

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Love God – Love Your Neighbor

This morning I would like to revisit a passage of Scripture we looked at back in January of this year as we began this series on the Heart of the Gospel, for two main reasons. The first is to remind you again of the heart of what it means to be a Christian and our mission as the church; and the second is to give some practical application of that as it concerns our involvement with API and the people of Kenya. The passage of Scripture is Psalm 67: *1 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us, 2 that Your way may be known on earth, Your saving power among all nations. 3 Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You! 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. 5 Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You! 6 The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. 7 God shall bless us; [that] all the ends of the earth fear Him!*

If you are a Christian, there are two commandments and one great commission that define our lives. The two commandments are **'Love God supremely – and love your neighbor as yourself.'** And the great commission is **'Go and make disciples'.** If you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself then you cannot be indifferent to the great purpose of God in the world – to call out from among every tribe, and nation and people and tongue a people for His own – and your own part in that calling. If you love God supremely, then your neighbor's welfare becomes your concern, and you will lay down your own life to make them eternally glad in God. These two commandments and one directive give definition and focus and purpose and meaning to our lives.

1) **We were created to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.**

This is the part about loving God supremely. We were meant to worship and enjoy the God who made us. If we miss this – we miss what this life is all about. ***The purpose of salvation is this – glorify God by enjoying Him forever.*** We exist to make much of God throughout eternity. Christ did not come ultimately to make bad men better men – He did not suffer the pain and humiliation of the cross simply to make our lives here on earth safe and prosperous and comfortable – but to remove the eternal barrier of sin that would keep us from glorifying God and making much of Him eternally. That great man of faith, George Mueller, made it his primary goal to get his soul happy in God. And he wrote: *'According to my judgment the most important point to be attended to is this: above all things see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord. Other things may press upon you, the Lord's work may even have urgent claims upon your attention, but I deliberately repeat, it is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have your souls truly happy in God Himself! Day by day seek to make this the most important business of your life. This has been my firm and settled condition for the last five and thirty years. For the first four years after my conversion I knew not its vast importance, but now after much experience I specially commend this point to the notice of my younger brethren and sisters in Christ: the secret of all true effectual service is joy in God, having experimental acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself.'*

Our happiness in God is of utmost importance because it is the spring of sacrificial love that glorifies God. If we are not happy in God – why would we tell anyone else about Him – or for that matter, why would anyone want what we have? Peter tells us to ***'...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you give an account for the hope that is in you...'*** 1 Peter 3:15 If people are not asking you about your hope in God it may be that they do not see you hoping in God – it may be that you have not made Him the supreme object of your affection – it may be that you are not enjoying Him yourself. People are attracted to what they see making others happy.

2) **We have been commissioned by Christ to spend our lives making others eternally glad in God.**

This is the part about loving our neighbor as ourselves. Love is the accurate estimation and adequate supply for another's need – and the accurate estimation is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and the adequate supply is the gospel of Jesus Christ to meet that need in every man, woman and child. ***Love is helping people toward God.*** Parents, are you helping your children toward God? All our instruction, all our discipline should have as their object the goal of helping our children toward God – to love Him supremely and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We have no greater mission than to spend our lives in the pursuit of making others glad in God. We have no greater mission - we should have no higher ambition. This was Paul's great ambition: *"Now I want you to know, brethren that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,"* Philippians 1:12 When Paul wrote this letter he was in jail – his temporal prospects were dim – but he never counted gains in this life worth talking about. In jail he was not primarily interested in his freedom but in the gospel – this was the centerpiece of his ambition. He could have said a lot of things – he could have asked the saints to pray for his release – or talked about ways to get out of this jam – but his heart had been captured by Christ and the spreading of the Good News was more important than his circumstances. **The mission that Christ has given every follower of Him is this – spend your life to make others glad in God.**

- 3) **We are called by Jesus to cultivate a lifestyle that reflects our everlasting enjoyment in God by risking temporal loss for eternal gain.**

Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 16:24-25

This is the part about going and making disciples. It is not enough that we should be washed in the precious blood of the Lamb and enjoy God in our lives – but that enjoyment should compel us to risk everything in this life for the sake of the gospel. I pray that Christ would free us from the seduction of security – that He would release us from the paralyzing effects of comfort and ease – that He would explode the myth of safety and ignite our hearts to risk it all for the sake of Christ. I pray that none of us would in the end have to cover our face and say 'I've wasted it.'

We need to begin living lives that reflect our eternal hope and enjoyment in God and live lives that are not focused on the things of this world – and risk our comfort, our security, our bank accounts, our retirement dreams, our prosperity and pleasure in this life **in view of the surpassing value and joy of knowing Christ Jesus ourselves and making Him known to others in turn.** It is only by risking what we treasure in temporal things for the cause of Christ that we will prove the glory of His grace in everything – and will ultimately live lives that prove to be triumphant and not tragic in the end.

- 4) **We must set ourselves as a church toward the goal of reaching the nations with the gospel.**

I want you to understand that when I talk about reaching the nations with the gospel I am talking about your unsaved friend, relatives and neighbors, and also about hometown missions of mercy and overseas cross- cultural missions. **We need to be massively engaged in all these arenas.** The core of the gospel is this: *'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.'* 2 Corinthians 8:9 It was for our sake and the sake of all those that have gone before and those yet unborn, that He spent the capital of heaven lavishly to secure our enjoyment of God. **The salvation we enjoy and proclaim to others is a ministry of those who have been made rich, spending their wealth so that those who are poor might be made rich.**

I have spent some time among those who are poor these past three weeks. Poor in material things and poor in that they do not yet know Christ. Pastor Roger and I, along with two other API board members went to Kenya this month to continue and expand the work of API. Agape Projects International, founded by Pastor Milton Sarara, exists to bring a Christ-centered holistic gospel to the people of Kenya, and we here at Summit are working together with them to make it happen, as Agape Projects International USA. **The mission of API USA is to partner with API Kenya in bringing hope and healing to the people of Kenya.**

Our primary mission is to bring hope – the hope of the gospel – to the people of Kenya. To that end we are committed to working with the pastors and churches of API Kenya in providing pastoral training and development, discipleship training, and evangelistic outreach so that the churches are effective witnesses of the grace of God to the people of Kenya. We realize that we are their partners in the gospel and our work is to empower and encourage those who understand the language and culture for the proclamation of the gospel. We had a wonderful pastor's conference the first week we were there where over 20 API pastors and some of their wives attended. All of the pastors were profoundly grateful for the help and encouragement they received and wanted Roger and I to convey their thankfulness to you at Summit for allowing us to come and share with them. There was a real sense that our lives here were somehow intertwined with theirs in Kenya and that we are truly one body in Christ, helping one another to complete the Great Commission on at least two continents.

We also spent much time traveling to the various churches all over western Kenya, listening to the pastors stories, their concerns and needs, meeting their congregations and understanding how we can better help them to succeed in the proclamation of the gospel. Helping them to succeed means continued intercessory prayer for the churches, money for Bibles and buildings. It means providing teaching materials, pastoral training, discipleship helps and on-site conferences like the one we just held. It means spending our wealth so that those who are poor might be made rich in God.

We are also committed to bring healing to the people of Kenya. Healing in this context means a concern for the physical welfare of the people of Kenya. The book of James tells us *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* James 2:14-17

We believe that if we love God supremely, we will love our neighbor as ourself – and one of the primary concerns we have for ourselves is that we have food and clothing and shelter – that the basic human needs are satisfied. I don't think we can truly say that we love our neighbor as ourself if we do not care for his welfare. James says that a faith without corresponding works is a dead faith – or really, no faith at all. And so the goal of API in bringing healing to the people of Kenya covers several key areas. We are engaged in bringing clean water through the production of Bio-sand water filters, and water projects in rural areas; we are committed to raising the level of health care by building medical clinics and sending short-term medical teams to offer free clinics as we did this past July; we are providing micro-finance loans to help women start small businesses; we are supporting orphans from the El-Shaddai orphanage in Limuru and are making plans to build our own orphan/school compound in Eldoret; and we are now helping to build a primary school there as well.

I believe our mission as Summit Christian is to know God and to make Him known in the world. We are called to make visible God's invisible kingdom in the world – to reveal God's loving character to our neighbors, not only by what we preach but by what we do. This is what moved men like William Wilberforce to work to reform morals and abolish the slave trade in England; this is what moved William Booth to spend his life among the human refuse in 19th century London. When Booth came to the slums of East London in 1865, there were tens of thousands living on the streets, sleeping underneath bridges and in alley ways. Whole families survived on slices of bread and butter when they could find work and went without when they could not. Everyone was in rags and many sought refuge in the cheap gin that was plentiful. Booth was moved, not only to preach the gospel of hope, but, as he wrote in his book, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, to '**transform the living hell of the homeless into communities of self-helping, self-sustaining families.**' To men like Booth, faith without works was dead.

In fact, when you look at the history of great gospel preaching and awakenings, you find that the proclamation of the gospel always aroused a great sense of moral responsibility within the church to work to end hunger and sickness and poverty in the world around them. I was struck by one significant fact while I was in Kenya this year. While I saw a number of Christian-based organizations committed to helping the poor of Kenya, I never saw a Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist organization building hospitals or schools or orphanages for the welfare of these people. That is because only Christianity teaches that to love God supremely is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Therefore I want us as a church to be engaged in the great work of God like never before. I want to see everyone of those who call this place home spending their lives, their time, their wealth and energy in the work missions of mercy at home, and cross-cultural missions abroad. My prayer is that Summit Christian Fellowship would impact not only this corner but this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ – that we would be those living to make the nations glad in God through the gospel.

Our gracious heavenly Father,

Grant that Your cause and not our own engages our hearts with the ambition to set up Your kingdom in every place where Satan now reigns. Come and fill us Holy Spirit with the passion and the power to carry the message of hope and healing to the nations. O that all men might love and praise You and sinners be brought to You for Your dear name and Your great glory. We do adore and love You and long that others should know it, see it, feel it and rejoice in it. Let the words of our mouth be vindicated by the works of our hands, and let us spend our wealth so that those who are poor might be made rich in You. Fill us dear Lord with a heart of compassion for the multitudes of those yet lost and make us willing to live and die to see them made glad in You. Wean us from the seduction of security - release us from the paralyzing effects of comfort and ease - explode the myth of safety and ignite our hearts to risk it all to make the nations glad in God, we pray in the sin-killing, death-conquering name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.***