

## By All Means

Sterling UMC  
October 18, 2009  
Matthew 9:35-38

She stood immovable for almost 130 years! 48,000 tons of granite, brick and steel! Her Foundations are solid-They have stood the test of time. She has weathered countless storms, existing in an atmosphere of sand & salt that would reduce the family car to rust in a few years! All the while, her piercing light has led countless sailors safely home.

She is the Cape Hatteras lighthouse-the most famous lighthouse in America! She is a lone sentinel, providing a safe haven for all those who fall within the shadow of her mighty searchlight.

But several years ago it was discovered that in spite of sturdy construction, unless something changed, the lighthouse would have been destroyed in less than 10 years!

How could this happen? What could cause the mighty Cape Hatteras lighthouse to crumble and fall? When the lighthouse was built in 1870 it was 1600 feet (1/4 mile) from the seashore on Hatteras Island.

During the next 130 years, ocean currents/shifting sands eroded the shoreline, changed the shape of the island. So in 1999 the lighthouse stood less than 160 feet from the ocean. In 1994, during a storm, the waves reached and battered the foundation of the lighthouse. The sand of time had shifted, and the ocean threatened to wash the lighthouse away.

Lighthouse keepers had two choices:

1. Leave the lighthouse where it was. (And allow nature to destroy it) or.....
2. Move the lighthouse to a safe location where it can safely perform its purpose (Out of harms way!)

Well in 1999 Cape Hatteras Lighthouse (48,000 tons) was lifted 5 ft. in the air, placed on rollers, and was moved on rails inch by inch, 1/4 mile inland over the course of 12 weeks.

Lighthouse keepers realized that, in order for the Lighthouse to survive/thrive, it must move. To stay put would only invite destruction!

The Church is alot like the Cape Hatteras lighthouse! Built on a solid foundation, quality materials, time tested foundation, well designed & functional, shining its light for all who seek safety.

Like Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, if Church does not change, it is danger of being swept away by a changing culture.

We have 2 choices;

1. Remain as we are, and crumble and fall. OR....
2. Be willing to move to meet the demands of a changing world.

Scripture is clear. The church does not primarily exist for itself. Our mission, our mandate, our reason for existence as the church is to go into the world and reach men and women, boys and girls with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we talk about becoming a five talent church, right at the top of the list of our priorities you would have to say is that we are called fulfill the Great Commission. I believe evangelizing is the primary reason God left us here on this planet. We can spend all eternity in heaven worshipping God, learning from his Word, praying to him, and encouraging and edifying one another in fellowship. But only here and now do we have the chance to reach lost people for Christ.

The sad fact is that while we are in a church with a rich heritage for evangelism, precious little is actually happening.

We may talk a good game, but our actions speak louder than our words.

Examples of events with many people attending, while evangelism committee is virtually non-existent.

But it does beg the question: Do we really care about lost people? Do we sincerely believe that knowing Christ is the best way to live and the only way to die? Are we convinced that everyone we know, without exception, needs to find the forgiveness, friendship, life, and leadership Jesus offers? Do we truly believe in hell, and that our friends and family members will end up there if they don't trust in Christ before they die? Do we really believe that? If so, are we willing to take risks to warn them? And are we willing to invest our time and energy in developing a church that will attract, challenge, and teach them to step across that line of faith?

If you go to the airport, and there are no airplanes landing, and there are no planes taking off, you'd say, "There's a problem!" If you went to the train station, and there were no trains coming and no trains leaving, you'd say, "There's a problem!" So why is it that we can be a part of a church that go on year after year with almost no truly unchurched people coming to faith in Christ, and with very few people really becoming more Christ like, and yet think there's no problem. Friends, if that describes our church, "There's a problem!"

I believe we must claim the higher ground. And in order to do that we need to change some things.

THE FIRST thing we must change is our view of people.

What was Jesus' attitude toward people? If you read the gospels you will soon see Jesus' attitude toward people. Jesus was a friend of sinners. He reached out to the poor, the sick, the crippled, the blind. He reached out to tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36 NIV)

Does it concern you that there are people within walking distance of this church who are feel harassed and helpless? Does your heart break to know that there are people in your neighborhoods, and schools, and places of business who feel they have no hope? Do you have a burden for the souls of the people of all around this world who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior?

Do you only want to ignore the problem, or do you want to do something to help? There should be no question as to what we should do as the church, because we have the one thing that is able to save them from destruction: the Gospel. For their sake a commitment to the great commission must be a priority.

Many so-called believers have adopted what someone has called a "decaffeinated Christianity - it promises not to keep you awake at night." Friends, a

brand of Christianity that does not cost anything and does not prompt the loss of sleep is unlikely to wake up others to their need to be redeemed as Christ.

The second thing we must change is the way we look at the church.

The Bible teaches that God is more concerned with the outsider than the insider; he's more concerned for the lost than the found. God is more concerned with the unbeliever than the believer. The tendency is for every church to create an environment in which believers feel comfortable, but unbelievers remain lost.

You see there's a gravitational pull in every church to become more inward focused. Over time, the focus always becomes what will keep us satisfied and happy. There isn't a church in existence that doesn't feel the pull to gradually scale back on reaching out, seeking the lost and to spend more time focusing on our own needs. Most of us, after a while, forget what it's like to be lost, and we don't even know a lot of people who are lost.

Over time, without even knowing it, we can start to erect barriers for sinners. We build walls that insulate and separate us from the world. I believe that many churches have unintentionally succumbed to a fortress mentality. The bricks and mortar, which we intended to provide a place of worship, have in effect walled us in so that we have little effect for the gospel in our neighborhoods. It's saying to people, "We're not coming to you, so you better come to us." "You have to penetrate our fortress before you can join the church."

This is far from what the Bible teaches, and far from what God intended. It's all "come and see," it's not "go and be." The whole Great Commission is not about "come and see," it's "go and be." Vance Havner said, "The gospel is not something we come to church to hear; it is something we go from church to tell."

By its very nature and purpose, the church ought to be a contagious place that is "infecting" more and more outsiders with the Christian faith. Why isn't this happening?

I believe that a major part of the problem is we allow so many things to lose sight of the primary purposes for which they were created in the first place.

We need to address what is likely to be our greatest challenge: A very real spiritual enemy, Satan, would rather keep us busy doing anything in the world other than building a church that reaches out with the good news. Satan knows all about our call to reach lost people. He understands that our efforts in this area are designed to expand God's kingdom and diminish his, so he tries to keep us tangled up in sin and selfish preoccupations. In fact, the seemingly mild sin of self-centeredness is, in my opinion, Satan's greatest weapon against evangelism.

Satan's more subtle tack is to keep us engrossed in things that are not bad but are of lesser importance. Trivial matters. The tyranny of the urgent. The squeaky wheels. Maintenance over mobilization. The temporal over the eternal. Anything – except reaching the lost men, women, and children for Christ.

The final thing we need to change is the way we see ourselves.

So many Christians don't see themselves as evangelists. They have misconceptions that they feel automatically disqualifies them from reaching out and sharing their faith.

One such misconception is that the task of outreach and evangelism belongs to only a select few.

Here is how most churches operate. The congregation's job is to show up and to give enough money so that the church can hire a pastor and staff. The pastor and staff's job is to do ministry. Whoever thought of this arrangement is dead wrong. Because as a result of hiring someone to do the ministry, churches have been crippled. The majority of churches operating under this scheme only have only a handful of person in the church engaged in recognized ministry.

Here's how it should work biblically. There's something wrong if you call yourself a Christian and yet you have no recognizable ministry. It's dead wrong.

We are God's Plan A, and He doesn't have a Plan B. The great commission applies to all of us, not just an evangelism committee, not just the pastor, not just the hired staff. It's not a matter of whether it's practical or not, it's a matter of obedience.

What does this mean? It doesn't mean that every one of us has to go door to door handing out tracts. It doesn't mean that everyone will feel comfortable standing in front of a group of people and giving your testimony. It doesn't mean that everyone will be on the evangelism or visitation committee. But it does mean that every one of us should live out our faith so that there is no doubt about our allegiance to Jesus Christ. And it may mean moving out of your comfort zone and doing something you've never done before. It may mean giving up your regular seat in the sanctuary because a guest is sitting there. It may mean trying something different even though "we've never done it that way before." It may mean occasionally subjecting our personal preferences in order that another person may be touched or reached for Jesus Christ. It may mean you will get your hands dirty for the cause of Christ. It may mean as Paul says, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Corinthians 9:22 NIV) Did you hear that? By all possible means! He was willing to do whatever it took to save whomever he came in contact with.

This morning, I am challenging us through the power, strength, and direction of the Holy Spirit to move beyond the walls and help people come home to Christ.

It's time that we, as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again... Move from a state of survival to a state of Revival...!

That is what the church is doing today... Surviving! It's time that we move from a state of existence to a state of persistence concerning Kingdom business... We have a survival mentality in the church.... But I'm here to let you know that God has called the church to do more than survive...! God has called the church to do more than exist...! He wants us to move from a place of survival to a place of Revival.

In order to do that there is a need for some workers... There is a need for some folks who are willing to get their hands dirty for the cause of Christ.

He says "The Harvest is truly plentiful... But the laborers are few." (Matthew 9:37 NIV) In other words, there is much work to be done... But there aren't enough workers to do it...!

I don't claim to be an agricultural major, but the last time I looked, harvesting was done OUTSIDE...! Harvesting is done in the fields...!

So that suggests to me that we've got to go outside of these four walls in order to get into the fields... So that we can reach others...!

In closing I would like to ask you several questions. If you would be willing to join me as we strive for this goal, I would like you to answer the questions I ask you with three simple words, "By all means."

Ready?

Will we change our view of people and see them as Jesus sees them? By all means!

Will we change our view of the church and remember that the church does not primarily exist for those of us who are already here? By all means!

Will we change the way we look at ourselves and invest ourselves in the all important ministry of evangelism? By all means!

The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Will we answer the call and go outside of these four walls in order to get into the fields... So that we can reach others? By all means!

How will we accomplish this? By all means!