

THE CHURCH: Mission, Method, Maturity

By Bob Young

Introduction

The church must have a vision of its future. It must seek a dream that defines its destination, it must determine the way to get there and set appropriate goals, it must keep in mind the vision that reflects what the church will look like when it gets where it is going. These are summarized in three questions:

#1: Where are we going?

#2: How do we go from here to there, or what do we need to get there?

#3: What will we look like when we get there?

This sermon is a simple sequence of three questions, each of which is coupled with a biblical metaphor.

QUESTION #1: Where are we going? What is our mission?

THIS IS THE DREAM. THIS IS THE WHAT.

Where are we right now? How do we prepare?

Physically we may use MapQuest or Google Earth to answer this question. We want to see the final destination, we want to have directions. We must have the means to get there.

Spiritually, there are many ways to describe the final destination, but for the purpose in this sermon, we suggest that our ultimate destination, our mission, is to become more like God (2 Cor. 3:18). How do we become more like God?

This is especially significant in a world that is moving away from modernity—rationality, information, and deduction, but is also losing prayer, dependence, stillness, meditation, and spiritual nurturing.

Metaphor #1: Metaphor of clay lamp—2 Cor. 4:7 (treasure, jars of clay, power)

- Prepare by focusing on and depending on God, power, direction, purpose, mission
- Treasure = light of gospel of glory of Christ
- Jars of clay = clay lamp, light, (get a lamp). This is not of gold, silver, bronze, can't be, because it alters the flame. Need simple container, light of gospel is from God.

Three possible responses to mission of God

- Despair—from life of Moses, who am I, I can't speak, how can I do this, I'm not able
- Ego—savior complex, power, think of self too highly, both of these first two responses focus on self, are opposites
- Reliance on God—not of/from/by us, but from God. Humble ourselves. Maintenance—80% are stagnating or going down. God, bring us renewal, help us reach cities, changing demographics, money in wrong places, money in bricks/mortar, African Americans, or Hispanics, lose what we have put all of our money in. Kingdom issues. Seek to understand and be a missional church, reflect Jesus in neighborhoods and schools, meet where the people are.

We cannot fathom what God can do through us when we become like him and he empowers us (Eph. 3:18-21). How can we progress? Allow God's light to shine through us. Expect God to work in surprising ways, Acts 10—conversion of Peter. God in unexpected ways goes before/ahead of his people in surprising ways. Thousands could come to Christ—how? Not as a result of what I teach/say, but by God's power.

QUESTION #2: How do we go from here to there, or what do we need to get there?

THIS IS DETERMINING THE DIRECTION, DETERMINING THE WAY TO GET THERE. THIS IS HOW #1.

What kind of path will we choose? What training is needed? What will we do to plant churches or strengthen existing churches? This is the nuts and bolts of Christianity.

Metaphor #2: Second metaphor—Romans 12: 1-2 (metamorphosis—caterpillar to butterfly)

- Eat and grow; consume and expand
- Caterpillar was not meant to remain a caterpillar—inside the chrysalis a great change is taking place, a pupa is developing.
- Eventually butterfly draws nourishment from nectar—pollinates.

Three kinds of churches-individuals reflect different paths and activities

- Caterpillar—consuming church, marketing, social surveys, what people want, self serving, church is to give people what they want, self-absorbed, self-concerned, meet felt needs, focus on humanity, caterpillars crawl only in the earthly realms—paradox is that many caterpillars die as caterpillars. Unable to perceive more.
- Pupa—redefine self, renewal, revitalization, turn from self to God, what does God want, question purpose for existence, try to fulfill God's purpose, realize own weakness, dependent on God, not human endeavor, decision making in Bible was made in Bible under God through prayer. This is a time of spiritual conversion, transformation, pray, need to reach community, not have spiritual vitality to do that. Need to be evangelistic, but requires major transition.
- Butterfly—weak, fragile, yet fly in the heavenlies, draw nectar, power from God in prayer, discipline self to bow under God, not know where we are going, open doors, nectar from Scripture, hearts are formed, prayer, fellowship, Bible, community. Draw nectar in order to spread pollen. Evangelism not hard for authentic Christians, living out there in the midst of culture, people come to Christ out of relationships. McClaren, *More Ready than you Realize*. Evangelism is like learning a song—absorb the song. Becoming a Christian is like absorbing the Christian way—relationships, participation, osmosis teaching, come to Christ out of special events, inclusion, games... These kinds become what God created us to become.

QUESTION #3: What will we look like when we get there?

THIS INVOLVES THE MEANS TO GET WHERE WE ARE GOING. THIS IS HOW #2.

This is our vision, our ultimate picture of what the church is to be about.

Metaphor #3: Metaphor of maturity—Eph. 4:11-16 (stature of Christ, functioning body). Can also be described metaphorically as health

- Christians prepared and equipped, capable of works of service, to edify the body
- Unity of faith, knowledge of Jesus, maturity
- The entire body grows up under the leadership of Christ to speak the truth in love
- The body builds itself up in love

Three approaches to church, reflecting what we think the church is ultimately to be about.

- Caterpillars were not meant to satisfy own desires. Some churches have a sign outside—we don't want visitors, we don't want things messed up (not literally, but figuratively)
- Pupae do not focus on self to accomplish personal transformation. The goal is to become pollen-carrying butterfly
- Butterflies are fragile, need nectar, do not live long

What is spiritual health, what is a healthy church?

- Capable of normal functioning
- Can do what God wishes in its current context

The treasure is in earthen vessels, we are changed to call attention to the treasure rather than to self, and we mature for the good of others. The mission of the church will never be successfully defined by selfishness, since we follow one who came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28).