

Title: Our Principles for Kingdom Expansion

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

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Introduction

Today is a special day. When my life began 47 years ago, this day was not a special day. This was not one of those days that was all that special. 10 years ago today, life changed for all of us. Permanently. Dramatically. Some of you have been impacted more than others, especially if you have a family member who has served or is serving in a Persian desert. We don't see the world through the same lens any more. The events of that day were so dramatic, every one of us knows exactly where we were, what we were doing, and who we were (or weren't) with when those planes hit the towers and the Pentagon. I do not plan to spend time recounting all of the different ways that our lives changed. We have 24-hour cable news channels to do that for us. Today is an important day in our nation's history for many, many reasons.

Churches around the country have spent the day commemorating a solemn Patriot's Day today. Here are some of the ways that some churches have been spending their Sunday. One church held a "rally day". Families provided photos and adornments for crosses provided specifically for the event. Included in the church service was a local ensemble of "clowns". Members of the congregation were also encouraged to wear a clown costume, presumably to remind us of the need for laughter in the midst of tragedy. Joining the clowns were emergency workers and medical professionals wearing their own costumed uniforms in paying special tribute to the first responders of 9-11. At another church, members of the Barbershop Harmony Society provided a patriotic program as part of the church's memorial service that included banners on which were written the names of every victim of the terror attacks. The service included recitations, a video, wreath laying and a gun salute. Another church service featured a pilot whose helicopter went down in Afghanistan who later became a finalist on TV's Amazing Race. The name of the church service held earlier today was "Hope Rises in the American Spirit".

I realize we have many brothers and sisters participating in similar services today, and many of those services are occurring during the Sunday worship services. My intent here is not to throw stones at them. Certainly there is a place for commemoration and memorial services on a day that lands on a Sunday. On a day in which our nation reflects on the attacks and honors those who put themselves (and continue to put themselves) in harm's way for the rest of us, it is only proper and fitting to pay tribute. We can't help but be moved by the pictures we've seen and the stories we've heard over the past couple of days on our computers and TV's. It is a good thing to take time out to reflect and remember.

But we must ask, when we are considering the nature of our tribute and commemoration, where is the gospel? Where is Jesus? And is it possible for Christ to share his stage, if you will, with the American Spirit? And the question we must pose, regardless of whether the commemoration is a church service or a gathering at the courthouse in the middle of town, what is it, in the wake of such a tragedy and 10 years of aftermath, that our fellow citizens need most? How best to pay tribute to those who've fallen and can't get up?

Based on our text this evening, I know what Paul would say. I know what Paul would say to those churches attempting to be relevant, or at best, trying to be a lighthouse in a dark world beset with sin. It's interesting as we think about kingdom expansion and our text this evening, that the very, very short list of hundreds and thousands of examples of churches wanting to be something in this culture must be part of our discussion of kingdom

expansion. I read about the clowns, the barbershop quartets, the Apache pilots, and the cowboys, and the celebrities, and the rock stars, and the mutli-gazillion dollar athletes that are considered part of the church *making a difference* in its community, and the question regarding kingdom expansion that rises to the surface: is this us? Is this us in 5 years? In order to be light to a world that is perishing, do we need Tim Tebow? Do we need Sarah Palin? Do we need an A-list actor, an internet technology whiz, an astronaut? Do we need the president of the United States? Do we need to have a preaching series on the movies? Should our production team create our church's very own reality TV show for the morning service? How about a 75-foot high 3-tree model gracing the I-75 skyline? Do we need to have a Starbucks? A McDonalds? Does Jesus need a platform? As we think about Kingdom expansion, what are our guiding principles, principles without which we should shut our doors forever?

The Corinthian context

Our passage this evening is 2 Corinthians 4. We will be looking at the first six verses. This passage sits at the end of an explanation or argument that began in 2 Corinthians chapter 2. 2 Corinthians is the third or fourth in a series of letters Paul wrote to the church at Corinth regarding a multitude of issues, some doctrinal, some personal. If we were to sneak a peek over at Acts 18, we would find the story of how the church at Corinth came to be, and we would find an allusion to the problem being addressed in our passage. The church at Corinth was birthed during what we call Paul's second missionary journey. Because the city of Corinth was a link between Asia and Europe's trade routes, Corinth was both a financial power and licentious metropolis.

Over against the decadence of Corinth, the gospel shone brightly. Paul labored with Aquilla and Priscilla 18 months in Corinth, seeing much fruit of the gospel in the planting and establishing of a church. In the first year and a half, the church apparently flourished. Among the converts to Jesus were at least one city official and two leaders of the synagogue, including the ruler of the synagogue. Paul had planned to stay longer, but his stay came to an end when Jewish opponents (Acts 18:12ff) stirred up trouble, probably due to the success he had had in the city's main synagogue, and he was forced to leave.

This event is not inconsequential to our text. Paul writes this section of 2 Corinthians because he has heard from Titus about the growing influence of Judaizers among the church at Corinth. Judaizers were those who professed faith in Christ but continued to claim that the law was necessary to maintain salvation and godliness. In our passage, Paul is warning the church at Corinth about legalistic critics who are bringing into question the veracity of Paul's ministry and his identity as an apostle. And these detractors were scoring points. They had the popular methods, the polished presentations, the skilled arguments... they dressed Moses and the law with all the trappings of success. They had the credentials and they had a gospel that fit with both the local synagogue and that would reign in a licentious church. Never mind incompetent Paul. No need for the synagogue to drag the church down to the town square. Paul was simply an amateur who was rough around the edges. In fact, Paul's insufficient and inadequate efforts have unnecessarily drawn the ire of the synagogue and thrown a veil over the "gospel." We have a "gospel" that will both clean up the immoral mess that Paul let get out of hand AND keep our Jewish friends happy at the same time.

Who is sufficient for these things?

Paul responds to this growing threat to the church beginning at the end of chapter two and continuing into chapter 4. And he starts it with a valid question. Faced with a threat that seemingly had the success and the speaking skills and the credentials to influence the church at Corinth toward a moralist and legalist approach to the Christian life, Paul asks “who is sufficient for these things”? And the implied answer is: “no one.” No one can stack up against an A-list lineup that is popular in town, especially if that A-list is either part of the current congregation or former members of the current congregation.

Paul says “no one is sufficient”, if it is measured by the same kinds of material and earthly barometers the legalists were using. Instead, Paul’s resounding answer is: our sufficiency is **from* God, who has “made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”* This is the kind of confidence that we have toward God because of Jesus. Our confidence is in Jesus who has given us the ministry of a new and more glorious and more permanent covenant through the Spirit.

Seeing the success and the polished and popular message of Paul’s critics might be tempting for some who were on the fence. And for those who weren’t on the fence, who with Paul had confidence that the glory of Moses had faded away, such a threat might prove disheartening. If the legalists are scoring points, that doesn’t bode well for the advance of the gospel in Corinth, or even the growth of the church that already existed, does it?

Paul tells the church that the glory of the New Covenant far, far surpasses the glory in the law of Moses. And the glory and radiance of Jesus far outshines the glory on Moses’ face that eventually faded to dark. *“We have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses... and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another...”* There’s no comparison to the glory of the New Covenant and its author, Jesus. In fact, unlike the law which only brings death, this New Covenant ministry of the Spirit is transforming us into the glorious image of Jesus.

We do not lose heart

Chapter 4, verse 1: *Therefore, having this New Covenant ministry by the mercy of God which has made us competent, we do not lose heart.* The idea here isn’t simply that we don’t become disheartened. The language here is that of being emboldened. We are not discouraged. We are very bold. We are determined. This New Covenant ministry of the gospel gives us stiff spines. Our competence and our adequacy is not our own. And because our confidence and our adequacy are not in ourselves, but in the One whose glory is transforming us into his image, our ministry in the gospel is sufficient to transform lives and invalidate the critics.

This determination by Paul and the other leaders in the church has manifested itself to the church in Corinth in three ways. Verse 2:

1. *We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.*
2. *We refused to practice cunning.*
3. *We refused to tamper with God’s Word.*

Paul has already alluded to the legalists’ insincerity and their peddling of God’s word at the end of chapter two. He repeats it here, and in fact, turns their claims about him against

them. In essence, he's saying I'm not the one who has been tampering with the Word. I have not corrupted the gospel. I'm not the one who has been behaving in a deceitful way in order to gain a following. We, Paul, Aquilla and Priscilla (and others), are not the shysters in this equation.

This New Covenant and its life-giving Spirit produce a different kind of ethic, a different way of living than from those who are surreptitiously using the law of Moses to pad their ratings and their bank accounts. The New Covenant and its gospel transform those who have been given life in the Spirit into Christ's image, not snake oil salesmen. Paul speaks almost as if it should be obvious to the church at Corinth.

And in fact, his fourth point pushes that idea further:

4. **We would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God by the statement of the truth**, which here in this passage is described as the Word of God, as the gospel, and as the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord.

In the end, Paul's credibility is not staked on his degree, or his list of endorsements, or his theological acumen. Paul's commendation and vindication are in the gospel itself. The validation of the ministry of the gospel, for Paul, doesn't lie in methods or numbers or programs or the who's who list of pop Christianity. Paul's confidence, Paul's competence, Paul's adequacy in the proclamation of the gospel rests in the very gospel that he proclaims.

Notice that even as Paul's commendation rests in the Word he preaches, and his appeal is to the conscience of the Corinthian church members, what matters to Paul ultimately isn't what his critics think of him, what the unbelievers think of him. His appeal to their consciences is "in the sight of God." In being commended by the gospel itself, Paul's courage and determination ultimately are fueled by what heaven thinks about him. The proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord not only provides the content of his gospel message, but also the final court of opinion of Paul's ministry in that gospel. Paul is commended by the gospel to their consciences in the courtroom of heaven where someday Christ the judge will either validate or invalidate Paul's New Covenant ministry. Here's Paul's otherworldliness having an impact on how he thinks about his own gospel ministry, especially in the face of criticism.

One of the issues in thinking about kingdom expansion is being aware of the dangers and pitfalls. Kingdom expansion calls us to think outside of the box in terms of how we reflect the glory of Jesus in the proclamation of the gospel. Kingdom expansion calls us out of our comfort zone as the New Covenant ministry of the gospel takes us into unfamiliar territory. But like Paul and the church in Corinth, it will be tempting to make nice with the culture and adjust the message so more people will like us.

Our consensus statement

Our habit over the years, to keep us focused on the gospel and the ministry of the Word, has been to develop mission statements and purpose statements that guide our thoughts and our actions in the Clearcreek Chapel version of New Covenant ministry. And as we gathered in the spring to think about these things at the Elders retreat, these kinds of questions were always in front of us: what keeps us from going off the rails? What safeguards are in place so that the clowns and the cowboys and the fashionistas are never allowed into this pulpit hawking the gospel like a cheap stain remover "as seen on TV".

We came up with a consensus statement in our own words, but you'll notice every step of the way, the Word and the gospel are shaping our thoughts. In fact, if you had been in the room to see the process work, you would be pleased to know that before we got to the point of drafting a statement as to what we believe to be true about kingdom expansion, we spent time in the Word considering a whole range of passages that deal with kingdom expansion.

Here's the consensus statement the nine of us came up with.. remember this isn't gospel, per se... and there may be better ways to write this. But this is what we landed on:

Consensus Statement: For His glory and by God's grace, for the expansion of Christ's Kingdom, established churches will multiply themselves through commissioning discipling. Therefore, as the people of God, according to the pattern of the New Testament, we will send gifted people to establish local churches through preaching and teaching, baptizing, and serving.

Let's unpack this briefly. If you have any further questions you can ask us afterward or at flock on Wednesday.

For his glory: The One who rules and reigns in the heavens glorifies himself through the expansion of His kingdom. And the church reflects that glory as it participates in Christ's grand design to glorify himself through the multiplication of churches. I don't think we should ever assume that what we preach and teach, and how we do New Covenant ministry is done for Christ and His glory. I don't think we should ever get to the place where, when the subject of Christ's glory is absent and someone points it out, that we say, "Oh, well of course everything we do is for the glory of God. Duh!" We must continually and repeatedly remind ourselves in all humility and brokenness that this is never about us and all about Jesus. This should be so ingrained in us that our corporate self-talk begins and ends with Jesus and His glory.

By his grace: the beauty of the gospel lies in the fact that we are absent from the equation. All that we are and anything we do is pure grace and mercy. Whatever blessing we experience, whatever task we undertake for the kingdom, whatever fruit we observe is undeserved and bought by another. The gospel forever is about what Christ has done for us and to us in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. We must remind ourselves, even as we consider the expansion of the kingdom, we are the recipients of and channels of stupendous grace.

For the expansion of Christ's kingdom: Christ promised in Acts 1:8 that kingdom expansion occurs as we are Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In Luke 24, that kingdom is spread by the proclamation of the gospel to all of the people groups. Our proclamation of the gospel is our participation in Christ's expansion of his kingdom. Our understanding of these texts is that Clearcreek Chapel is to be an active participant in Christ's expansion of his kingdom through the proclamation of the Word and the life-giving activity of the Spirit.

Established churches: churches that have been around awhile. An established church is a church that has been firmly grounded in the Word and where elders have been appointed for the ministry of that Word. Established churches are stable and mature churches.

Will multiply themselves: our understanding of the text is that established churches are not islands to themselves. Established churches may be tempted to grow inward and not outward. This phrase is a recognition that multiplication must always be on the table and a priority that is on our radar.

Through commissional discipling: This is right out of Matthew 28. Because all authority has been given to King Jesus... because the kingdom has been given to Jesus and received by the church, the church is to go and make disciples of all of the earth's people groups. Clearcreek Chapel must be intentional about spreading the visible reign of King Jesus in the duplication of kingdom citizens. The multiplication of Jesus followers, while it is dependent on God's grace and mercy in the regenerative work of the Spirit, must be an intention of the gospel ministry of Clearcreek Chapel. We have been commissioned by Jesus to increase the visible realm of his authority. Wherever Christ's authority is manifested there will be disciple-making. This is our call. This is our challenge.

As the people of God. We also recognize that "making disciples" is a task that has been given to Christ's church, the local assembly that gathers as the people of God. The visible expression of Christ's rule and reign, the visible expression of the authority that has been given to Christ (vs. 18) is found in the local church. The visible expression of the kingdom that has been given to Jesus increases when churches multiply disciples that gather as churches. While it is certainly commendable that individuals are involved in the proclamation of the gospel, the command to "make disciples" was not given primarily to individuals, but to the church body. This is a corporate responsibility. And it is to be a corporate activity. The church has received the kingdom as it was given to Jesus. We have been tasked with increasing the visible realm of that kingdom. We must be intentional *together* about the proclamation of the gospel aimed at the expansion of Christ's kingdom.

According to the pattern of the New Testament: The New Testament provides ample examples of church multiplication. The clearest of these examples can be found in Paul's missionary journeys that begin in Acts 13. As the gospel moves from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth, the proclamation of the word is increasing, the authority of the word is increasing, the reach of the word is increasing and Christ is adding to his visible kingdom the church through the work of the spirit. As the gospel spreads, churches are multiplied again and again.

We will send gifted people: part of that pattern in Acts is the sending of gifted people out of the local churches, especially those whose gifts have been given for the purpose of seemingly accelerating the kingdom expansion. When the time comes for Antioch to participate in kingdom expansion, they send their best: Paul and Barnabas. The nature of all of the gifts that Christ has given to the church is outward, not inward, focus. While some of those gifts benefit the local body, many have been given with a view toward exercising those gifts in the expansion of the kingdom.

To establish local churches: while there are worthy enterprises being carried out under the banner of King Jesus that are more about discipleship than church planting, the task given to the church in Matthew 28 is to make disciples through baptism (which I'll get to in a moment). The implication of this is that making disciples is specifically tied to the local church, whether it involves increasing the number of an existing local church or in the establishment of a new assembly of disciples. The disciple-making process is not complete until a local church has been established. (And yes, I realize that puts us at odds with more than a few large evangelical ministries.)

The question then arises: What are the biblically ordained activities through which the local church are to be about the business of disciple-making?

Four biblically-based kingdom expansion activities

As we studied the text, we came up with four activities (and again, you may think of more, but this is what we included in our consensus statement:

Through preaching: the proclamation of the Word is the primary means through which Christ expands his kingdom. The unilateral, unidirectional prophetic proclamation of the Word is Christ's means of both bringing his church to life and then sustaining that life. This is why we must continue to maintain a centrality of the pulpit in our disciple-making.

Through teaching: one of the interesting patterns established in the book of Acts is that the act of unilateral preaching was often accompanied by the activity of two-way conversational teaching. The teaching of the Word is itself part and parcel to the proclamation of the Word as a complement to the activity of preaching. Making disciples who follow King Jesus occurs when kingdom citizens are taught to observe all that the One who rules and reigns has commanded. Thus, the rhythm of preaching and teaching, and preaching and teaching, and preaching and teaching is the heartbeat of a church participating in kingdom expansion.

Through baptizing: the church that has received the kingdom from the Son who has been given the kingdom marks its citizenry through the proclamation of the gospel in baptism. Baptism forms the boundary marker between the church and the world. Baptism functions as the border by which the expansion of the kingdom is visible in the world. In baptism, King Jesus declares this one who has been regenerated by the Spirit belongs to me. In baptism, the kingdom citizen declares I belong to the King. Where there is kingdom expansion, there is repentance and baptism.

Through serving: the posture of the kingdom citizen who is participating in the expansion of the kingdom is that of a servant who sacrifices all in pursuit of the kingdom. What we find in the book of Acts in churches that are multiplying all over EuroAsia is an activity of sacrificial service. This is highlighted in Acts 6 where men were chosen to serve for the purposes of unhindered gospel proclamation. Service is the mark of a church that is increasing and expanding its boundary markers as disciples are baptized and taught. And this service isn't without hardship. Repeatedly, the writers of the New Testament remind the church that their service to the King and the expansion of the kingdom can and will involve suffering for the sake of King Jesus.

That is our consensus statement that delineates what we believe to be true about the church and kingdom expansion:

Consensus Statement: For His glory and by God's grace, for the expansion of Christ's Kingdom, established churches will multiply themselves through commissioning disciplinarianism. Therefore, as the people of God, according to the pattern of the New Testament, we will send gifted people to establish local churches through preaching and teaching, baptizing, and serving.

Our guiding principles for kingdom expansion

After we agreed on the consensus statement, we also drafted some principles from the statement that help serve as guidelines. Here they are... and you can see that they flow out of the consensus statement.

We will pursue this (or participation in kingdom expansion) through the following principles:

1. God intends to magnify himself through expanding Christ's kingdom
2. God has chosen to expand Christ's kingdom through the local church
3. God will expand Christ's kingdom from among all people groups
4. God expands Christ's kingdom by establishing maturing churches in all people groups
5. In expansion of Christ's kingdom, the pattern is for established churches to multiply themselves
6. Established churches multiply themselves through commissional disciple-making
7. Disciple-making is the process of going, baptizing, and teaching in kingdom expansion
8. The process of disciple-making will be costly as we follow the sacrificial and suffering pattern of the king
9. Christ's rule and reign is expanded through glad-hearted submission in the making of disciples

These are our guiding principles for kingdom expansion. As we think and strategize and talk and pray about kingdom expansion and what that might look like for us here at the Chapel, these are the principles derived from the Scripture that will help shape our beliefs and our actions.

God has shone in our hearts

At the front of any and all of our participation in kingdom expansion must be reminders that we are in the service of a King who will be glorified in the making of disciples. Christ uses his church to multiply image bearers who reflect the glory that they behold in His face, every time they meet for the proclamation of the Word and the fellowship of His people.

We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Having this New Covenant ministry we do not lose heart. The glory that shines on us from the face of the New Covenant Himself has as its trajectory an increase of that glory in the expansion of the church. Even as others try all sorts of man-manufactured methods of expanding the kingdom, our passage this evening places the expansion of the kingdom at One and only One source... verse 5: **what we proclaim is not ourselves. What we proclaim is Jesus Christ as Lord.** Who would be so foolish as to proclaim themselves. Those who have come to believe that kingdom expansion rises or falls on their efforts. Those who believe that Moses and the law are a necessary component of kingdom expansion. Those who fall for the notion that numbers are the primary means of calculating and quantifying God's blessing in kingdom expansion.

Even here at Clearcreek, as the numbers increase, and they will... there will be a temptation to walk by sight instead of by faith. There are all sorts of ways to "proclaim ourselves" and to act with cunning peddling the gospel and not be obvious about it. What is it that keeps us from what I like to call "getting stupid"? The answer is here: what we proclaim is not ourselves. What we proclaim is Jesus as Lord. Our biggest temptation here won't be the dog and pony show. It will be to provide 12 verses for life change and the gospel goes missing. It will be providing a task list without a reminder of who Christ is,

what he has done for us and to us, and who we are in Him. Our proclamation must always and ever be about Jesus. We must pursue the glory of Jesus. We must continue to behold the face of Jesus as we are transformed into his image. We must continue to make a big deal about Jesus in our preaching and teaching.

And why is it that we proclaim Jesus? Why is it that He continues to be our subject matter? Because Jesus not only has shined his face on us, but has imparted that light into us to shine out of us. Verse 6: For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The radiance of Christ’s glory beheld by those who have been given life in the Spirit is evidenced by glory shining out of the lives on behalf of the gospel. The glory of Jesus shines onto the church and then shines out of the church into the darkness of this world, just like it was the very first day of creation. Who knew, when God created light over against the darkness that he was giving us in that creative act a portrayal of the way the gospel works in a sin-filled world? The very first light that shone into the darkness anticipated both the light of Jesus shining into dark hearts, and then those transformed hearts shining the light of the gospel into a sin-darkened world. The first day was a picture of the new day and its proclamation of the gospel shining into a world that is dark with no hope.

Conclusion

You want this church to shine the light of Jesus to those who are perishing? Cling tenaciously to the glory of Jesus, even if it kills you. You want your life to be the radiance of Jesus? Proclaim the gospel in all of its simplicity and glory, even if it means they’ll say you’re inept and incompetent. If we desire our church to be a light for Jesus in a dark, sin-filled community, we must proclaim the wonder of Jesus. It cannot be more complex than that. It cannot be any less difficult than that. The brilliant radiance from the face of Jesus is on display in a church that manifest supreme and utter confidence in the One whose glory it radiates. We must be thoroughly and fully determined that it is through the proclamation of the gospel that Christ’s glory increases as disciples are multiplied. Having this glorious ministry of the New Covenant, we do not lose heart. True kingdom expansion is fueled by a determination to proclaim Jesus because we are enamored with Jesus.