

## What Makes a Great Church

We had a wonderful week here at the Vineyard beginning last week with MusicFest and our Saturday evening party that we threw for the community. Then proceeding into this week with our annual Summer Harvest – three nights of music and an opportunity for people to bring friends and neighbors and relatives to hear a simple presentation of the gospel. It was a great week and I just want to come back and report to you that God was so active. One high school girl brought seven friends to our youth meeting, and all seven came forward to make decisions for Christ. I watched another man receive Christ, and he and two friends cried together as someone they cared for now had eternal life. I saw another young man who had a very tough history embrace Christ and he told me, “I feel totally different. I know Christ has come in.” We had many, many, many people respond and give their lives to Christ this week. We are still counting up the results, but we had scores of cards filled out by people indicating that they were responding to Christ for the first time. So let’s thank Jesus for that.

As I was thinking about the Harvest, I began reflecting on one of my favorite passages in the New Testament. I am going to just plunge right in today without a lengthy introduction. The text is Matthew 9:35-38. It says:

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the

crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Then he said to his disciples:

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

As I reflect on this text, I think it gives us the contours for the style of ministry that Jesus wants his followers to engage in. Jesus is modeling a pattern for churches. He is laying down the tracks for churches and he is saying, “This is what healthy church life ought to look like.” You know friends, it is not enough that we just reap a harvest; the harvest has to be taken into the silos. The silo is the church.

So what we are going to do today is take a look at Matthew 9:35-38 and we are going to use this text as a blueprint for considering what makes a great church. Let’s pray.

The first thing I think you see and what makes a great church is in v. 35. A great church is a balanced church. There are three pairs of items that Matthew records regarding the ministry of Jesus and they speak to the balance in Jesus’ ministry. It says first of all that Jesus went through all the cities and villages. His ministry involved both cities and villages. His ministry involved both teaching in the synagogues and preaching the good news. Teaching and preaching. And his ministry involved both preaching and healing. He preached the good news of the kingdom and healed every disease and sickness.

A great church is always going to be a balanced church. I have always said that my vision for this church is for us to run on all 8 cylinders. That Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Columbus would not only be known as a preaching church or a worshipping church or an evangelizing church or a ministering church or a mission-minded church – but that it would be all of that. People would look at the church and not simply say, “That is a big church.”

but say, “That is a healthy church. That is a church that is following the New Testament pattern of balance.” I don’t think churches have the right to say, “Well, you know, we are not into ministering to the poor.” Or “We are not particularly really interested in evangelism and so we are just going to be the intercessory prayer church.”

The plan for God’s church is set out in the New Testament. And I believe that God is going to hold leaders responsible for how they build according to his plan. You don’t have to be very innovative to build according to plan. I am not trying, as pastor of this church, to be highly original. I just want to be faithful to the Master’s plan.

And the Master’s plan is a balanced plan. It says, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages...” In terms of the Master’s plan for a great church, a great church ought to have balanced concerns. Cities and villages. Jesus is moving throughout Galilee. This may either be his first or second circuit. It is unclear because Matthew doesn’t arrange the material in chronological order. He arranges his material in topical order. But we see Jesus demonstrating the balanced concerns of God.

In the ancient world there was a vast difference between people who lived in urban areas and people who lived in rural areas. That difference has been significantly moderated in the modern world with the advent of the automobile and mass communication. So that you could go to a small town in Ohio and see kids dressing very much like kids in downtown Los Angeles, using slang from the streets of New York, just six months before.

I remember about a decade ago driving through a very small town in Ohio with my wife, Marlene. We saw a kid walking along the roadway in overalls. He was an obvious farm kid, but his hair was spiked in different colors and he had a nose ring. I thought my goodness, even in the tiniest back water of Ohio we have the spread of rock and roll culture.

But this blurring between city people and rural people certainly was not the case in Palestine in the first Century or in the Third World today. When I visited our good friend, A. Stephen in India, I had the opportunity to visit a number of rural villages. The people in the village were significantly different than the people living in the large urban areas of India like Bangalore, Bombay or Delhi. As I watched A. Stephen's team evangelize the villages, the approach taken was so different. Most of the village people were illiterate. They were subsistence farmers. They did not own businesses. Work in the village was done very much the way it had been done in India for the last 2000 years. While the village people were easy to reach with the gospel, it was very clear that these people would not provide dynamic leadership for a movement. Villagers would never influence the larger Indian society.

If you want cultural influence, if you want maximum impact, if you want to change a society, you go to the cities – to Los Angeles, to New York, to Chicago, to Seattle. Establish trends in the cities. Change the cities and you will change the culture. The cities have the go-getters. The cities have the future leaders and teachers. The cities have the people with the vocational skills and the educational level to influence the rest of the people.

So why do I say that Jesus demonstrated the balanced concerns that a great church ought to demonstrate when he went to both the cities and the villages? Well, anyone who is a strategist for taking over a culture or influencing a whole people is going to go to the cities. Anyone who is a big picture planner, who thinks the way a general would think – What do we need to capture? Where do we need to mass our troops in order to win this battle? – Anyone who thinks strategically will head for the cities. Don't let anyone ever suggest to you that Jesus is opposed to planning and strategy. He was a master strategist.

And so was the apostle Paul as we find him in the great urban centers of the Roman Empire spreading Christianity from city to city. Those of you who might be interested in

discovering Jesus' planning model, the way he worked to take over the world, you might want to read a little classic book by Robert Coleman called "The Master Plan of Evangelism" or books by Roland Allen on the mission strategy of Paul.

But I said here that Jesus demonstrates balanced concerns because he not only goes to the cities, but he goes to the villages. A great church has more than big plans and strategic thinking. A great church also goes after little people for no other reason than every person matters to God. In too many churches strategy and planning rule over all and there is no balancing concern for just one person.

One hurting person in a little village. What is the strategic value of one little village turning to Christ or one hurting person turning to Christ? No strategic value. Why reach them? Because every person matters to God.

And so a great church doesn't exclusively think about strategy. But a great church is concerned about one person sitting in a nursing home lonely and afraid of death. A great church is concerned about one disabled person who is not able to pay their bills. A great church is going to be concerned about one teenager who is without their mother or father and just has no one to provide direction in life. A great church is going to be concerned about one single mom who is overwhelmed by life and on the verge of emotional collapse.

Jesus Christ models for the church balanced concerns – the great plans and strategies, yes; but also the marginal people. Why spend a day talking with a bruised and promiscuous woman by a well, as Jesus did? That woman had no strategic value. But she had value to God. And everyone of you has value to God as does every single person within driving distance of this church. And a great church is going to recognize that. Even if people can't serve the institution or are not future leadership material, a great church sees value in every person.

And then we see a balanced proclamation in v. 35. It says, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom.” A great church will both teach and preach. Generally, the distinction that is made in most evangelical churches these days between teaching and preaching, in the way that it is made, is entirely false. Let me share the traditional evangelical way of distinguishing teaching and preaching.

Teaching is supposedly informational. It is delivered in a non-emotional, very calm way. Almost matter of fact. The picture of the teacher is the guy up there reading his notes. A woman giving a fairly technical lecture aimed at the mind. You watch the person taking their glasses on and off, maybe using an overhead projector with charts and graphs.

But preaching on the other hand is stirring. The person shouts and gets emotional. Maybe they even perspire a little. You can tell that we are moving into preaching because the guy up front is starting to sweat. They loosen their tie and it is not as much content driven or aimed at the intellect. It is just aimed at the heart.

So you hear people say, “I am more of a preacher than a teacher.” They mean, “I just go right for the heart and stir emotions.” No light, but lots of heat.

The New Testament distinction, when a distinction is made between preaching and teaching, has nothing to do with whether something is more emotionally stirring or content driven. I would hope that good Bible teaching would always have great content and would always convert the whole person, not only the mind, but the heart and will as well. That it would have both heat and light. So the distinction has nothing to do with calm, dyadic style over against exhortation with lots of illustration. Rather, when the distinction is made in the New Testament, we are talking about two very different audiences with very different messages. Teaching is done to insiders. It says that Jesus was teaching in their synagogues.

Teaching is to insiders. To the already converted. And its aim is to build people up in their faith. Teaching is about edification, strengthening people, helping them to grow as Christians. We'd call it discipleship. Preaching has to do with proclamation to the unsaved. So teaching by Jesus would be done on the Sabbath Day and preaching would have been done Sunday through Friday, out in the streets and in the fields.

Now, a great church ought to have both teaching and preaching. A great church ought to both edify its existing members, strengthening them in the faith, and also be evangelizing, reaching out to the lost. Some churches don't show this kind of balanced proclamation. They may be wonderful in growing people, in strengthening the saints, but there is never any emphasis on reaching out to the lost. So it is wonderful that people know how to have good marriages and well-ordered families. And folks in the church have very disciplined tongues. People are taught about gossip and healthy financial habits. All of that is important.

But we need to couple teaching to the church with preaching to the world. And some churches shift the other way and once a person gets saved, there is very little meat to grow. The church is more than an obstetrics unit in a hospital. It is more than a place where people come to get born. The church also must take someone from the nursery through the basic grade school lessons all the way up through the university and launch.

Pastors, by the way, are required to both teach and preach in the classic pastoral job description in 2 Timothy. Timothy is told to preach the word in season and out, and to teach sound doctrine, and to do the work of an evangelist.

And then a great church also has a balanced ministry. It says in v. 35 that Jesus was not only preaching the good news of the kingdom, but he was also healing every disease and sickness – A balanced ministry between proclamation and demonstration, between telling the good news and showing the good news. Some people call Jesus a word worker. It all

has to do with the good news of the kingdom. See, the Jews in Jesus' day had a hope in their heart. Their hope was that God would visit his people and usher in the age to come, the Messianic Age. And with Jesus it is always show and tell. Jesus came proclaiming God has come to visit his people. God is now with us. God is now doing a new thing among his people. And God's new thing requires a radical response of repentance and faith. The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that God has come and he has ushered in the Age of Eternity, the Age that brings healing in every respect: to marriages, to the psyches, to the bodies, to the spirits of all who come in contact with the presence of God.

See, in the past, in the Old Testament God sent representatives. He sent messengers. He sent agents to tell people what he wanted of them. But in Jesus Christ, God himself visits. It is one thing to send a representative. It is another thing for you to show up. And the good news of the kingdom of God is God has come to visit the Jewish people and God is also bringing the Age of Eternity to his people.

That is why Hebrews 1:1 says, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed the Heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe."

The good news of the kingdom is that God has come to visit his people and he has brought eternity with him.

But God's visitation of his people is not just proclamation; it includes demonstration. It is not just words; it is also works. And you know, you see this balanced ministry of telling and doing, of preaching and healing continually in the ministry of Jesus. Let me just read to you some of the verses that show the balanced ministry of Jesus. If you are taking notes you might want to list some of these.



Matthew 4:23, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”

He is teaching. He is preaching. He is healing.

Mark 1:39, “So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.”

Luke 5:15, “Crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.”

Matthew 13:54, the people said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?”

See, the response to Jesus’ ministry was where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? Not just a great sermon, pastor, but great message and I am also healed. I am healed and I also understand who it was who healed me because you explained it to me. Proclamation and demonstration.

And this model was the model that was used by the early church. Acts 4:29-30, the apostles prayed to God and this is what they prayed, “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Empower your word and stretch out your hand to heal.

Or regarding Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian church, it says in Acts 6:8-10, “Now Stephen, a man full of grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people... These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.”

Demonstrated through signs and wonders, and Stephen was full of wisdom in his speaking.

Regarding Philip in Acts 8 it says, “When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.”

We see the same thing in Paul’s ministry. Romans 15:18-20, “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracle, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.”

Now a lot of people say well, they needed miracles back then because these folks were just getting started and they needed to demonstrate the truth of what they were saying. A lot of people will say the miracles back in the early church were simply designed to authenticate the preaching and that is not needed anymore. But the preachers back then needed the miracles to bolster their preaching.

John Piper, the Christian author, points out the foolishness of this view when he says, “This was a generation whose preaching – of Peter, of Stephen, Philip and Paul – was more anointed than the preaching of any generation following. If any preaching was the power of God unto salvation and did not need accompanying signs and wonders, it was that preaching. Moreover, this was a generation with more immediate and compelling evidence of the truth of the resurrection than any generation since. Hundreds of eyewitnesses to the risen Lord were alive in Jerusalem. If any generation in the history of the church knew the power of preaching and the authentication of the gospel from firsthand evidence of the resurrection, it was this one. Yet it was they who prayed passionately for God to stretch forth his hand in signs and wonders.”

Do you understand what he is saying? If any generation in the history of the church could have relied on preaching and basic evidences through apologetics, it would have been

the first generation of the church, the early church. Because their preaching was better than ours and their apologetics would have been better because they had firsthand evidence of the resurrection. There were still hundreds of people around who had been healed by Jesus, and yet they knew that they needed signs and wonders to demonstrate the kingdom. That if God would come to visit his people that would be manifested. People would feel the presence of God.

But with our naturalistic world views, with our post enlightenment perspectives which suggest if anyone is going to be healed, they are going to be healed through the use of medicine or some psychosomatic reaction to the emotion of the moment, we entirely block healing from taking place in the life of the church today.

I recently read a book by Jane Rumpf called *Stories from the Frontline*. It is a book of documented stories from around the world of how God used signs and wonders, particularly on the mission field. I want to tell you the story of the healing of a man named Hogwanobyao. I will call him Hogwan for short.

Hogwan lived in the western province of Papua, New Guinea. He had various ailments that rendered him a complete invalid. Some Christian missionaries with the Wycliffe Bible Translators were working in Papua, New Guinea in 1975. This particular missionary, Dan Shaw, befriended Hogwan and since Hogwan was a good listener, he helped Dan Shaw translate the New Testament into the Samo language so that the Samo people would have a New Testament in their own mother tongue.

Well, Hogwan became sicker and sicker. And Dan Shaw was concerned that he was going to lose his wonderful Samo friend and also the one who was helping him translate the Bible. But he had no experience at all in healing. He was a nice Baptist kid who did not

have in his world view at all the idea that God would reach down today and demonstrate his kingdom through healing and signs and wonders.

As Hogwan got sicker and sicker, he visited various witch doctors in the villages. They beat on his body to get rid of the evil spirits. They said various incantations over him. Hogwan visited western medical doctors, but there was nothing they could do. He was eventually completely paralyzed. And it was apparent that he was going to die.

One day Dan Shaw came to Hogwan to help with the translation of a text from John 5. It was a text regarding how Jesus healed an invalid who had been an invalid for 38 years. So Hogwan said to Dan Shaw, "Well that's me. That's me." And Dan Shaw said, "What do you mean that's you?" He said, "Don't you see, the man in the story was sick for a long time just like I have been sick for a long time. And he tried everything, just like I have tried everything. And there was no hope or anything that anyone could do for him. But Jesus healed him. Don't you think Jesus could heal me?"

Dan Shaw furrowed his brow and said, "Well, I don't know."

So Hogwan said, "I want you to ask Jesus to heal me right now."

Now, Dan's heart is pumping. The adrenaline is running through his body. He is thinking I am just a Baptist kid from Tucson, Arizona and he aloud said to Hogwan, "There are other Christians here on the island, why not ask them?"

Hogwan said, "Well, you are my friend. You pray for me."

God has a way of cornering us, doesn't he? So Dan Shaw prayed, "Lord, here's my brother and he is in need of healing. He believes in you and just like you healed the man at the pool, we are asking you to do the same thing now for Hogwan."

After prayer, he looked to see if anything was going to happen. It didn't seem like anything was happening. He left. When he left he was dragging his tail behind him. He

said, “Lord, these are the kinds of things that you used to do and we so desperately need here in Papua, New Guinea. Your name is on the line. Please do something. You have to come through.”

Four days later Dan Shaw is walking in the village and here comes Hogwan. He is on crutches walking toward Dan Shaw. Hogwan says, “Look, I have energy. I am getting better. Every day I am getting stronger and stronger.”

Well, Dan was happy for Hogwan, but he had a little bit of skepticism. Well, maybe he just feels better having been convinced that he is better. He said, “You know, it is possible that all the things that you did before, the medicine that you took several months ago maybe just started to react chemically and that is why you are better.”

Hogwan picked up one of his crutches and stuck it right in the chest of Dan Shaw and he said to missionary Dan Shaw, “Don’t you believe in Jesus? Don’t you believe that Jesus heals today?”

Dan Shaw, who now teaches at the School of World Mission, Fuller Seminary, said that was a life changing moment. When a Samo native had to challenge a Christian missionary about believing in Jesus and the power of his name.

Now, I am going to tell a story on myself and on Danny Meyer.

A few months ago a couple came to our church council meeting, which is our board of elders meeting here at the church. It oversees the church’s finances and is my accountability group here in the church. We also pray for the sick. If there is someone who is chronically ill and wants to have the senior leadership team pray for them, we schedule appointments and they come in and receive prayer.

Anyway, a few months back a couple came. She couldn’t get pregnant and there were a number of problems in conception, I believe for both of them. They asked for prayer and

we prayed for both the husband and wife. The Holy Spirit was evidently there. You could feel his presence. And they, to some degree, were responding to his presence by trembling, shaking. The other day, Danny and I were out having lunch together and this couple happened to be there. They came up and said, “Look, guys. We want to show you God’s answer to your prayers.” They had an ultrasound picture that indicated that they were not only pregnant, but that they were going to have triplets. Pretty incredible, right?

Well, the interesting thing was Dan and I both had the same reactions. We sat down at the table he immediately said to me, “Well, I’ll bet she was probably taking some fertility drug to have triplets.” And I said, “Yeah, you know that’s the first thing I thought too, but it didn’t seem real appropriate to say that at the time.” So as we finished up lunch, I turned around and they were still there. I said, “By the way, was your wife taking any kind of fertility drugs?” He said, “Absolutely not. No drugs. No surgery. No nothing. This was Jesus.” I felt like Dan Shaw with Hogwan in that story. Don’t you believe in Jesus? Don’t you believe in his name?

A great church is not only a balanced church, but a great church is also a compassionate church. Look at v. 36, “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

You know the word for compassion here is a derivative of the Greek word “*splanchna*”. It means the innards of a person—their liver, their kidneys, especially the lower parts of the body. And in describing Jesus’ emotional reaction to looking out on the crowd, the New Testament writer picks a word that shows Jesus having a visceral response to people’s pain. We are talking about deep seeded feelings. Jesus was just not competent, nor was he simply intellectually savvy. He deeply felt other people’s pain and that deep feeling led him to action. What a different kind of leader. What a different kind of model.

Friends, there are a lot of folks who are very competent in the world. You look around and there are very competent engineers and lawyers and surgeons and teachers, mechanics and cooks, and pastors. But you know, a great church must be more than competent. A great church must also be compassionate. A great church is moved deeply by people who are hurting. And they aren't just moved emotionally – they are moved to action. Yes, they feel pain, but they do something about it. A great church just doesn't sit around and sob. A great church is activated, motivated to do something because they are compassionate.

You know derivatives of this word “splanchna” are very often used of Jesus. It is so unusual for a great man to be very tender hearted, to be very soft. But Jesus could not look at hungry people without being deeply moved. He couldn't look at isolated people like the lepers without being moved. He couldn't hear the cries of the blind without being moved. A great church ought to have compassionate ministries flowing out toward the least and the last and the lost. Ministries not just done by a small percentage of the church or at the margins of the church, but flowing out of the center of the church by some of the best people in the church.

A significant part of the church in America has responded to the compassionate model of Jesus by launching compassionate ministries. Do you know that virtually all the personal involvement of Americans with the poor in the inner cities is the result of churches and Christians showing compassion? That virtually all the soup kitchens and inner city programs for children and literacy campaigns and job training programs and parenting programs and food pantries and clothing banks and house building projects, nursing home visitations and housing for unwed pregnant teenagers – virtually all of the personal work of getting connected with a hurting person is done by churches in this country and by Christians. If

you were to remove the church from the inner city, there would virtually be no personal involvement whatever.

Those who think that Christianity doesn't change anyone, doesn't make anyone better, just go to visit an inner city neighborhood on a cold winter night and see who is standing on the street corner handing out blankets to the homeless. It certainly is not going to be a Marxist professor from the local university. You are not going to see the American Humanist Society opening up a soup kitchen getting down and dirty. But you are going to see people from the local Baptist church and the local Vineyard church meeting with groups of kids, taking in an unwed mother.

A great church operates out of splanchna depth of feeling especially toward the harassed and helpless. Look at what the passage says, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

That word "harass" means flayed or skinned alive. The word helpless means knocked down or knocked to the ground. See, the model that Jesus demonstrates for the church is one that gets past people's symptoms, which we don't simply react to people's irritableness or upset or anger or drug problems. But with compassion, with splanchna, we look below the surface of people's symptoms and we see folks the way Jesus did, as knocked down and skinned alive.

Lots of people have been knocked down. There are a lot of folks in America who don't have the savvy of a bond trader on Wall Street or a sports agent. There are a lot of folks who can't just pick up a phone and call a law firm that employs 350 lawyers and have them at their beck and call. Many, many people have been knocked down by the system. Or knocked down by an ex-spouse, knocked down by an employer and they don't have the



resource or where with all to do anything about it. They don't understand the system. They are groping.

A great church comes along to the knocked down people and shows them splachna, compassion and mercy. See, compassionate Christians understand that Jesus often comes to a person's life in the wake of pain. Pain is often the wedge that Christ uses. It doesn't matter how savvy you are. You may think of yourself as being a pretty shrewd person, but I will tell you there are forces at work in your life and personality that are beyond your control no matter how savvy you are. It is very possible that you have a graduate degree and you have done really well in the world. But I will bet you there is some power at work in your own life, in your own personality, or in your own family that you cannot control. I look around me right now and I see a population of people whose lives are increasingly spinning out of control. You, right now, may be facing a problem that you cannot manage, a problem that will destroy you over time, or a problem that you are powerless to free yourself from.

You may very well be among the millions and millions of Americans who are addicted to some substance – alcohol, food, to various drugs, sedatives. There are additional millions addicted to work, to making money, to some sexual behavior, gambling, to a dependent relationship. You may be savvy, but you still have some problem that is outside of your control – like your anger, or your perfectionism. And while you never think of yourself as being helpless, Jesus sees you and says that you are one of the knocked down people. Not only knocked down, but skinned alive. The word “harassed” literally means “flayed.” Some translations have it as distressed. That is a little weak.

When I think of people being skinned alive, I think of not so much the inner personality forces that tie us up and render us helpless, but external powers and authorities that abuse folks like churches sometimes. Jesus has the eyes of a shepherd and as he looks out on

people, he sees sheep who have been abused by bad leaders. By pastors who just fleece the flock. In the years that I have pastored I have literally been astounded by some of the stories that I have heard from people coming from some very destructive churches – painful experiences that folks have suffered at the hands of abusive leaders. Flayed. Skinned alive. That is what some churches do. And as a result people get defensive and turned off and they run away from church and sometimes they run away from God.

There does come a point in any Christian's life where God will say to them, "You know, you have been running too long. It is time to turn not only back to me, but back to the church." A great church embraces knocked down people and it also embraces people who have been skinned alive.

Here is something that we don't often think of when we think of a great church, but a great church is full of optimism. You can feel the positive attitude, the expectancy when you walk into a great church. Verse 37, "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the Harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

A great church is not overwhelmed by the needs around them, the harassed people, the helpless people, the knocked down people, the skinned alive people, they are overjoyed at the potential. Not overwhelmed. Overjoyed. There is a sense in the church that with God's help, we can get the job done. Great churches aren't characterized by, "We are supposed to do this, but we don't feel like it. We are supposed to do ministry because it is the right thing to do." Great churches are involved in great causes because they want to be. Because they believed that they would honor God and they believed that God was going to do something. Great churches see lives transformed every day. They understand what happens when God meets a person.

And watching get people transformed sows into a church incredible optimism and incredible faith. What are some of the elements when I think of optimism?

I think of people who are excited about ministry – folks who wouldn't think of being anywhere else on Sunday morning than being at church. They are really pumped up. They want to worship the Lord. They want to hear the word. They want to pray for the sick, and be involved in the other experiences that happen through the week at the church – the small groups, the ministries, and the outreaches. It all serves to heighten the expectation that God is going to do something. There is a sense that we are a part of a winning team.

And I have been in churches that have been exactly on the other side of this, where optimism was entirely absent. And I have watched the people in the church vocalize skepticism that they as individuals or the church together could in anyway impact their community. People in the church stopped believing that God would bless their efforts. There is this continual throwing of the wet blanket over any ministry passion that started in the church at all. You know, the fire brigade instantly got out and sprayed out the least bit of enthusiasm. It won't work. It can't be done. It has never been successful before. We tried and failed. There is this overriding complacency rather than expectancy and activity. There is this complacency. Oh, that's nice. I am glad that you are excited about the church.

When I think of an optimistic church, I think of a church that is full of dreamers and doers. I love when people stop me and share with me their dreams of what they are praying that God would do through them or through the church. A number of people this week shared with me their dreams. A young man told me that he is thinking of starting a meeting down on campus registering as a student group – Vineyard Campus Fellowship, or something like that and getting one of the rooms and getting some folks who play Vineyard

style music and inviting kids from campus on a Friday night to come and hear good preaching and worship. He said, “I have a dream of reaching the campus.”

A bunch of our young men just rented a house down near the campus because they want to have some way of penetrating that campus for Christ. They are dreamers and doers. I love it.

I talked with another woman who said, “I want to help connect people in this church for ministry. The church has gotten so big it is hard for people to find a way in. I want to help connect them.” She is a dreamer and a doer. I love it.

Another woman said, “I just want to pray for the church that people in the church get involved. I am going to start a prayer meeting so that people really don’t just sit on the side lines.” She is a dreamer and a doer. I love it.

Great churches are full of optimism, people who believe that their efforts will make a difference. I am one of those people. I believe that the ministry of the Vineyard will make a difference in central Ohio. I believe that one day the Vineyard churches that we plant around the city will have a combine membership total of 20,000 people. I believe it. We have about 4000 combined people in the Vineyard churches that we have planted around the city. I believe that God will give us five times that number at least in my life time, while I am still ministering. And I believe that 20,000 people will directly influence five times that number, a 100,000 folks, and that we are going to impact central Ohio for Christ. I believe our efforts really make a difference in people’s lives and will make a difference in this community.

A great church is a balanced church. A great church is a compassionate church. A great church is an optimistic church and a great church is a praying church. Jesus says in v. 38, “Ask the Lord of the Harvest, therefore, to send out workers into the harvest field.” The

problem is not with the harvest. The harvest is really ripe; it is overflowing. Do you know the evangelistic harvest right now is the ripest I have ever seen it or experienced it in the 24 years that I have been a follower of Christ. I believe there is a sovereign ripening happening. I don't know as we head for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the close of this millenium that God isn't bringing revival. I don't know. I have no documentation of nationwide trends. All I know about is what we are experiencing here. We have never seen the kind of harvest in the Columbus Vineyard that we are experiencing over the last six months to a year. Just in the last few weeks, I had three unsolicited phone calls, three, from people calling up asking me if they could come in because they wanted to find Christ.

Now that is not fishing. That is fish jumping into the boat. That is not us setting the hook and waiting for someone to come along. That is people saying, "I have come to the end of my rope. I know that my own resources are not sufficient. I need God." The harvest is ripe.

Jesus says, to be able to cultivate the harvest, we need to pray. But it is interesting that we don't pray for the world so much as we pray for the workers. In the New International Version, Jesus told us to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers. "Send out" is way too weak. The original has a meaning close to expel, or cast out. It's the Greek work *ekballo*, which is the same word consistently used for casting out demons in the New Testament. Jesus didn't send out demons from people. He cast them out. He threw them out. That's what great churches pray for - fling people out here to the mission field; cast people out to church plants; expel people to the far reaches of the world. Evangelistic prayers in the New Testament, if you study it, are generally not directed toward the unsaved, but they are generally directed toward the saved. Let me say that again. Evangelistic prayers in the New Testament, if you study it, are generally not directed toward the unsaved, but

they are generally directed toward the saved. It's generally in the New Testament not that the world might be converted, but that the church might be empowered. Paul asked for prayer in Ephesians 6:19, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might declare it fearlessly, as I should"

Not so much pray for the lost. The lost will be converted if I open my mouth fiercely and God empowers my words. Colossians 4:3, "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I might proclaim it clearly, as I should." Not so much pray for the world, but pray for the church that the church would have opportunity to proclaim the message and proclaim it clearly. Because if we have opportunity to preach and we say it clearly, people are going to get converted.

It is the rarest thing in the New Testament that people pray for the unsaved. They always pray that God would put power on his word and that he would stretch out his hands in signs and wonders. Listen to Acts 4:29,

As Peter prays, he prays, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your servant holy Jesus."

A great church is a praying church. And they are praying for power on the word. They are praying for signs and wonders. We have several prayer meetings here that you may not be aware of. Every Tuesday morning at 7:00 a.m. the pastors gather together to pray for the church. Praying that the gospel would go forth. Praying for power. Praying for vision of the church, for the health of the church, for the success of the church. If you live anywhere around here and are able to come to a prayer meeting on your way to work, join us. Any of

you are welcome. And you are welcome to come one week and if you can't make it another, that's fine, but join us in prayer.

On Saturday evening, before the service a number of people get together to pray and to ask the Lord to put power on the service. If you come on Saturday night, come an hour early and pray. The same is true on Sunday morning at 9:30. There are folks who gather to pray all during the first service. There are folks who come to church before the service on Sunday nights at 6:00 p.m. to pray for the Sunday evening service. There are folks who gather on Monday evenings from 5:30-8:30 who simply spend that time praying for the church.