next winter.
- We're hoping to host three concerts like we did with Big Daddy Weave earlier in the fall. That's a great thing.

On the blue-sky kind of thinking ... things we haven't decided on but we continually talk about and maybe God is leading us toward these.

- I'd love to see us figure out a way as a church to adopt some of the schools in the Northland – it's really odd because we have so many educators in this congregation, and it's like, why is this. I think maybe God is doing something here. We want to investigate how we as church could partner with some of the schools in our community.
- I'd also love to see us figure out how to have an impact with foster families in the Northland. Every year we set up this tree to help out the families. There's a connection here and we're not sure what it is but we'd like to investigate that.
- At some point would love to hire someone to focus ministry on people in 20s and 30s in our congregation.

Pic of exterior

- On a more mundane note, we to do some work on the parking lot and start thinking about how we might remodel the exterior of our building. Our visibility is increasing with the completion of 88th Street and with the Menards going in on the NE corner of Green Hills and 152 it will increase even more. We have this property, let's leverage it, let's take advantage of it.

Your Involvement

So, how can you be involved in all of that? There are three things you can do:

1. You can invite. We can send out tons of marketing material and put stuff on our website and on facebook, but there's nothing like a personal invitation from someone who is part of the church.
 - Christmas Eve cards have been mailed to all NHCCers to remind and to use.
 - We have invitation bags left over from yesterday. You can give them to friends and family.
 - We have just cards at the welcome center.
2. You can serve (opportunities to serve are listed in the program)
3. You can give financially.

And we're trying to make that easier than ever before. Our new online giving system is live today.

Slide of "give money" page

<explanation>

Slide of "give stuff" page

<explanation>

If you have a program, you'll notice a QR code in it. If you scan that, it will take you the give money app so you can do that as well.

More info will be coming in the mail this week.

Having said all of that ... I need to say that a couple weeks ago I got an email from someone who said they were not going to be part of NHCC any longer because I asked for people to consider giving. She thought she had found a really good church but she was wrong because I was "begging for money and the church was all about money." When I first got it, it kind of shocked me, but then as I understood the person's situation I could understand, because of where she was financially, how it might have felt that way. So, here's what I want to say to you. If you are in a position of need right now, you are the reason we have the

Christmas blessing program. Let us know so we can help you. We have money that people have given to help people who are in that kind of situation. You don't need to be giving, you need to be receiving! That's why we do this.

But if you're like me and my wife and you're looking at your Christmas list and you're wondering what you're going to buy for the person who has everything. "They really don't need anything but it's Christmas and I've got a pen." If you're in that situation and you love this church, you've got capacity financially. This stuff doesn't happen by magic. It takes money to do what God has put us here to do. It's not all about the money. It's about the people and doing what God has put us here to do. I just want to make sure that's really, really clear. If you feel any pressure about giving, send me an email, but sign your name. Let's talk.

2014 is going to be a great year at NHCC. And what I want for you more than anything else is to be part of it because I want you to experience the joy of being used by God to reach others who are still on the outside.

Let's pray to that end.

<prayer>

Worship Song – Build Your Kingdom Here

CLOSING COMMENTS

Endnotes

ⁱ The message is inspired by "Second Chance Christmas At Velma's Diner - Who Let Them In?" by Dean Angell, December 6 & 7 , 2003 found at www.lakeviewchurch.com/learning/sermons03/christmas-wholetthem.html

ⁱⁱ From a message entitled Please Come Home for Christmas, December 5/6, 2009.