

STONE HARBOR

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Dear Readers,

What follows is one man's weekly attempt to know the truth of God's Word and bring it to His people for their good and ultimately for His glory. Please regard these only as notes belonging to a busy pastor uploaded as they stand (for better or for worse, complete or incomplete, almost always with grammatical errors, and always with room for refinement in content, structure, presentation...) to support the ongoing study of God's Word. I firmly believe that the community of faith which is the body of Christ can and should bring their gifts to bear for the good of the rest of the body and that any one teacher can be taught by the others with an understanding of the truth. Therefore, should you have insight that would sharpen any of the thinking expressed here, know that I would be pleased to receive it. Clearly, the input that is most welcome and most helpful is that which is more concise than verbose, Biblically grounded and expressed with the goal of displacing misunderstanding and apprehending the truth of God's Word. Your thoughts of that nature are most welcome, certainly appreciated and will be thoughtfully considered. You are invited to send those insights to me at johnny@stoneharborchurch.org.

In pursuit of truth and growing a shepherd's heart,

Johnny

Transformation Card

This page provides an overview of the message and resources for individual and group study.

Date: Aug 1, 2010
Series: The Church of God's Intention
Part: Part 2 – What God Intends the Church to Do
Section: Mission
Topic: Mission
Message Title: **God Intends the Church to Join Him in His Mission - 2**
Outline Title: To overcome the difficulties in mission we must...
Short Title: Overcoming Difficulties
Text: Various
Key Words: Mission, Witness

Message Outline

God Intends the Church to Join Him on His Mission
Overcoming Difficulties
1. **Burn** Off the **Gospel** Fog
2. **Live** in the **Gospel** Light
3. **Articulate** the **Gospel** Message
4. **Persevere** in the **Gospel** Fight

Related Scripture

1. Gen 1
2. John 15
3. Acts 1
4. Acts 2
5. 2 Cor 5

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How clearly do you understand the gospel?
2. What can we do to improve our understanding of the gospel?
3. How can you more completely live your life in light of the gospel?
4. What is the gospel message?
5. What do you need to do to be able to verbalize the gospel effectively?
6. What fights against your personal living out and articulating the gospel?
7. How can you persevere against the forces aligned against the gospel?

Memory and Meditation Verse

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Acts 1:8 (NASB)

4. Overcome the Difficulties in Mission

I would have to say that the biggest barrier to my effectiveness on mission is my lack of clear understanding of the gospel. What has the gospel to do with mission? Everything! **The gospel is the message of God's mission** and because our mission is simply an extension of His, the gospel is the message of our mission as well.

Most organizations have a mission – an overarching purpose for their existence. Many have a mission statement – a brief sentence or phrase that articulates their greatest purpose. For example:

- The mission statement of Stone Harbor church is “to help people like you and me become people like Jesus Christ.” It can be found in our by-laws and on our web site and various publications that describe us. As I study more I have toyed with changing it to something even more fundamental like, “to know God and make Him known in all the world.”
- I learned in business school years ago that the mission of most for-profit companies is “to maximize share holders wealth.” It is not just profit maximization as one could think but it looks beyond the profit of any one period to the long term wealth of the company owners.
- The mission statement of the not for profit Peace Corps includes the founding intent, “to promote world peace and friendship.”
- The US Department of State has a well articulated mission statement which can be found on their web site: it is to “*Create a more secure, democratic, and prosperous world for the benefit of the American people and the international community.*”
<http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/dosstrat/2004/23503.htm>

The mission of the church of God is perhaps less succinctly stated, but it is none the less accessible to those who would look – the mission of the church is one and the same with the mission of God; and the mission of God is to restore His creation from its fallen state to its perfect state. Its perfect state is like:

- The one spoken of in Gen 1-2
- one where all things are in a state of peace and rest existing and operating exactly according to the plan of the infinitely perfect Planner and Creator
- one like the one where God looked back and said, “it was good” “it was very good” (Gen 1).
- But one that is even better than “very good.” Better? Yes better!
- One that is very good, **forever!** One in which the fragile goodness of the first creation having been perfected by the redeeming love of the all powerful God and being made by the work of His Son into the durable good of the new creation NOT susceptible to the failings of man but secured forever by the eternal God. Like a crooked bone that was broken in the field and then set by a friend doing his best with his belt and two sticks broken again and set rightly by an experienced orthopedist in the best modern hospital, the Great Physician has responded to our broken and naturally bent selves by allowing His Son to be broken on the cross so that our corrupted nature would be restored and perfected. He allowed His Son to

suffer in our stead to bring about with divine skill what we could never begin to accomplish on our own. He is the Great Physician and we are at best well intentioned friends. What ability has any man to fix himself or his loved ones before the God of creation? What could any of us say to the righteous judge when asked to give an account for our sins or to remedy those of another? What can any of us think we could offer that would satisfy the righteous requirements of a God who knows every hair on our head, every thought in our mind? What could I say or do to rescue you from the just judgment of God?

The Gospel is that the problem of man
(the real problem, not the problems that we worry about like what we are to eat or drink or where we are to live..., but the real problem, the problem of our estrangement from God coupled with the fact of His coming just judgment, i.e., the problem of God)
God Himself has mercifully solved for us.

How has God solved our problem? He has solved it by:

- delivering us from the death and bondage and brokenness and 'bentness' of our old natural fallen state into newness of true life birthed by the power of His indwelling Spirit who our Lord Jesus sent to us
 - after He ascended to heaven
 - after He overcame the death of His body (resurrection) and had thereby proven His power over that which we have no power in ourselves to conquer
 - after He had sacrificed Himself to atone for our sins.

The gospel is that in Christ -- in union with the crucified, buried, resurrected, ascended Spirit giving Christ who is God the Son – we are the restored sons of God and it is good, very good, forever!

God's mission is:

- to reconcile creation to His intended order for it
- to reconcile all of His people to Him to such a degree of completeness that He can legitimately call them His sons
- to deliver us from the deadness of our life apart from Him and give us new life in our union with the Son of God
- that His church would be the dwelling place of His Spirit, reconciled so completely that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Ro 8).
- to be able to truthfully say, "There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
- to write the names of all He would call to Himself in His book of life.
- to save His people from the righteous judgment that falls upon all men and to do so by the blood of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29).

We call the message of God's mission and ours "the gospel."

The gospel, the good news, is also that although our bodies groan under the curse of the fallen world which itself also groans waiting to be redeemed, we have the sure hope that at the promised return of Christ even your mortal bodies and this physical world we all live in will be finally redeemed themselves so that all will, for all eternity, be “good,” even “very good.”

We see some glorious descriptions of the end result of that mission of God.

- Isaiah 11 (esp. 1-10)
- Rev 21 (esp. 1-7)

God's mission is restoring the creation to the peace and rest of His original intention displayed in creation and perfected in redemption. The message of that mission is the gospel. Our mission is to be the redeemed of God reaching those who He is still calling into His church by means of living and sharing the gospel.

But communicating the gospel message, though a natural by product of being a new creation in Christ, is not accomplished unchallenged by the forces set against God. We do not carry out our mission without difficulties.

To overcome the difficulties in mission we must...

a) **Burn Off the Gospel Fog**

ILLUS. -- Central Coast Summer Fog – Obscures landmarks and puts mariners at risk...

There is a fog that hangs over the coast of our understanding of the gospel of God. The fog of our natural thinking obscures the landscape of our spiritual reality. Somehow we must burn off that fog lest we spend our lives paddling in circles never getting where God would have us go.

How do we increase the clarity of our understanding of the gospel? On the central coast the rising sun of God's creation often burns off the fog and brings clarity of sight. In our spiritual lives the force that burns off the fog is similar: it is the eternal Son of God who Himself shines through the fog. Knowing Christ and living in light of the truth of Jesus as redeemer and reconciler of all things into their proper order according to God's intention gives us our spiritual bearings.

Where is that knowledge of the Son of God most clearly found? In the word of God and that **rightly understood**. Many have been blown off course in the fog and even shipwrecked in their faith by getting a bum steer via misunderstanding Scripture.

GPS data needs to be rightly translated and understood in order to be useful to mariners. Like all digital data it comes into a GPS instrument as a series of on and off electronic states translated as ones and zeros that to the unaided mind would be nonsensical. But fed into a mapping program that understands the first set of bytes as longitude and the next as latitude and the next as time data those zeros and ones have precise meaning.

I'm beginning to understand that the mapping grid that helps us understand the individual parts of the word of God in general and the gospel in particular is the larger story of the Bible itself. If we can hold the map of the big picture of the whole Bible in front of us then the GPS data that comes in from the reading of individual Bible passages becomes intelligible and we know where we are. With such a map of the gospel in front of us we begin to see through the fog of our natural minds. We are able to utilizing the truth from God's word by faith even though our sight may still be obscured.

Just as a map of the world is useful in helping us understand where we are in relation to where we are headed, so too a map of the word can help us burn off the fog of our natural thinking and discern the spiritual landscape we are traveling in.

The Map of the World

Arctic
Asia
Australia
Pacific
North America
South America
Atlantic
Europe
Africa
Antarctic

The Map of the Word

Creation (Gen 1-2)
Fall (Gen 3)
Redemption
 in Promise (Gen 3)
 in Type/Picture (Gen 4 – Mal ?)
 in Fulfillment (Jesus)
New Creation (NT)
 Already Secured (Inaugurated)
 Not Yet Realized (Consummation)

Such a map of the word of God gives meaning to the individual passages of the Bible. They become not random and independent to be infused with meaning from us. Rather they become parts of the integrated story of God's plan of redemption in Christ.

I'm going to give you a charge more than a simple solution: learn the larger story of the Bible! Learn the larger story of the Bible so that you will be able to rightly understand each of the individual passages. As we can hold the big story of the Bible in our heads, the fog of the gospel will begin to burn off and we will be able to navigate the waters of our mission without becoming tired, exasperated or worse, shipwrecked.

What do you call a traveler who does not bring along a map on his journey where he has never been before? You can call him a **lost fool**. Even if he knows he must travel north without a map he may set out on a road that runs north for 1 mile and then dog legs right taking him east for 300 miles. Ooops. Had he had a map the decision would have been easy. I'll take this road west for one mile that then dog legs north for 300 miles.

So where do I get a good map? We always stop at AAA before we do a road trip. They have great maps that have served us well. You can usually find maps at local gas stations. You can buy them at bookstores. The serious traveler will want to stay away from those tourist maps put together by the local association of business men. All they show is where the businesses are that paid to be on that map. So you will be able to find you way to their check out counter but you may not be helped on your overall journey.

It is a little harder to find a good map of the spiritual landscape. Ultimately the word of God is its own map and the experienced Christian guide would take that with him above all other maps. But practically speaking it is often hard to see the forest through the trees when reading the Bible. Many have published spiritual maps that show a lack of knowledge – like the early maps of the world that showed the oceans falling off the edge of the world like a waterfall. They are the ones published for commercial reasons. Fortunately others have adventured before us and charted much of the spiritual landscape out of a pure love for God and the journey He has called them to.

Pastor Kit Culver is one of those guys. Not only is he well intentioned but he is also scholarly, humble and submitted to God – not a combo pack I have run into much in my life. The problem I have with his material comes from the fact that he is an engineer and I am a surfer. He takes great interest in wave energy dynamics as they interplay with the changing submarine topography in correlation to wind velocity and tidal forces. I just like to play in surf. But this man has gone ahead of us and brought forward a detailed map that can help us understand with greater clarity the gospel and therefore God's mission and ours. That detailed map is drawn in his message series and study notes called Sacred Space that many of you have labored in and been helped by.

I have the desire to sit at a big clear table, open the Bible, spread out his map, trace the main gospel lines (interstate hwy system), anchoring them to key passages of the Bible (like cities on a map), and then share them with those just trying to get their bearings in the fog.

Pastor Kit will be joining us the week after Labor Day. And this is what I think I'll ask him to help us with: burning off the fog that obscures the gospel message that we might clearly and rightly understand the mission of God and our part in it.

Then to compliment his efforts I would like to take those interested through the main outline of the gospel as the Scriptures unfold the story. Where the world map gets us from where we are in the fog to the town we are headed to in parts unknown, this word map will help us burn off the fog that surrounds the gospel so that we might so that we might effectively join God on His mission.

What is our mission? It is to join God on His mission? What is God's mission? It is the restoration of creation to its perfect state – the state of God intention characterized by all things existing and operating in peace and rest. In relation to man God's mission is to redeem His people from the death of estrangement from Him to the life of union with Him by means of the atoning work of Christ on the cross and the indwelling of His Spirit. What then is our mission regarding mankind? It is to live and share the gospel message of God's mission so that the people God is still calling to Himself might know Him and be reconciled to Him, i.e., that they would be born again and live the life of intimate communion with God He has always intended, both now in faith and then (at His second coming) by sight.

Picture a loved one who does not know the Lord. God's call to mission would have His church, and you as a part of that body, live your life in such a way before that loved one that your life would testify (bear witness) to the reality of God and His mission of restoring creation in general and that person in particular into the relationship of a devoted son to God our heavenly Father.

Part of that live lived will most likely include your verbal articulation of the gospel message. Another part of your mission will require your perseverance on mission amidst hardships. But getting over those barriers will have to wait until next week.

For this week let it be enough to know that in order to effectively live out our life of mission we must burn off the fog that shrouds the gospel and the best way to do that is to know the overall story of the God as He has presented it in the Bible.

If your mission was to take this Bible from Monterey to NYC in the shortest possible time I'd give you a map with I-80 highlighted through SLC DEN Lincoln Nebraska, staying just south of Chicago, keep heading east through Pennsylvania, then through Newark and finally into NYC.

Since your mission from God is to join God on His mission I give you the charge to secure the map of the gospel, which is the map of the Word of God, and know the route God has chosen to accomplish His mission -- the route Christ that begins in creation, travels into the Fall, out the other side via redemption into the New Creation life in Christ, the life which has already been secured and which will be fully realized at His coming again.

Even as we celebrate communion this morning see if we can pick out the elements of God's great gospel – the story of His plan of restoration – in the visible gospel Christ commanded His church to share until He comes again.

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