

Christ Community Covenant Church
Remodeling the Church
Pastor Dave Scherrer – Pastor Mike Brown
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Generally speaking people don't like change. But last week we learned that the Christian life is all about change: people change moment by moment and the greatest change of all is when we yield our lives back to God and are born again. The Holy Spirit draws us to Himself by conforming us to the image of God's Son and we call that transformation and sanctification - big spiritual words for change. Here the deal though – God is asking us to embrace this change, even 'lean into' it by prayerfully listening to God and obeying him. People don't like change but apparently God likes change!

Then I also said that the church too changes. Our church building is going through a physical change and this is what is serving as the metaphor for this series. But the church isn't a building; the church is us – the 'called out' ones of God. Those filled with the Holy Spirit make up the church. Churches are called to grow and mature as well. Paul's letters to the churches of Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and Colossi and were letters of admonition, correction and encouragement so that the corporate expression of the Kingdom would be maturing and growing – changing - as well. Changed and transformed. Think of it this way. If Paul were alive today, he might write a letter to us here at Christ Community Covenant Church and centuries from now people might read Paul's letter to the Arvadans and see his thoughts about how we need to change and grow. I'd like to see that letter!

Last week I spoke for a moment about the concerns that have been raised for the church – the church as a whole. I have two concerns that come to mind that I think our fellowship needs to be aware of. The first is that I have a concern that churches are being conformed to their community and the world rather than transforming their community and world. This can happen a lot of ways but typically it ends up by measuring church success the way the world measures success; numbers in the congregation, fame of the pastor, the electric buzz of an admiring public. And to do that it usually means compromises so that the world will like what we say and stand for and be comforted rather than be disquieted by what we say and stand for. So we soften our message or repackage our message to make it more palatable. I don't know that pastors get up in the morning and calculate how we can be manipulative and deceptive, but I do believe that over time the message of Christ and his kingdom has been compromised. We are tempted to sell a cheap kingdom gospel or a cheap grace in order to be 'Successful.' Commercialized I am afraid. It stands to reason that the more people there are in the seats, the more money and the more influence a church seems to have. There is the sense in our culture that bigger is better, flashier is better and more complex is better. I don't think I buy into that, especially for the church. When it comes to the church clear and uncompromised is better, true and complete is better, simple and straightforward is better. It is clear that the people who get the publishing and TV time tend to be big and flashier, but I tend to think that is what sells is not necessarily what is spiritual. The world has different standards than the Kingdom. The world whispers "You deserve a break today" and "You deserve the very best" while the Kingdom beckons "come and die." Those are not the same messages and world views!

So many of our so called 'successful church experiences' are concert like environments where the congregation is the audience and the people on stage are worshiped; Pastor-centric – if that is a word. It feeds a consumerism and entertainment view of church where I want what I pay for. I want the Sunday experience to satisfy my emotional needs for comfort and convenience rather than take me to a place where I can die to self a little bit more. Jesus never made it easy to be a follower, but he made it clear that it was better for our souls to abandon the short cut and take the high road instead.

I think the second thing I am concerned about is that we try to fix things through clever programming and copy cat churching rather than seeking God's unique dreams for our unique church. Clever 21st Century programming sells books, or maybe books sell the program. But I

believe that God has a unique desire for 4Cs, a desire for us to be His church in this community at this time. But, there is a temptation to follow the fads; I find it concerning that the church has become consumed with programming for Jesus rather than inviting each other into a deeper walk with Jesus.

Mike

After listening to you Dave, and of course from our many discussions, we are concerned about almost exactly the same things; so, let me simply talk about your two points from my perspective.

First, you mentioned cheap grace and the orthodoxy of the world, such as, “You deserve a break today.” Of course, there is some truth to that because God gave us the Sabbath. But, it is too often misused by the world and wrongly bought into by Christians, which was your point. Christians, too, have their slogans that are true but misused. Sayings like:

- Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven.
- A Christian is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.
- If *Saint* Paul couldn’t overcome his sin, what chance do I have?
- After assessing me a huge fine I could never pay, the judge steps down from the bench and comes to stand by me and says he will pay my fine.

There is truth in these ideas, and they are useful as far as they go. Unfortunately, they can lead us into only half the gospel message, a message that is limited to only my sin and forgiveness, as remarkable as that is. If we focus only on this half of the gospel, we are led into a life of sin management, a life in which we keep a tally of how well we are doing based on whether or not we commit x number of sins/day. There is no victory in this kind of life. If we only recognize this half of the gospel it can lead us into a life of resignation of ourselves as still slaves to sin like everyone else who is unsaved with no real hope of being conformed into the image of Christ. So, we are in great danger of simply giving up and not looking to cooperate with God to live as we really are—freed people.

Scripture tells a bigger story. Jesus says:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:5–6, ESV)

John, in his gospel says:

“To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12–13, ESV)

We have a new birthright. We are heirs of God’s kingdom (James 2:5), “**a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...called out of darkness**” (1Peter 2:9). This is the rest of the story. In this we have victory: we are *new creatures*, literally born again. I would love to see us grasp the implications of this good news and begin exploring together the consequences of this new life.

Your second concern was for the church to be fad driven. One writer said that the starting point of the church is not to change the world but to prevent the world from changing the church. This is a tough battle and the lines are not always clear. Jesus has left us in this world but has commanded that we not be influenced by it. This was the command to the early Israelis, too, the command they repeatedly violated leading ultimately to the complete overthrow of the kingdom of Israel.

How do we prevent the world from changing us? For me it begins and ends with one thing: following Jesus. I follow many things: growing up I followed the space race and watched the moon walks, often staying up late or getting up early, I follow the Broncos and the Rockies. I follow the advances in some technology. I continue to follow the aviation industry. Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Matthew 6:21, ESV)

We often quote that verse with respect to our money. But I wonder whether we spend as much time and effort following Jesus as we do any other thing in our lives? Can we look at our day-timers and see where the treasure of our time and energy is spent? If you spent three hours in one day watching a Broncos game, can you look back over your week and find even three hours you spent with God? One of the great myths of the past several years in regard to child-raising was that it wasn't quantity time, but quality time that mattered. That is just wrong. Any relationship takes quantity and quality time if it is to grow.

To follow Jesus means to learn to live a life of complete dependence on God (Matthew 6:33). It is to fight temptation leading to sin to the point of shedding blood (Hebrews 12:4). It is to learn to live a life of sacrificial love for even those who are our enemies (Matthew 5:21-26, 43-48).

Surveys show that one of the leading reasons for the rapid growth of Islam among American men is because it is demanding. Men do typically thrive on challenge. Sadly, we have painted Jesus as a meek figure and Christianity as a soft religion. That is because we do not know the real Jesus and what He has asked us to do. Following Jesus means dying to myself: it is the hardest thing I have ever done. In fact, it is impossible without God. Even with God there is nothing soft about it. I want to be in that fight with all of you.

Dave last week you mentioned that churches change, that that is the nature of being a church. What are some of the changes you have seen around here in the last four or five years that you see as evidentiary that God has been at work changing us?

Dave

I see God's handiwork in the development of this team of ministers. I am so humbled and pleased with what God has done in forming this team of Division Heads. This is a cracker jack team of dedicated Christian workers. They are talented, they are mature and maturing. They are fun to be around. We have the same philosophy of ministry and values. We see the world the same way and we see the Kingdom the same way. We like each other and trust each other. We believe the best about each other. There is a quote that I like from a book called *Primal Leadership*:

“What could our lives look like if the organizations we spent our days working were naturally places of resonance . . . and the entire organization would be a place where people flourished by working together?” *Primal Leadership*, Daniel Goleman, 251

This is the team that God is forming here. These are powerful changes only the Holy Spirit can do.!

I see also God's handiwork in the leadership of our church. We have reinforced the idea of eldership in our church, following a Biblical model prescribed in Titus and 1 Timothy. I see God calling out leaders and mentors from our fellowship and that is a good sign of our maturity. 100 fold means that we are about the releasing of the leaders of leaders, the teachers of teachers and the mentors of mentors. We have a long way to go but we have it in our sights.

I also see God's handiwork in these recent difficult building circumstances:
The way APEX has come alongside us helping us to succeed

How our dreams of being in a place where the community will see us and join us – as it turns out hundreds of families will now park in our parking lot and will get to know us and then Christ. Our priority has always been and will be children and youth and this new partnership will only enhance that part of who we are.

This new challenge and change has brought out the best of our church once again. In times of turmoil and hardship we pull together and sacrifice together and discover again that we are better together. I see God in all of that. He is changing us by refining us. And I am humbled by this.

Mike

I find it hard to look at areas of change in others and trust myself to base much on what I see because I don't know the motive of people's hearts. It is easy to fake things. But, there are a few of areas that give me great hope for our church.

First is tithing. It is hard to fake it when it comes to our money. Over the past four years we have intentionally worked to remove programmatic reasons for giving. We no longer do a youth ministry silent auction. We generally do not allow ministry fundraising activities of any sort. It is too easy to fall into the trap of giving to get something or giving to support something specific. We want you to give because God said to give and for no other reason than your spiritual growth through obedience. And you only have to look at the budget numbers to see the response; it can only have been divinely inspired change in our hearts; the Holy spirit at work.

A second area is in the genuine authenticity of the congregation. "Authenticity" is an often overused word today. But, I think we are really embracing it here. Dave mentioned the staff. We have been working intentionally to create an atmosphere of authenticity and genuine safety and support within the staff to be who we are each called to be. And, I see it in two forms in all of us. One is that we are more open about our individual struggles with sin. People I know well rarely tell me they are "fine" with that plastic smile. We are honest with each other. The other part is our increasing openness to be who we are uniquely created to be. I think I see a growing willingness to both accept who God has created us as individuals and for each of us to accept and embrace others who are unique. It is the Holy Spirit at work.

Finally, I've admitted to you that one of my great worries of this move was your response. Churches have split or died over much less. By and large your response was one of, as the spiritual writers say, detachment. It is not that you don't care, but that you are allowing God to shape your cares. The Psalmist says:

"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37:4, ESV)

You are allowing God to give you desires that are His. In my experience, that is extraordinary in such a large group. It is truly divine; the Holy Spirit at work.

Dave what do you see as one or two things that God is still at work on in our church, things that we are praying about as God transforms 4Cs, what might that include?

Dave

Mike you and I have talked before that we see ourselves as gardeners of sorts when it comes to attending to the growth of God's Kingdom, but our gifts and inclinations are different in that gardening process. I find my heart resonating more with evangelism and your heart more with discipleship. We have only half jokingly called ourselves the Pastor of Fruit and the Pastor of Dirt. My deep desire to see new souls yield to Christ causes me to long that we as a church will have an increasingly 'salty and lighty' impact on our world; "others will see our good deeds and glorify

our Father who is in Heaven.” We will be not just **responders** to the world condition but **leaders**, proactively entering the world with Kingdom love and Kingdom answers.

Maybe a church issue but more of a personal issue is to see prayer as ever increasing and vibrant and courageous and extended in my personal spiritual journey. God has said “My house will be a house of prayer” and it is my firm conviction that we will grow stronger and truer with hearts that pant for God. I am asking God to make me an even more fervent praying pastor in 2011. And I am praying for that for us as well.

Mike

The first, for me, is to echo you on prayer. If you have been reading the relocation updates, you know that I believe prayer is central to everything. I believe that prayer is where we learn to be with God as we are and to experience His unconditional love for us, which is the actual force that transforms us.

It is in our personal communion with God where we learn yielded participation with the Trinity who must show us who we really are and how God is working in our lives to change us.

But, we are such busy people. We race about in our jobs and in our personal lives, and even in our work for the church. We don't know how to slow down; we have lost the ability to do nothing in particular. Imagine that people used to sit out on their front porch and just whittle a stick while “passing the time”; imagine a life without TV or electricity where people couldn't continually be on the go; technology has made our lives better, and more frenetic. One prayer I have is that we learn to live unfashionably deliberate in a way in which we can commune with God in prayer.

Secondly, I want to see our sense of community grow. One day last week while working in the east-side construction zone, I looked around to see two high school kids, a college kid, a rocket scientist, a government psychologist, a golf pro, an airline pilot, a high school physical therapist, an electrician, a carpenter, a pastor, a janitor, and two retired business men working side-by-side. Some of these guys were not even from our church. There were no crude jokes and no swearing; just guys laughing and working side-by-side to the best of each of our abilities. The professional construction guys were graciously teaching the amateurs and everyone was watching out for the other. And food just kept showing up to feed the workers. And I know people were praying because we had a bunch of amateurs working with power tools and no one has been hurt!

When Paul writes of the Christian church, he doesn't mean a remodeled group of people; rather, he means a new society. Jesus talks of a His followers as a new family. I pray that we continue to participate with God as He transforms us into His family, one big family, and that from this new family we are able to invite others to join us.