

In preparation for and participation in Clearcreek Chapel's mission

On November 16th two messages will be delivered on the Mission of Clearcreek Chapel. The first message is aimed at preparing the Chapel for mission. This will be done with Acts 1. The second message delivered in the evening will largely be guided by a ministry organizing document on evangelism. This document written and supported by CC's elders is condensed into a model that will help us understand the mission. These messages are given not merely to educate but also to motivate us to participate in the mission of the Chapel as unveiled on January 2009.

The two messages will hang together under the title "God's people on mission in community". And now to the first message.

Introduction

"By God's grace and through His Word we aim to cultivate in the hearts of God's people a passion for the Supremacy of God magnified in love for Him and manifested in love for one another".
– Clearcreek Chapel's mission statement

Here is our well written and carefully said mission of Clearcreek Chapel. It resonates with power. It rings out with truth. It reminds us of who we are and why we exist. I've learned it. I love it. I'm living it. But something strangely is silent in it.

Our vision of the Christian life can be summarized in four phrases. 1) Savoring the Supremacy of God 2) Studying the Word of God 3) Shaping the people of God 4) Spreading the Gospel of God. These four phrases make up our vision at Clearcreek Chapel. They too escort us up to a scriptural and satisfying stratum on which we build our lives together. I believe our vision of the Christian life is right on. I've learned it. I love it. I'm living it. But something unsettling happens in my mind when I ponder our vision in light of our mission.

To explore what seems to be missing and creating unsettledness in my heart I began to research our cherished documents. These documents are easily obtained. They are found on our web site. They make clear our vision, purpose, mission, values and distinctives of our beloved church. They are well written. They are graphically displayed. And they are easily discernable. As I combed over them it was clear why there is discord between our documents (and perhaps fleshed out in our moment by moment ministries). We have 3Es that make up the mission of our church – Exaltation, Edification & Evangelism. Exaltation is clear. Edification is constant. But Evangelism is distant and dim in our writings. She has moved out to the outer reaches of who we are and what we do as God's people. In our statements, she looks little and unrelated. Her appearance is not striking. And unless you know she exists, we might forget she's even there.

After my rereading of our organizing documents, I knew repentance in my heart was in order. Saddened over the condition and yet heartened over His mercy and ministry I repented. I repented over my lack of participation in God's will. I repented over my lack of concern for the lost. I repented over my lack of leadership for God's people. I revived my heart in the gospel. I rehabilitated my vision through His Word. I have now a renewed participation in the mission of God and for his people. I am resolved to go after Orphan E to bring her back home where she belongs. We need your help. We must team up and move out to rescue Orphan E and bring her back to her siblings so that Exaltation, Edification and Evangelism abide together happily.

What I am talking about this morning has to do with the mission of Clearcreek Chapel. Specifically, what I'm talking about is our identity and mission; that is, who we are and what we are about. Nine months ago, I was tasked to write out the ministry of evangelism. All the Elders participated in counsel over this document. After much labor we all affirmed the vision.

This morning, in preaching Acts one, I will try to make clear this vision by first talking about preparing for mission. Then, this evening I will introduce you to a new model that will capture in one picture our mission and invite each of us to participate in mission. These two messages are aimed at piquing our interest in the Chapel's mission and sending us into further study and conversation over the mission of the Chapel. This increased interest over CC's mission will linger for 6 weeks and prepare us for the upcoming January series at which time we as Elders will take one month and help each of us think clearly over and live consistently in CC mission with special highlight on Evangelism.

With that said as an introduction, let's open our Bibles to Acts 1 where we find God's people on mission in community needing preparation.

Introduction to the Book

This theme on God's people on mission in community comes to us with great force and clarity in the book of Acts. The book of Acts was written by Luke who was a companion of the apostle Paul. Most scholars agree that he wrote the book around the early 60s A.D. This would locate his writing around 30 years after the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Luke has a person in mind as he writes this book. His name is Theophilus which means "lover of God". His title Luke gives is "most excellent". He was of nobility as a Roman official and was a convert to Jesus Christ (notice the phrase "what you have been taught").

Luke is known as an historian. But he is much more than this. He is a teacher of the mission of the church. And He taught this "lover of God" the history of the mission of the church in order to strengthen his certainty over "the things you have been taught". Who he was in Christ and what he was to be about through Christ were to be clarified and fortified by Luke's writings. Luke does this for Theophilus and for his entire readership – including Clearcreek Chapel.

Luke's way of doing this was to show us the formation and spread of Christianity – how it broke through barriers of all sorts to change lives, families, communities, regions and even the world. So Luke uses real history to equip real people to do real dangerous and rewarding mission.

These men and women who originally heard and heeded this teaching about God's people on mission in community needed to be prepared prior to moving out in mission. Our task this morning is to think together through the first chapter of Acts in order for us to be clear on and prepared for mission.

We will attempt to accomplish this by asking helpful questions concerning the topic of Luke's writing.

God's people on mission in community

1:1-26

What we are talking about this morning is God's people on mission in community. And the first thing we see about this is that they need something before they can be on mission. This something can be seen as we turn in our Bibles to Luke 1:1-4. After we make observations in his Gospel we will turn to the introduction to Acts and make observations there.

How does it start out?

(Luke 1:1-4)

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4; ESV)

This paragraph is a remarkable claim of careful historical research. We see that this research was done in three phases. 1) There were eyewitnesses to the person and purpose of Jesus Christ. These men took down an accurate account of Christ and passed it along. 2) We notice that after 25-30 yrs. from the death and resurrection of Christ there were many who took up the pen to write an account of the person and life of Jesus Christ. 3) We see Luke doing the same. He leans on credible eyewitness accounts, he reads carefully the accurate records of the life and person of Jesus Christ and then he sets out to follow closely these sources and write an orderly account of Jesus Christ for Theophilus. His desire to do this was not merely for educational purposes but also for motivational purposes. He wants Theophilus to grow in his certainty over what he was taught. Luke desired to reach the heart of this lover of God with his historically accurate narrative of the person and mission of Christ. And the net effect for Theophilus was that he would have certainty; a steady assurance that would give rise to a firm confidence in all that he was reading. (Friends, don't miss this) This would serve him well as he faced much opposition and persecution and hardships as part of God's people on mission in community.

Now, let's think about this for a moment.

Upon hearing Luke's self assessment about his writing, we the readers are placed in a particular bind. It means that as we read Acts 1 and as we read the book of Acts as a whole, we do not have permission to select from the book what we will believe and what we will discard. We are bound by Luke's introductions to do one of two things.

1. Read Luke's writings and then say "it is all fictitious". That is, after reading what Luke penned we come away saying, "That is impossible! There is no way this storyline can be true". If we conclude that way, what we are saying is that Luke was purposefully deceiving Theophilus and his broader readership. If we read an episode in the Gospels or the book of Acts and do not take it to heart as though it were true, we are saying that all of Luke's writings are false and that Luke was a most evil person.
2. Read Luke's writings and then say "all that is in them are true and wonderful". That is, after reading what Luke penned we come away saying "he was right! This is true. All that he wrote was accurate. All that he wrote was for lovers' of God. Now, we can be God's people on mission in community with a heart of certainty.

Beloved, can you see where this train of thought is taking us? What we are looking at today is the Church's mission. And what we are asking initially is "what does the church need first for its mission? What initially did churches around 30 years after Jesus death and resurrection need to start their mission? What do we at CC need to start or stimulate the mission? The answer to these questions is singular. God's people on mission in community starts with: Believing what we are reading.

Believing what we are reading when we read:

Purpose

"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Lk.5:32)

"The son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk.19:10)

Purchase

"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk.22:20)

"The tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner". I tell you this man went down to his house justified" (Lk.18:13-14)

Price

"Some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Luke 21:16-17)

“Anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple”
(Lk.14:33)

Participation

“Whoever does not gather with me scatters (Lk.11:23)

“from now on you will be catching men” (Lk.5:10)

“love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Lk.6:27)

“Sell our possessions and give to the needy” (Lk.12:33)

“Engage in business until I come” (Lk.19:13)

Provision

“You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Lk.14:14)

“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers (Lk.22:32)

“Rejoice that your names are written in heaven”. (Lk.10:20)

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy for behold your reward is great in heaven” (Lk.6:22-23)

Pitfalls

“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap”
(Lk.21:34)

“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”
(Lk.9:62)

“They are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life” (Lk.8:14)

“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk.12:15)

Punishment

“And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Lk.13:23-24)

“In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Lk.13:28)

These are staggering statements. These are true statements. To be God’s people on mission in community we first need to be people believing what we are reading.

What is it about?

(v.1)

With that first point as our starting point, we move into the book of Acts and notice something striking in verse one.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up...

Think with me over the implication to this introduction. He says to the lover of God that in his first book, the Gospel of Luke, he wrote on a specific topic. It was “all that Jesus began to do and teach”. What word springs off the page at you and begs you to ask the question, “What is the book of Acts all about?”

The word “began” tells us much. It says that Acts is not about the church. It is not about the apostles. It is about Jesus Christ and what he continues to do and teach. In other words, both books by Luke are about Jesus. The first one has to do with Jesus earthly ministry done directly by him. The second book (Acts) has to do with Jesus heavenly ministry done indirectly by his church. A study of the book of Acts, therefore, is a study of the ascended Christ through his church. What is the mission of the Church about? The answer is *Jesus Christ in heaven continues His mission in the World by His Word through His people* on mission in community.

Listen to how John Stott put it as he read the first two verses of Acts.

“Luke’s first two verses are, therefore, extremely significant. It is no exaggeration to say that they set Christianity apart from all other religions. These regard their founder as having completed his ministry during his lifetime; Luke says Jesus only began his ...after his resurrection, ascension and gift of the Spirit he continued his work, first and foremost through the ministry of this chosen apostles and subsequently through the post-apostolic church of every period and place. This then is the kind of Jesus Christ we believe in: he is both the historical Jesus who lived and the contemporary Jesus who lives”. – John Stott, The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today), 1990.

(Recap)

So far we talked about God's people on mission in community and what the church needs to start / sustain its mission. To prepare for mission we said in light of the book of Acts that we must 1) be believing what we are reading and 2) we must understand that mission is all about Jesus Christ.

This leads us to notice v.3-8 and how the ascended Christ prepares His people for mission.

How does He prepare us for mission?

V.3-8

(read v.3-8)

We are told here that Jesus put the apostles through a period of training and instruction before he sent them the power to carry out mission. For 40 days Jesus instructed the apostles about the kingdom of God. This intense training program occurred before the power of Pentecost arrived. Are we as readers suppose to pick up on a basic way Jesus prepares his church down through the ages for mission? Could it be that there is a reason for the sequence; Truth before Spirit?

In my personal and pastoral experience with the book of Acts and the life of the church, I believe there is a striking discovery for mission in these verses. Many people think that all the church needs is more of the Spirit. This was first made clear to me back in 1984 soon after my conversion to Christ (brief story of Pentecostals and me). I came away bewildered and guilty. I had little to no power to carry on what I thought the Bible taught. What was missing is missing in many movements today.

Notice that Jesus taught for 40 days on the kingdom of God before the power descended upon his apostles. In one of the Gospels we see what God is looking for; namely people who worship him in 1) Spirit and 2) in Truth. This becomes central for us as we ask questions related to mission. How does Jesus in heaven prepare his people on earth for his mission? The answer in part is that he first teaches them the Truth. He next pours out power by the Holy Spirit. Beloved, we must understand this point if we are to make progress in mission. There is no Spirit power without truth provided. The Spirit's job is to take truth about Jesus and make it clear to us with the effect that we will want this Jesus more than anything on earth. As that takes place mission surges at a local church level by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If we are struggling with inability and timidity and lack of energy and limp Christianity we may find help in this observation. The Spirit gives us power by making the truth of God powerfully attractive and thus empowers us (cf. Eph.1:17-19; 3:16-18). There is no power when truth is absent. If the Spirit is known as fire then the Truth is know as the wood. One plus one equals "firewood".

The prerequisite for God's people on mission in community is a deep and rich understanding of the Scripture. It also is a heightened expectation that Jesus empowers His people with His Spirit. How does Jesus prepare us for mission? *Jesus (by his word through his people) teaches with the Truth and empowers with the Spirit.*

In Conclusion

In wrapping up this message, I will remind you of where we began. It started with me coming to terms with the mission of the church. I noticed that we highlight Exaltation and Edification but strangely Evangelism was dim and distant; both in our writings and in our ministry. What I discovered in my research pierced me into repentance. And out of this repentance comes a renewed participation in the mission of the church. What I saw then I'm saying now.

We need to come together as a church and go after Orphan E. We need to bring back Evangelism to our mission giving flavor to everything with its presence. We need to think carefully over Clearcreek Chapel mission. We need to increase in affections for the mission. We need to act corporately in this mission.

And so for the next six weeks we are calling us to prepare for the upcoming series on *God's people on mission in community*. To prepare for this series use this message by:

Believe all that you are reading (Lk.1:1-4)

Bear in mind that Jesus Christ in heaven continues mission on earth by His word through His people (Acts 1:1-2)

Appreciate mission as focused and fueled by both Word and Spirit (3-8)

Stop standing around and get on with mission (9-11)

Pray much together (12-14)

Look to God to raise up and equip godly leadership (15-26)

As we faithfully do these activities in reliance upon God we can expect a heart-repenting, family-altering church-changing, ministry-moving January 2009.