

Ministry Update: God's Sovereignty Grace & Glory

Pastor John Brackbill/Ephesians 1:10b-12/4.8.18

10:45 am Morning Worship Service

Could you summarize the message of Ephesians? Well, let's see if you can fill in the words with me. Ephesians is about walking worthy of our calling in what God the Father is doing by His Son, in His church, indwelt by His Spirit, according to His eternal purpose, for His glory forever.

And the way this book starts is by calling attention to God the Father's blessedness. Ephesians 1:3-14 proclaims to us blessed be the Father who has blessed us with blessings. This lengthy sentence starts off in Ephesians 1:3 by saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." And then in verses 3-14 some of those blessings are listed, but primarily verses 4-14 are explaining to us why in fact God has blessed us with these blessings. Notice the connection between Ephesians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." That same logic flows through this whole sentence. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us because He chose us for the praise of His glory (1:4-6) and therefore because He redeemed us for the praise of His glory (1:7-12) and therefore because He has sealed us in Christ with the Spirit for the praise of His glory (1:13-14).

Two weeks ago we started looking at the second reason why God has blessed us, and it is because He has redeemed us for the praise of His glory (1:7-12). Redemption refers to God's purchase of us out of the slave market of sin with the ransom price of the blood of His own Son. Jesus is the person of redemption, and His blood is the means of redemption. Verse seven also reveals that the immediate result of redemption is the forgiveness of our trespasses. But the last point about this redemption that Paul gives us is that grace is the wealth of redemption. God has redeemed us not merely out of the wealth of His grace, but according to the wealth of His grace. In Ephesians 1:8-12 Paul gives two pieces of evidence of the lavishness of God's grace toward us. First, in the lavishness of His grace, He has made known to us the mystery of His will. Which in this passage refers to the fact that God has made known to us God's plan for all things in connection with Christ. Paul tells us in verse ten that in the end all things will be summed up in Christ. But what part do individual Christians have to do with this mystery that God has revealed about all things being summed up in Christ? That is the second evidence of God's lavish grace upon us. Not only has He revealed where everything is going in connection with Christ, but He has also made known to

us that in Christ we have obtained an inheritance. Paul says this in 1:10b-12: "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

There is a phrase in verse 11 that we want to focus in on today. It is this phrase: "Who works all things after the counsel of His will." There could not be a more all-encompassing statement of God's complete control. We know that Scripture clearly teaches that we make real choices that we are accountable for. And yet we also know that Scripture teaches that God is in complete control. Proverbs 16 is a passage in Scripture that emphasizes God's sovereignty with three different pictures. First, Proverbs 16:1 says, "The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD." So man plans things, but in the end what comes out of their mouth (even though they chose to say it and are accountable for what they are saying) is in fact from the Lord. In other words, the speech of man is not out of God's control. But second, Proverbs 16:9 says "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." Again, human beings make real choices that they are accountable for, but not in such a way that God is out of control. No, God is in complete control. A third similar passage in Proverbs 16 is verse 33 which says "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." You can think of a lot as dice. The point is that every turn of the lot or the dice is from the Lord. Another helpful picture from Proverbs about this truth is in Proverbs 21:1 which says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." The King's heart is flowing with water, he is making real choices that he is accountable for, but the water is in the hand of the LORD and He turns it wherever He wishes.

This truth is so encouraging because it means that just as God sovereignly set His love on you before time to save you and just as He sovereignly predestined you to obtain a future inheritance in His presence, so He is sovereignly ruling all things right now in your life to bring you into that future inheritance. He is "working all things after the counsel of His will" which is that you would come into your inheritance in His presence.

What I want to do today is introduce you to a statement that I have used to shepherd my own heart through the ups and downs of life in between trusting Christ as Savior and one day being in His presence having come into my promised future inheritance. Here is the statement: God's sovereignty (that is His rule, His total control of all things) is the servant of His grace and glory. God's sovereignty, is the servant of His grace and glory. And of course,

the way we see God's rule or His sovereignty today is through His providential dealings in our lives. Let me show you how this passage teaches us that God's sovereignty is the servant of His grace and glory.

In Ephesians 1:4 we are told that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. In other words, God chose us for salvation by sovereign grace. And verse 6 tells us that this choice has everything to do with the praise of the glory of His grace. In Ephesians 1:7-12 we are told that God has redeemed us in Christ and that He redeemed us out of the wealth of His grace. Chief evidence of the wealth of God's grace is that He predetermined that we would come into a future inheritance. God's predestining us to that future inheritance is an evidence of His sovereignty. And then again we are told that to bring us into that future inheritance He "works all things after the counsel of His will." And why is He working sovereignly all things in your life after the counsel of His will that you be in His presence forever? Verse 12 tells us that it is "to the praise of His glory." In verses 13-14 we are told this: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." In other words, interwoven in this whole sentence is the fact that God's sovereignty is serving the display of His grace and glory. You could say, God's sovereignty is the servant of our good and His glory. And because God is working all things in our lives for the praise of His grace and glory that means that there is not one thing that has ever happened in your life that God has not sovereignly ruled over for your good and His glory. Not one thing. In fact, Romans 8:28-30 is also making this point. In a world full of sin and suffering, victories and defeats, changes and disappoints, God's sovereignty is always the servant of His grace and glory: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified."

If you have repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ, the One who lived a holy life in your place before God and then died in your place before God and then rose again for your salvation. Then you can be confident that everything you are currently facing is being ruled over by God for the display of His grace in and through you and for the display of His glory in and through you. And the longer you walk with the Lord you can look back after the fact in

your life and see the traces of God's providential sovereign hand at work in ways that cause you to bow in worship before Him.

With that biblical explanation of God's sovereignty being the servant of His grace and glory I want to tell you a story of God's providence in my life and the life of my family. It is a very personal example and one that affects all of us. It is my desire and prayer that in the end, you see how God's sovereignty has been and will continue to be the servant of His grace and glory for all of us. As I tell this story, I want you to trace with me the evidence of God's providential control of all things and worship the Lord with me.

In the Spring of 2000 as a college Sophomore, I learned about Shalom ministries led by Craig Hartman. I was already training for pastoral ministry, but regarding future direction for me personally and for my future family this was a defining moment. When I heard about an internship opportunity, I believe the Lord awakened a desire in my heart to learn more about Jewish evangelism. So I came to NYC and spent a summer immersed in the city and doing Jewish evangelism. That summer the Lord burdened me for the need of the gospel to run and be glorified in NYC to all people. That summer was the start of eight years in which coming to the city to take part in church planting became my focus.

When I returned to South Carolina after that summer, my family transitioned to being members of Mount Calvary Baptist Church which eventually ordained me as a minister of the gospel. Part of my pursuit of going to the city was to return the next summer and have my pastoral internship with Pastor Matthew Recker at Heritage Baptist Church in Manhattan. The end result of another summer in NYC was a deepened conviction that the Lord wanted me in the city taking part in church planting.

My senior year of college the Lord graciously introduced me to Sarah, and the wonderful ball of our relationship started to roll, and we were married in 2004. I also met Tim Richmond who attended Mount Calvary Baptist Church and found out that he was seeking to go to the city to plant a church. Tim was a few years ahead of me in his ministry training, but we started to plan for being a church planting team in the future. As I was working in BJU's Admissions office gaining experience and a resume that the Lord knew I would need later, I became acquainted with a guy named Nathanael Gentilhomme in my role as office manager. Before I finished my seminary degree I hired and trained a young lady named April Dion (better known to some here as April Gentilhomme).

While I finished my seminary training Tim Richmond was an assistant pastor with Jim Bickel at Bethel Baptist Fellowship in Brooklyn. Then in 2008, we moved up to Queens to assist Tim Richmond in the planting of Grace Baptist Church in Forest Hills Queens. Tim was supported as a missionary church planter, but the church that was being planted obviously couldn't support me and our family so a guy whose education was all in the area of pastoral training needed to have a job that could support a family in the city where our one bedroom apartment would cost \$1550 monthly. This did not surprise the Lord. His sovereignty in the past was the servant of His grace and glory in this need. Because of my admissions student services experience at BJU, I was able to get a job at NYIT that provided for our family.

For three years I was a lay pastor/elder/overseer in the church as I worked in the city as a Student Solutions Manager. During this time the Lord enabled us to get much ministry experience and learn life in the city. He also had to produce in me contentment about laboring in the church as a lay pastor/elder/overseer even though I had trained to give all my time as a full-time pastor/elder/overseer. During this time I could not see a way forward to minister full time in the city. It wasn't until I was genuinely content and trusting the Lord that the Lord started to move in our hearts away from a particular geographical location to the priority of ministering the Word publically and privately as a shepherd in the church anywhere the Lord would have us. That was 2010 into 2011 seven years ago.

During that process, we talked to a church in California, but that was not a good fit. We started talking to a church in Port Washington Long Island, and that was increasingly looking like a good fit. At the same time, I was talking to The Church of the Open Bible in Burlington MA. They asked me to come and speak as a pre-candidate. I scheduled it with The Church of the Open Bible's understanding that I may need to cancel because it was looking more and more likely that the Lord was directing us to TBC. In God's clear leading that is precisely what happened. I canceled there as the Lord was drawing us to the joy of my being the pastor here. And so we came in 2011, and I became the pastor that year in February.

Can you see how God's sovereignty was the servant of His grace and glory in all this? We would have never understood this area if we hadn't lived in the city for three years. For nearly a decade my whole focus was on the city because I believed that is where the Lord would have us for our whole ministry. But what I found out was that God had ruled over all that so that I would become the pastor at TBC and understand this area having had experience in

the city. Also, of course, we were growing spiritually through all the challenges and circumstances that we faced during that time. We have been here at TBC for seven years, and I can say that these seven years have been a primary joy in our lives. Things haven't always been easy, but we have seen God at work, haven't we? He has been at work in my heart as much as in anyone else here. Gospel advancement on the Island is difficult, but the Lord has His people here and in His good kindness we have a special family in Christ here at TBC that we love very much.

What I want to do is trace the evidence of God's sovereignty being the servant of His grace and glory in these last seven years. In May of 2011, the Lord ruled in such a way that a pastor stopped by our church during the Memorial Day picnic here at the church and introduced himself. The Lord caused a friendship to bloom between Pastor Dan Labieniec who pastors West Hills Baptist Church in Huntington Long Island and me. For the last 7 years, Dan Labieniec has been a huge blessing and encouragement in ministry as we have labored in different fields on Long Island for the glory of God. During that time his daughters Leah and Sara started to attend the college and career Bible study we used to have, and we came to enjoy their friendship.

When I came to TBC I was convinced that God is the one that saves and that faithful ministry is faithful communication of God's Word at every level of ministry. I had the conviction that God is the one that brings fruit. Theologically I was aware of this, but after being here a few years, I became experientially aware that God is the One that saves and He is the one that brings fruit and that He is all satisfying even if His timing for that fruit is not my timing. This experiential awareness is one of the ways God's sovereignty has been the servant of His grace and glory in my life.

Also, God in His sovereignty that is the servant of His grace and glory gave me a desire to find a young couple that would help us out in the ministry here. Only later would I find out how important a decision it was for me to pursue ministry partners. Through various connections with past work and church, the Lord brought Nathanael and April Gentilhomme to minister with us here. Remember, for a time I was both Nathanael and April's boss at BJU's admissions office. As many of you know, Nathanael was Pastoral Assistant here for 2 years and God blessed us as a congregation in many ways through Nathanael and April's time here. Nathanael, of course, was gaining ministry experience so he could go into the Navy Chaplaincy. At the end of his two years with us here a mission team from his home church (Trinity Baptist Church in Concord NH) was coming to help us out with gospel

advancement here. That very week that the Trinity missions team arrived, Nathanael found out that he had been accepted into the Navy Chaplaincy and would be leaving in just a matter of weeks. At the same time, Kevin Vigneault was a youth sponsor on the team, and on his way down he found out that a possible ministry opportunity for him and his family was no longer an option. I mentioned that we were looking for another couple to assist in the ministry here and Kevin said he and Liz were looking for a ministry opportunity and the rest is history. Now the Vigneault's have been with us here for almost 4 years.

Around about the same time, I was asked to preach the gospel at the wedding of Leah Labieniec, Pastor Dan Labieniec's daughter. Leah was getting married to Scott Rosen who was from Massachusetts. And so I had the joy of being part of the wedding of Scott and Leah Rosen.

During the last few years, the Lord has shown His faithfulness in remarkable ways at our church. Clearly, His sovereignty has been the servant of His grace and glory. He has provided for us financially and He has met with us in wonderful ways as we have gathered around the Word. I remember being asked during my Q & A with the congregation here in 2011 whether or not I would plan to stay at TBC long term. My answer then and what has been my growing conviction over the last seven years is that though we don't know the future, He seems to have called us to labor here for His glory for the duration of my ministry. During these seven years, I have had opportunities to have my name mentioned to churches looking for a pastor, and I have said no every time. One particular ministry opportunity came to me, and I was able to communicate that I knew the Lord had called us here. I have never looked for other ministry opportunities.

A similar thing happened around two years ago now. Pastor Dan Labieniec called me and mentioned that The Church of the Open Bible in Massachusetts (or COB, the church that I almost candidated at seven years ago) was once again looking for a lead pastor. He communicated to me that he thought I would be a good fit for the church. After marriage, his daughter Leah (whose wedding I spoke at) moved up to Massachusetts, and she and Scott eventually started attending COB. Dan called me to ask if I had any interest or would consider the possibility of contacting the church about their need for a pastor. I told him that the providence of all this was striking, but that I was confident the Lord had us here at TBC. Sarah and I talked and prayed about it for 24 hours. We went to a Wednesday night service and walking on the way home I remember saying almost at the same time to one another: "No way."

Over the last two years, the Lord has greatly blessed our church here at TBC. As many of you have seen, especially in the previous two years, TBC has started to move forward in wonderful ways that we have been praying for and working for the last seven years. However, one of the more difficult times of my ministry here took place last summer when Kevin communicated to our church that though they obviously love TBC, he believed the Lord was moving them on for further education and the opportunity to adopt a child into their family. Though this was painful news, I was and continue to be very thankful for their willingness to stay with us until an appropriate replacement comes. And so for the last 9 months, I have been working hard to find another pastoral assistant. There have been two significant leads which have both ended up going nowhere. I have been trusting the Lord in this knowing that God's sovereignty is the servant of His grace and glory even when there are delays in finding ministry partners.

Last week we considered the truth in Psalm 16 that those who take refuge in God know His counsel. The Psalmist says, "I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. 8 I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Psalm 16:7-8). As we considered last week if we are saturating our hearts and minds in the Word and are submitting to whatever the Lord wants that there is a subjective leading that takes place through our thinking as the Spirit works in us. No, it is not a direct revelation from God and no we cannot always accurately interpret these things, but it is a fact, that God does counsel His people through their very thinking who have their minds renewed in the Word. I have found this to be the case as the pastor at TBC many times. However, I would have to say the clearest time I have sensed the Lord's counsel regarding leading the church in a particular way had to do with "Next Steps Sunday." I was burdened about it last year and thought hard about doing it at the start of 2017, but did not think it was the right timing. But this last summer I believe the Lord impressed on my heart in my thinking that it was time to lead our church thinking through what next steps we needed to take if we were going to "fly" as it were as God wants us to as a church. Yes, we regularly talk about these things, but I wanted to have one Sunday that we looked at the biblical steps of a flourishing church. That conviction only grew, and as you know, we started to pray fervently leading up to the first Sunday in February. I had no idea how important it was for us to have that emphasis. God's sovereignty was the servant of His grace and glory once again.

Meanwhile, the Lord chose to take our 7th child Samuel to Himself while still in Sarah's

womb. I remember after burying Samuel in Nassau Knolls cemetery telling Sarah that even though the Lord had already convinced us that best we knew this is where we would be until retirement, now it felt as though our roots were here even more.

That was in November. Fast-forward to December 29th. I received a phone call from Scott Rosen who married Leah Dan Labieniec's daughter. Remember, Dan Labieniec had called me nearly two years ago about the need that The Church of the Open Bible had for a pastor. During that period they had still not found a pastor, and concurrently in the last nine months, we also had not found a replacement for Kevin. Why? Because God's sovereignty is the servant of His grace and glory. To be honest, I was hoping Scott was calling to say he and Leah had heard about the need for a pastoral assistant and wanted to know more information to see if he would be a good fit. But before we talked, it dawned on me that Scott was now an elder at The Church of the Open Bible (e.g., COB) and I groaned to Sarah about the genuine possibility he was calling about their need of a lead pastor. When we talked, Scott told me he was now one of the elders at COB and that they had been looking for a pastor for a year and a half and that he thought I would be a good fit for the church. I said to him, "you probably know what I told your father-in-law months ago." He said he was aware of what I had said, but was reaching out again because he thought I was a good fit and COB had still not found a pastor. I told him that I could not ever see us leaving TBC and that we were content here and excited to see what God was doing. But just to be polite, I asked a few questions and told him that we would think and pray about it.

I got off the phone and assumed that it would be just like last time. I would mention COB's ongoing need of a pastor to Sarah, we would briefly talk about it, pray, think about it for a day or so, and both agree that there was no way we were interested in leaving TBC. But for whatever reason this time it was different for both of us. I couldn't get it out of my head. I started to pray and consider all of God's providence in all these things, and I had a growing desire to walk down the path to see if it was the Lord's will.

I knew that I had been walking with the Lord, we were content and excited about what God was doing here, and best I could tell the only motives I had for even considering it was godly motives. There is a real sense in which the contentment and joy we have here enabled us to evaluate God's providence in this possibility not second-guessing our motives. So in my spirit, I had this growing parallel track. On the one hand, I had an increasing desire to pursue what might be God's leading in our life to COB, but on the other hand, I had this very heavy sorrow in my heart at the thought of even thinking about leaving this congregation that we

love so dearly.

So I prayed, and we talked and we struggled with these two parallel tracks of a growing desire and a sense of seeing God's evident providence vs. a heavy sorrow of even thinking of leaving TBC. I knew that I should not reach out to COB about their need of a pastor unless I were sure I was willing to leave TBC and could do so in a way that was righteous. Why? Because Psalm 23:3 says "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." In other words, God would not guide me to leave TBC and go to COB unless I could do so righteously. And if He did guide me in this way, it would be for His name's sake all around. So I called some mentors in ministry and laid it all out before them. They assured me that I was thinking right about the decision and said they would be praying for me to know the Lord's leading. One of the pieces of counsel I received was that as I was walking with the Lord and my motives were pure I could analyze the trend of my thoughts and that the Lord might be leading through those things. In other words, if I was genuinely delighting in the Lord, then I could analyze my desires, and it might be that the Lord was leading me through those godly desires. Again, Psalm 16:7-8 speaks of this dynamic: "I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. I have set the LORD continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

The desire to reach out to COB was so on my heart that I would wake up very early in the morning and not be able to go back to sleep and so I would brew some coffee read my Bible and talk to God about the situation. One morning, I had enough clarity in my spirit to tell the Lord that in spite of the sorrow of even thinking of leaving TBC I desired to reach out to COB and see if it was His will for me to be the pastor there.

I briefly explained to Kevin the situation and asked him to give me his feedback. After thinking and praying about it Kevin also seemed to see the Lord's hand in this and encouraged me to pursue it. But even more important to me was Kevin's unprompted communication to me that he would see this as God's plan for him to stay here to transition the church to the next pastor which was an essential piece of the puzzle for me. Though I did not mention anything about that to Kevin, Sarah and I had prayed that Kevin would on his own communicate his willingness to stay at TBC redirecting his plans to move back to New Hampshire and his plans for further education. We saw this as a clear answer to prayer as we were seeking the Lord's mind about these things. I knew that it would be harmful to TBC for both of us to leave. In that same conversation, I mentioned to Kevin that if in fact, the Lord led us to COB I thought he should consider whether or not the Lord was calling him to

be pastor at TBC to which Kevin said at that time that he did not believe that would be the case.

Now that I knew I could reach out to COB with a clear path forward for TBC, I reached out, and two weeks later I had a video chat with COB's search committee which was made up of two elders and a cross-section of members from the congregation. We ended up having three one and a half hour long conversations over the course of a few weeks before they told me that they were passing me on to all the elders for them to consider whether or not I was a good fit for COB and to discern the Lord's mind. During this time my desire and clarity in spirit about what the Lord might be doing were only growing, and that is Sarah's testimony as well. Throughout this process, the Lord has given Sarah and I a spirit of complete unity just as He gave us full agreement two years ago to pass on reaching out to COB.

Over the last two months I have driven up to Burlington MA on my day off and had lunch with various elders and then had a several hour meeting with all the elders in the evening before driving back late that night. I have done that three times alone. Also, Sarah and I traveled up and spent a Monday and Tuesday there having a meal with the elders and their wives and getting to know more about the church. Sarah came away from those days just as convinced as I am that the Lord is in this. It is about a four-hour drive one way so each time I have made that trip I have had an excellent time to think, worship the Lord and cry out to Him for wisdom. I have complete confidence in my spirit that it is His plan for us to continue to pursue being the next pastor at COB. Just like God's sovereignty was serving His grace and glory in preparing us for ministry here through being in the city for three years, Sarah and I are increasingly seeing God's sovereignty in having us minister here for seven years coordinating things for a future ministry at COB.

On Monday, March 26th, after my last trip up to COB, I received a phone call that the elders had decided to move forward with me as the public candidate to be the next pastor and that it was up to me if and when I wanted to move forward. I told them that on April 8th (today) I would be announcing what God has been doing and that they could also announce my name at COB at the same time during their service.

Throughout this process a passage of Scripture has been impacting my thinking: "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with

Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:1-3). Saul (or Paul) and Barnabas were part of the leadership at the church at Antioch, but as they were worshipping or serving it became clear that the Spirit was setting them apart for the first missionary journey. That meant that God was calling two of that church's pastoral leaders away to ministry elsewhere. This calling took place in the context of them worshipping together as a church and seeking the mind of the Lord. Though we do not have prophets today in the church giving inerrant directions, in harmony with Acts 13, I believe that as I have worshipped with you here, the Lord has given me a clear sense in my heart that God is leading us to Burlington MA.

And yet, though I subjectively and personally have sensed the Lord's leading, and though there has been increasing external and objective confirmation of that leading through the unity of the elders there, the congregation of COB has to see the Lord's leading as well. And so on 4/22, 4/29 and 5/6, we will be worshipping with COB so that they and we can get to know one another. If the Lord knits our hearts together during those weeks, in all likelihood, there would be a congregational vote soon after that. And assuming the congregation also affirms that the Spirit is appointing me to be an under-shepherd at COB there would be a transition sometime in the summer. God's sovereignty serving His grace and glory is also evident because we have a college summer intern coming to minister here at TBC this summer. This intern will be able to carry out children's ministry as Kevin would seek a future ministry partner carrying out the role that he has filled so well the last four years.

I realize that this is not the news you came to church to hear this morning and I am genuinely sorry. I sorrow with you even as I am convinced that the Lord wants us to visit COB and see the Lord directing us there. This process has been a vivid reminder to me that I am just another one of the Lord's sheep that in His sovereignty He may choose to move to another place to display His grace and glory both here and COB through that change. I want to remind us that only Jesus is the Good, the Great, and the Chief Shepherd. All other shepherds in the church are merely under-shepherds. Jesus is also Head of the Church and as Head He sovereignly rules over the church for the display of His grace and glory. It is my conviction that what God is doing is for the display of His grace and glory at TBC and COB and in all of our lives.

Throughout this process, I have seen the Lord working in Kevin's heart as well to the point

that I asked him if he was becoming open to the possibility that the Lord might be calling him to be more than a transition pastor to the next man. He acknowledged that in fact if the Lord were leading in these ways, he would desire to be the next lead pastor at TBC. So I can tell you now that if in fact, the Lord does call me to be the next lead pastor at COB, I would be recommending to the membership that Kevin Vigneault be the next lead pastor here at TBC. If that is how the Lord leads I am confident that it is because the Lord knows what is best for TBC according to His plan.

We are both submitted to the Lord's plan. At this point, God's leading will be very clear. If COB does not call me to be the next pastor then I know the Lord has taken us through this process for His own mysterious purposes only to reaffirm that I am to continue as undershepherd here at TBC. That, of course, will also be God's clear leading for Kevin as well. If on the other hand COB calls me to be their pastor we believe that is the Lord's calling and we will be accepting. In addition, if the membership of TBC sees that God is calling Kevin to be the next pastor here and affirms that, then the Lord's leading for the Vigneault family and TBC will also be evident.

I know this is not easy. It is certainly not comfortable for us. Sarah and I have been very honest to one another throughout this process that the most comfortable thing to do would be to stay here at TBC where we are settled in and with the people, we love so much. And yet, we cannot deny that the Lord seems to be directing us to COB. Kevin and I both ask that as a church we maturely submit ourselves to God's sovereignty that is the servant of His grace and glory in this situation. We must each pray fervently that the Lord will accomplish His will, that we would submit ourselves to His will and that He will display His grace and glory through these circumstances.

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

by William Cowper, 1731-1800

1. God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

2. Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs

And works His sovereign will.

3. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

4. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense.
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

5. His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

6. Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own Interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

We are going to close by singing a song with the wonderful truth that the Lord is our Shepherd. He will never let us down, He will never leave us, He will never change, He is all satisfying, He is the perfect Shepherd, and He is the all-sufficient Shepherd in whom we have everything we need for eternal life and spiritual growth.