
Our Plan for Kingdom Expansion

Ephesians 3:20-21

Devon Berry

Introduction I wish we had the time to read all of Ephesians 1-3 together. [Over the last week in the car...] In these chapters, we have such an amazing confluence of astounding truths. If you have been to the Smokey Mountains in the fall, say to Cades Cove, at the peak of colors, you will have caught glimpses of panoramas so stunning that there are just not words to describe it. No camera can capture it. No artist can fully recreate it. It is sheer awe. This is Ephesians 1-3. A plan that involves all of creation, all of time, all of mankind is described and explained in a way that is enormous in magnitude and yet extremely, intensely, personal.

Let me quickly show you a few of the “enormous in magnitude” vistas...

- 1:3-4 prehistoric redemptive intention involving
- 1:7-10 a plan to unite all things in Christ
- 1:19-23 and to set him above all things, giving him as head to the church, his body,
- 2:17-22 the church being built according to plan, saint by saint
- 3:8-11 for the display of God’s glory in heaven
- 3:20-21 and display of God’s glory on Earth throughout all generations

From before the beginning of time, the triune Godhead set into motion an epic plan. At creation, that plan spilled over onto the canvas of time and it alone has been the singular brush by which all of history has been painted. Every color comes from a palette that is designed to bring praise to his glorious grace. And on that palette is a very special set of colors – they are used to paint the thread of redemptive history woven into the fabric of all time. And as time passes, that thread becomes evermore brilliant, evermore broad, ever closer to its destination. At Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection the thread explodes into a million different strands, each one a local church, reaching ever further into every tribe, tongue, and nation. The entire canvas, the whole tapestry, is increasingly flecked with the color of the thread... this beloved, is the expansion of the kingdom through the church that we have, as your pastors, been trying to describe to you over the month of September even as we are praying deeply that you will be overcome with passion for this great vision so that... *to him [will] be glory in the church (3:21a)*. [Let’s Pray]

But Wait a Minute...

“But wait a minute...” you might say. “I can see that *you* clearly believe this about the church, but this does not seem to be the modern day church to me...” Hmm. Good point. As Pastor Chad pointed out in his sermon, the church does seem to be about a great many things these days and in some cases to the exclusion of its primary mission: The making of disciples through the proclamation of the gospel and the teaching of the Word. You are not the only one to observe this. USA Today, just a few weeks ago on the front page below the

fold ran a story titled, "More Americans customize religion to fit their personal needs; One day? '310 million people with 310 million religions.' Here is a quote from the story:

[Over the past 20 years] More people claim they have accepted Jesus as their savior and expect to go to heaven.

And more say they haven't been to church in the past six months except for special occasions such as weddings or funerals. In 1991, 24% were "unchurched." Today, it's 37% .

Barna blames pastors for those oddly contradictory findings. Everyone hears, "Jesus is the answer. Embrace him. Say this little Sinners Prayer and keep coming back. It doesn't work. People end up bored, burned out and empty," he says. "They look at church and wonder, 'Jesus died for this?'"¹

Apparently, modern Christianity in America has worked out a plan for kingdom expansion that does not involve the church. Unfortunately, such a plan does not exist in the Bible. At the Chapel, we recognize that the church is integral to the expansion of the kingdom because it is the church that preaches and proclaims the gospel (Romans 10). We also realize that this expansion takes place via the real estate of people's hearts. Wherever Christ is proclaimed as Lord and Savior in the hearts of people and disciples are made, there the kingdom exists. Nevertheless, even in a church such as this (and there are many thinking biblically, though they are not the majority), there are threats to kingdom expansion and this is one angle we have not yet considered in this series. (Do you remember an illustration I used some years ago? It was February of 2009, going on 2 ½ years ago. We were preaching Acts in efforts to introduce to the Chapel the idea of "commissionality" that we were embarking upon as a church... It had to do with the Macy's day parade... This series on kingdom expansion is another step in that direction. Oh, how faithful is our God.)

So tonight we are going to briefly look at three threats to kingdom expansion that we can see in the early church. If indeed we are aiming to grow as a church into all that God calls us to be, not only should we understand what it is we must believe and do, but also what we must turn from and beware of. Following this, we will wrap up our time together considering what the next steps for the Chapel are. [Let's pray]

Persecution

The first threat to kingdom expansion that we can see documented in the Bible is persecution. Now this threat is unique in that it is external and often, paradoxically, through physical loss and suffering actually brings spiritual gain and growth. The stoning of Stephen in the book of Acts is an example of this [Read Acts 7:58 – 8:6]. Stephen was stoned and his ministry snuffed out – but – as a result, the gospel went out to unreached areas. Here is

¹ Grossman, CL. More Americans customize religion to fit their personal needs; One day? '310 million people with 310 million religions.' USA Today, September 13, 2011, 1A. See <http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2011-09-13-If-World-War-II-era-warbler-Kate-ST-U.htm> for full story.

Spurgeon² on persecution: *Never did the church so much prosper and so truly thrive as when she was baptized in the blood. The ship of the church never sails so gloriously along as when the bloody spray of her martyrs falls on her deck. We must suffer and we must die, if we are ever to conquer this world for Christ.* I know little of this sort of persecution for my faith. The same is likely true for you. If God were to bring this kind of persecution to us, may we suffer and die in such a way that sends out thousands of gospel sparks, setting the world on fire with His glory.

Doctrinal Disunity & False Teaching

The remaining two threats to kingdom expansion come from inside the church and unlike persecution, may be less consistent in their outcomes. Doctrinal disunity and false teaching is documented in many places in the New Testament. At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 we see doctrinal disunity causing dissension among those who were spreading the gospel. The eventual outcome, however, represents not only a further opening of the gospel to the Gentiles, but a significant step toward a more full understanding of the New Covenant by the early church. In contrast, among the newly established believers on the island of Crete were those who sought to infuse the law into the gospel – those who were false teachers. The effect of this was the *“upsetting of whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach”* (Titus 1:11). This kind of influence was putting the barely formed churches on the island of Crete, and therefore the church’s work in kingdom expansion at risk. Again, in terms of the Chapel, the Lord has graciously protected us from this in great measure. Nevertheless, as we consider kingdom expansion from our own front porch, we must be ever vigilant to these dangers. [[Why elders retreat over expansion issues and why planting a church can be risky business](#)].

Worldliness

The last threat to kingdom expansion that I want to highlight is probably the greatest threat to the Chapel in its current place in history. There was a man who travelled with the apostle Paul, who stood by Paul during his first imprisonment, who was known to believers and churches throughout the early Christian world, who likely preached the Gospel, disciplined believers, and who put himself at great personal risk in expanding the kingdom (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24). He was not only the model of a Christian, but a Christian’s Christian – in this church he likely would have been looked up to and recognized as a spiritual leader. This man, *in love with this present world*, deserted Paul and went to Thessalonica (2 Timothy 4:10). His name was Demas. This man, in love with this present world, deserted the body at the Chapel, and went to live the American Dream. His name could be Devon. Scott. Dan. Steve. Larry. Trevor. Zach. Robert. Bob. Greg. Tom.

Worldliness is a very real threat to kingdom expansion. Worldliness is a love for this fallen world. It is to “gratify and exalt oneself to the exclusion of God... It elevates our sinful de-

² Charles Spurgeon, 6.154

sires for the things of this fallen world above God's commands and promises"³. Could this be you or me? Who would have thought that Demas was slowly drifting this way? Yet he was. Who would have thought that people at the Chapel are drifting this way? Yet, perhaps, they are. (Youth, young adults, adults). Worldliness can be "managed" or "contained" in such a way, that no one but you and God knows. When you have mental free time, what are your thoughts dominated by? What have you googled over and over and over? What stirs your heart and gets you really excited? What is the next big thing you are dreaming about? Answers to such questions may be a gauge of your own heart. I struggle with this regularly. You know what this is like... preoccupation (illustrate).

When I was reading through Ephesians tonight – was there any positive emotional response? Over this month as we have been considering kingdom expansion has there been any sense of anticipation or excitement or joy? Have the messages or better yet the passages resonated with who you know yourself to be and what brings meaning to your life? Or, are you just now realizing we've been doing a series on kingdom expansion? Are your thoughts dominated by other concerns? Is your first thought in response to kingdom expansion about your own comfort, "Do we have to change again? I like things the way they are" or "I don't want to be part of an inner-city church!" or "I hope I am not asked to leave this church to start another" or "Why can't we just leave well-enough alone?" or "If we grow that just means more work, more money, more time... and I just want to find a space and time in life where I can focus on me and what I want for once..."

Worldliness is departing from God. It is a man-centered way of thinking; it proposes objectives which demand no radical breach with man's fallen nature; it judges the importance of things by the present and material results; ...it knows no truth for which it is worth suffering; it declines to be a "fool for Christ's sake"⁴.

In warning us against worldliness, the Apostle John tells us **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** To paraphrase CJ Mahaney, "Today, the greatest challenge facing the Chapel is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world⁵." If the Chapel fails to be all that God has called it to be, particularly in the area of kingdom expansion, it will likely be because we are preoccupied with receiving our reward on earth, dilly-dallying with worldly trinkets, living like this life and our material or relational kingdoms are all there is. In love with this present world... on our way to Thessalonica (good question is it not for children and spouses?)

I issue this as a very stiff challenge to our church – what will you sacrifice for the glory of his name in the church? How central is the expansion of *his* kingdom to *your* kingdom? In short, what are you living for? And these challenging questions come most stiffly to me... Where will we find our treasure?

³ Mahaney, CJ. *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen Word*. (p. 27).

⁴ Murray, I. *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the years 1950 to 2000*. p. 255.

⁵ Mahaney, CJ. *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen Word*. (p. 22).

Our Plan

From a sobering reflection then, let us consider how will we become more intentional and strategic about our role as a church in the grand plan of redemption that began before the beginning of time? In a plan that actually involves you and me from the beginning of time – because the Father has redeemed us and set us on mission for his kingdom. This, beloved, Ephesians 1-3, is who we are. There could be no truer description – abandon worldliness and embrace fully your true identity. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him⁶.

First, let's remind ourselves of the consensus statement that the Elders formed on our most recent retreat this past April:

For His glory and by God's grace, for the expansion of Christ's Kingdom, established churches will multiply themselves through commissional disciple making. 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.

We arrived at this statement, and the accompanying nine principles for kingdom expansion, through the consideration of about 20 passages⁷ and the closer study of two in particular, Matthew 28 and the book of Acts. The next question was how to turn our analysis into action.

We began by identifying the possible ways in which we believed kingdom expansion could take place relevant to the Chapel. Here is the list we came up with:

- Local – through flock,
- Local – through church revitalization,
- Local – through church plant “in culture,”
- Local – through church plant “cross-culture,”
- Global – through church plant

From here we reasoned that it would be necessary to develop a systematic approach to evaluating this list of possibilities. To do this, we generated a preliminary list of questions that, when answered, would supply guidance as to what direction was wisest. We are entering into the process presently of potty training Reuben. One of the books we are reading on this gives a list of questions like, “Can he pull his pants down? Does he show some ability to control his bladder? Does he have interest in toileting activities, etc.” Once you answer these questions, you will have a pretty good idea if your child is ready or not. That is how we were aiming to use this pool of questions... and I am happy to announce that all the elders are ready to be potty trained 😊.

⁶ John Piper, popular quote

⁷ Matthew 28, Matthew 16, Genesis 1, 12-17, 2 Sam 7, Daniel 7, 1 Cor 3, Acts 13-15, Acts 1, Isaiah 55, 1 Thes 1, 2 Thes 3, 2 Cor 4, and more.

General categories of questions included *When* (do we have a qualified team to send?); *Where* (Where is there no established church that is faithful to gospel and exposition of the Word?); *Who* (Who is willing to go?); *What* (What are the minimum requirements for a local church?); *Other Questions* (Can we resource this in a God-honoring way? If fear of failure driving any part of our planning?)

Coming out of the retreat our first intent was to do several things with the understanding that we were engaging in a living process that would change and develop as we moved along. Here are two of the items relevant to our discussion tonight: (1) establish a small temporary group of elders and chapel members to further develop the questions and how the questions should be applied across opportunities and if we were to plant a church, establish the minimum requirements necessary before a body of believers can be recognized as a church; (2) continue teaching into existence the Chapel's commitment to being a missional church in this more developed focus on kingdom expansion.

The first task has been completed. Earlier this summer Pastors Tim and Dan reported out on the work of a small group of Chapel members. The product of the small group's work was further expansion and refinement of our preliminary set of questions and the evaluation process that could be used to apply the questions to each potential opportunity for expansion that the Chapel might encounter. This resulted in a detailed and extensive bank of questions organized into the categories of Pace, Personnel, Philosophy (How?), Place, and Purse.

The second task, continuing to teach into existence our commitment to growing as a missional church has been occurring all this month. We hope that more than ever, we have all grown into a greater vision, passion, and understanding of what God has called the church to do on Earth.

In the meantime, as we are doing this planning, right beneath our noses, God has seen fit to add to our number on this campus... Did we plan for this? No. Did we create it? No. Were we wondering if God would do it? Yes. So as we were considering how God would expand his kingdom through the Chapel, in a way that was largely focused "out there," he began to do it "right here."

Therefore, our next step has been to establish two smaller work teams to continue our growth in these things: First, carrying on our consideration and exploration of off campus expansion are Pastors Chad, Dan, and Tim. Second, carrying on our consideration of on-campus expansion is Pastors Dale, Mark, and Russ. Steve, Michael and myself did not make the cut 😊. Reports from both of these teams are due in January. From the first team we are expecting an application of evaluation process to the potential area of growth that we discussed earlier – meaning that we will reach a greater level of clarity about what can, cannot, should, or should not, happen off campus. From the second team we are expecting much the same – except for focused on on-campus activity.

With all this said, I want to answer two frequently answered questions:

FAQ 1: Are we planting a church? The clearest, most accurate answer to that question is – only God knows. We presently have no plans on the table. Perhaps, how-

ever, a better answer to that question is another question... Does your heart long to see the kingdom expand? To see the glory of his name be ever-increased through the multiplication of churches? As chair for the Elders for the past several years, I will add one piece of commentary that reflects my observation – I believe that God has grown the Chapel's eldership and its people church to be more biblically minded on this issue than we ever have been before. I rejoice greatly at this and I am genuinely excited to see what is going to happen as we become ever more who the Bible tells us who, as a church, we are.

FAQ 2: Are we building again? And the answer is simple as I am able to copy and paste from the above response: The clearest, most accurate answer to that question is – only God knows. We presently have no plans on the table. I can tell you that a recent and quick analysis makes any physical expansion on this campus seem unlikely any time in the near future.

FAQ 3: Is Pastor Russ leaving the Chapel for international ministry? Here I can be very clear. No. The last email that went out regarding Russ' ministry in ----- may have given that impression, especially to those who are new to the Chapel. The Lord has opened up ministry opportunities for the Chapel in several international locales and Russ has been enabled by the Elders to be away about 25% of his time to serve in this way.

Regardless, bricks and mortar, locations, programs, computers, hallways, bathrooms, even particular pastors, etc. never were *the* church and never will be the church. It follows then that the expansion of the kingdom is not dependent on such things. Rather, the simple question is will be joyfully faithful to, by God's grace, fulfill our mission as a church? To take our place in the plan that was set into motion by God before time began... A plan to bring himself glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Is this what we are about? If so, then let us put our shoulder to the plow with a grand vision of our Savior's glory in every tribe, tongue, and nation before us, his promises beneath us, his grace behind us, and his people around us. May we die building and being built together into a holy temple, a dwelling for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

Conclusion As of late, I find myself singing louder and louder on Sundays. If you have had the ill-fortune of standing in front of me, I apologize. It is not that my voice is getting better and better. It is that my heart is getting more and more full. A favorite song right now is "...We are waiting on you Jesus, we believe you are all to us. So let the glory of your name be the passion of the church, let the righteousness of God be a holy flame that burns. Let the saving love of Christ be the measure of our lives. We believe you're all to us. I love how both the words and the music in this song intertwine to, in such a satisfying way, express not only the rhythm but the thoughts of a believer's heart. We'll wrap up tonight by placing a stethoscope over that heart to hear more closely what is coming out:

Ephesians 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him

Genesis 1:3 And God said, let there be light and there was light.

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his head.

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 10:7 And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Matthew 13:44 The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

Romans 7:24ff Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!... There is now now condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Matthew 28:18ff And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Revelation 19:6ff 6Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah!For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

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

[Let's Pray]