

Sermon Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

Are YOU Preaching the Gospel?

Michael McKinney, April 25, 2015

God wants His gospel message preached to the entire world. It's a message of His desire to reconcile every human being that has ever lived to Himself.

He wants every human being to know His way and have the opportunity to make a choice as to whether or not they want to go that way. It is so important to Him that He doesn't leave it up to us to get people for Him or to be sure we've contacted everyone who has ever lived. You'll remember in John 6:44 that Jesus said no man can come to me unless the Father calls Him. And when the time is right He will work with every human being.

Since the decision of mankind in the Garden of Eden to lean on our own understanding, to at best include God in on what we are doing and thinking, God has been seeking to guide man back into a relationship with Him. He is not forcing mankind. He is encouraging man to choose the only way out of the problems we have created for ourselves. Problems made worse by the influence of the being that introduced our adversarial approach towards God—Satan the Devil.

Our free-will is not an accident. Character is not character if it is forced or coerced. God is not authoritarian. He is like a father. He speaks of Israel as "My child, My firstborn, Israel" in Exodus 4:22. He wants us to make choices, to take responsibility and to grow.

God is allowing us to see the problems that stem from our self-referential approach to life. An approach that brings only pain and death. By allowing us our free-will we can vividly see the source of our problems and take responsibility for them. Then we can repent, grow, appreciate, and then embrace what He is offering us.

The message of the gospel is that there is a better way. There is a way out. It's a positive message. And it begins with the understanding that God is in charge. And by that fact everything else is made possible.

In Isaiah 52:7 we read about that gospel message:

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes, (announces or proclaims) peace, who brings good

news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

It’s about the peace and security, the happiness and contentment that comes from following God’s Word, and of the salvation He has made available to all mankind. And this made possible by the absolute sovereignty of God. God is the creator and sustainer of all things and He is able to bring about all that He promises He will do.

Almost 4000 years ago, God decided it was time to preach this message in earnest on a much bigger scale. He didn’t begin with a big media push—leaflets, scrolls, preachers standing at the gates of every city, town, and village. Or having people give testimonials of their faith. He began very small and very quietly with an approach that was and is much more compelling.

Over time, God would send warnings through His prophets to get people’s attention, to remind them of the consequences of their actions—which we so easily forget as we get wrapped up in our own thinking—but that wasn’t the thrust of the plan.

It’s not God’s plan to scare us into obedience. He’s not a negative being. He is not trying to force us into obedience. Certainly there are consequences of not following His laws and every human being needs to be aware of them, but the compelling part of the gospel is how good it is for us to be in harmony with God.

Reconciliation with God will heal the broken part of us that only brings us pain and death. It’s the pain and death we see in our individual lives, in our relationships, and in the headlines we read from around the world. It will never go away until we all come into a proper relationship with God. When we begin to live as we were designed to live by our creator.

When God was ready to teach mankind in a big way, He began by going to the youngest of three brothers, Abram. Abram was born in the city of Ur south of Babylon. He lived there until he was 70 years old, at which time his entire family moved north to the city of Haran; probably because of the political unrest that was increasing in that area at the time. After five years there, his father Terah dies. At that point God tells Abram to take his family and move to Canaan—to leave his circumstances, to leave the influences of his life and to rely completely on God. The account of God’s relationship with Abram begins in Genesis chapter 12:

Genesis 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

2 “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.

5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Abram obeyed God and in chapter 17 God made an everlasting covenant with Abram and promised that he would be a father of many nations changing his name to Abraham. In Genesis 18:19 we read about why God did this and Abraham's responsibility in it. Beginning in verse 17:

Genesis 18:17 The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, (speaking of Sodom and Gomorrah)

18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?

19 "For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him."

And God did and will continue to do what He promised. Abraham's life represents the connection between the commands of God and the willing obedience of man to create a new order based on God's righteousness and justice. His obedience created something new in the history of mankind.

God will use Abraham's descendants, the children of Jacob or Israel to fulfill His purpose. They will become partners in delivering His gospel message. The preaching of the gospel is a thread that runs throughout the Bible.

By the time we get to the first chapter of Exodus, Abraham's descendents have finally become more than a family. They have become a nation.

Beginning with Abraham, God created a nation of people—the Israelites—that would help to preach the gospel in a profound way. They would demonstrate His gospel message.

He delivered them from bondage not just for their own sakes but, as He explains to Moses in Exodus 9:16, He did it for a bigger purpose:

Exodus 9:16 But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you My power and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

That the gospel message might be proclaimed in all the earth. The nations of the world would see through His relationship with Israel His message to mankind. They

would see that He was the one true God. They would see His power and a way of life that will bring peace, happiness and salvation.

God did something else significant for His people. He told them they were to be *for Him* a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Let's look at Exodus 19:3-6

Exodus 19:3 Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:

4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

They, of course, did not all literally become priests. Moses was never a priest. In the context we're speaking of today, we might think of this verse in another way. We are, without a doubt, destined to lead and rule with Jesus Christ. But this scripture, given its context, also points us to something more specific about what God expects from both the physical and spiritual nation of Israel.

They were to be for Him priests. Not in the function of the priest, but in the role of the priest. We know that the priests were to teach God's Word—His truth, justice, mercy, discipline, and holiness—to mankind.

In ancient times, the priests were the only people who could read or write. The word "hieroglyphics" means "priestly script" because they were the only ones who could read or write. The law that God was about to give them in Exodus 20 was to become the possession and responsibility of every member of the nation of Israel. They were to know it, study it, and write it on their hearts—because they were to live it.

Exodus 19:6 is a statement—a mission statement if you will—of Israel's role in the world. The entire nation of Israel was to be dedicated to leading the world toward an understanding and acceptance of God's plan. They were to be moral leaders in this physical world. They were to, in effect, teach the world of God's way and His plan for all mankind by their behavior—by obeying Him fully and keeping the covenant. They would preserve God's Word in thought and action.

David wrote about this act of God in Psalms 147:19-20.

Psalms 147:19 He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel.

20 He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws. Praise the LORD.

As a holy nation, that is, a nation led by God, they were to preach the gospel to the world. So that, as God said, "My name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

Consider Moses' statement in Deuteronomy 4:32-34 (NKJV). This was unique.

Deuteronomy 4:32 "For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether *any* great *thing* like this has happened, or *anything* like it has been heard.

33 Did *any* people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?

34 Or did God ever try to go *and* take for Himself a nation from the midst of *another* nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

This is what Isaiah was getting at in Isaiah 43:12 where he said,

Isaiah 43:12 "*you are My witnesses, says the LORD, that I am God.*"

They were given special knowledge.

The history of Israel provides the irrefutable evidence of God's involvement with mankind and His desire to work with man. It is irrefutable evidence of the blessings that come from a relationship with God and of the self-destruction that comes from giving in to our own thinking.

If we go back to Deuteronomy 4:5-6 Moses is restating the mission and purpose for Israel. Again they are to be an example for the sake of the nations around them and to God's glory.

Deuteronomy 4:5 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess.

6 Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.'

The world would take note. There's something unusual going on in Israel. The laws God gave them represent who God is and what He is doing and why. Their adherence to the laws demonstrate to the world why man needs God. His way works. Israel's behavior points to something beyond themselves. A plan for all mankind.

All of the children of Israel were to be partners with God in the covenant and in the preaching of the gospel to the world. A kingdom of priests for God. And God saw to it

that they were uniquely located to do just that. What God is working out is not random. They were uniquely placed to do what God needed to be done.

The nation of Israel was situated in the middle of the most important trade routes in the Middle East. The principle route, the Kings Highway, ran basically north and south connecting Egypt and Syria and all regions in between. It would have used by anyone coming from the east by way of Damascus, as far away as Babylon, as it skirted the desert.

So when Israel was instructed how to treat the stranger within their gates, it wasn't off-handed advice just in case you happen to see one. It would have been a common occurrence to have people—caravans of people—travelling through the land of Israel. And God wanted the stranger to take note of something very important.

These people traveling through Israel were to witness the results of following the one true God. Israel was not expected so much to preach it as they were to live it. Strangers in the land would see the honesty, the kindness and graciousness of a people that lived the instruction to love your neighbor as yourself.

And here's the thing. This isn't a switch you can flip on when you see a stranger. This isn't something you put on because you expect to run into a stranger later in the day. God is not talking about your game face. This is an extension of who you are. We live it on a daily basis in our homes. It's just the way we treat each other. It's the way we are in our homes—and in our marriages—as we will see in a minute. When we walk out our front door we aren't putting on a new face. It's just the way we are.

Hopefully a stranger would go away with the thought that "There's something different here. I don't see this anywhere else on earth. I want to be a part of this. I want what you have." Hopefully they would come away with the understanding that there is only one way to get it—the way that Israel got it—through obedience to the Most High God.

Dislike of strangers is natural and is as old as civilization itself. Travelers would have expected it and would have been wary of it. But God made a huge point of telling Israel to be different. God is especially sensitive to the vulnerability of the stranger. This is an important issue to God because it communicates His thinking to people who have not been exposed to it. In Leviticus 19:33-34 God says the stranger isn't just to be tolerated, they must be loved.

Leviticus 19:33 And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him.

34 The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, (like family) and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God.

This is a statement about God. About who He is. God asks Israel to demonstrate a different way—a contrast in thinking. This is very different than what a stranger would have experienced travelling through other nations. This was not normal or natural, but it demonstrated God's love for mankind. Strangers would have experienced something unique in the world that was the direct result of a people having a relationship with the one true God. It was a powerful message to carry back with them into their own lands.

This is about being a kingdom of priests for God. God was providing an environment for His way to take root and grow for the eventual benefit of all mankind. A blessing to the nations around them. You didn't need to fear going through Israel. It was a blessing to go through Israel. Abraham's descendants were to demonstrate the way of God to the nations around them in such a way as to make them want to live that way too.

It didn't always go that way, though. Israel's successes and failures teach us all a number of things, not the least of which is insight into our own human nature. Their issues are our issues.

1 Corinthians 10: 1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

3 They all ate the same spiritual food

4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. (It's why they wandered for 40 years.)

6 Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry."

8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.

9 We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.

10 And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.

12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Paul said in Galatians 3:7 that those who have faith are children of Abraham. We are spiritual Israel and our mission is the same. Our tools and opportunities may be greater, but our nature is the same. And thus our issues are the same.

We are not so different says Paul. We too are to be a light to the world. But if you think you are standing firm, if you think you are communicating the gospel clearly to the world, be careful that you don't fall. You might need to rethink your position, says Paul. The question is: do people think what you are doing is so different. "I want to be a part of what you're doing. I want to know what you know."

In Revelation 3 we find a congregation full of God's people that were, for the most part, asleep at the wheel. In verse 1 we read

Revelation 3:1 I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.

Coasting on a reputation for living the truth, they had fallen asleep. It says that their deeds were found unfinished. They were not growing. To think you stand, as Paul said, is to essentially go back to sleep.

God has wakened us from a Sardis-like sleep to do something different. We must do something different. We must be different. Why? Because what we have been doing is not getting us where we need to be. It is not making ready the bride of Christ. I think we have just scratched the surface.

This points to the need for us all to be humble people. If we are not humble we can't learn. We can't grow. We have to approach the road we are on with a child-like mind. God is calling for a high level of engagement from each and every one of us. A kingdom of priests and a holy community.

With a clear sense of God's Word as a standard, we need to be continually examining ourselves, listening and modifying our behavior accordingly.

We have come to a place as God's people where what once seemed to work isn't working. It's not bringing the unity, the peace, the forward momentum that God's way of life should bring. That's because we are working from some wrong assumptions caused by some poor influences and skewed interpretations. The problem isn't where we want to go, it is how we get there. If we are to be a light to the world, a blessing to the nations, we must move forward differently with a new mind more closely attuned to God's Word. We must take action individually and as a community with a heightened sense of awareness.

God's word, of course, isn't the problem. It's what we have done with it.

As we know, Israel had problems delivering a consistent message to the world. It's not surprising that God's people have the same problem today. Our behavior and adherence to God's word is fundamental to the preaching of the Gospel. In Luke 16:10 Jesus said:

Luke 16:10 “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.”

We must deal with who we are first, because that is the primary way we communicate the gospel and it is the foundation to anything else that we do.

It's easier to become a Pharisee than to actually deal with the inner man. The Pharisees were not bad people. They were extremely committed to the word of God. Spiritually impressive, even. The apostle Paul was a Pharisee. They praised God but, when Jesus showed up, they opposed Him. In the same way we can be spiritually impressive like they were in Sardis. But when God shows up in our lives in ways we don't expect or agree with, or make us uncomfortable, we can oppose Him, too. Spiritual pride and exclusivity is an easy trap to fall into because it hides a lot of things we'd rather not talk about.

You might say the Pharisees had a zeal for God, but their self-righteousness sabotaged them from developing a deeper understanding of God's word and what He is about. It put a lid on their growth. Humility is the only way to guard against it.

The Pharisees would use personal interpretation of scripture to judge others. When we study the Bible and pray about it and then feel like God had revealed something to us and everyone else should be on the same page — we do the same thing. We fall into the same trap. It's hard to fathom that anyone would not think like we do. Right? It's crazy.

Again, God didn't tell Israel to bring the stranger up to speed when they came around. He didn't say hold court on them. He told them to love them, care for them, make provision for them and they would see a new way to live by their example.

To preach the gospel is to allow the gospel to change us. If the gospel message establishes that God is in charge, then that should change everything for us. It dramatically changes how we behave.

We must then respond to life with a law that is outside of ourselves. We must respond to what life throws at us in a manner that is often foreign to us—not of our own mind.

Our circumstances aren't all that different from the world around us. It's that our response is completely different. And so our response to life, our response to each other, will often not be reasonable. It won't always be logical. It might not make sense. It will rarely be comfortable, but it should always be Godly.

Our response to life is not based on a code of our own making or on our own thinking, but on something beyond us—the laws of God. And the result should be evident in the community we are a part of.

If we expect the gospel to change people's lives, then we had better make sure that it is changing ours.

The fact that God is in charge demands of us a long-term orientation in all that we do. James' instruction to count trials as joy is an example of a long-term orientation. We are responsible for our long-term growth in every short-term situation we find ourselves in.

We want to be sure that we are learning all that we can from each situation we find ourselves in. Because here's the thing: if we don't, then we will still have this lesson out there that we need to learn—deeds that are found undone as we read in Revelation 3. Lessons that we still need to learn. And the next time the lesson comes around, the stakes will be higher. It just escalates. It doesn't go away.

And the stakes will keep getting higher until we finally learn that lesson. So it's better to catch them early. If we have an excuse for every criticism that is directed at us, we will stagnate. And life for us will become more complicated. We will be found undone.

What about our need to be noticed? Human beings don't so much prize success as they do validation. We crave feedback. We want to know how we are doing. We want a badge. A long-term orientation doesn't look to this life and to what men say, but to what God will say to us based on what we do in this life. Of course we should notice, appreciate and respect what people do as is our duty. But if we are seeking it out we might want to go back and ask if we really believe that God is in charge. Because that's what it really boils down to.

If we believe that God is in charge we have no reason to quarrel with each other over our understanding of God's word. In Romans 14:1-4:

***Romans 14:1* Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.**

2 One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

3 The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God (not you – God) has accepted them.

4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? (We are all servants of God—called by God. We need to see each other that way.) To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

God is working with each of us as He sees fit. Skipping down to verse 22:

22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

Getting caught up by our own beliefs. We all have issues we struggle with that we ourselves would condemn.

God's Word is not a club we can use on each other. Depending on our background and experiences, we all understand some things differently. Paul is telling the Romans that God is working with each one of us individually and will make known what needs to be made known when the time is right. We are not to cause another to stumble. Encouragement for what each of us is doing right goes a long way to help correct what we are doing wrong. It's easier to point than it is to lend a hand. It's easier to label people than to understand them. A godly community takes time and commitment. There are no shortcuts. We need to take a long-term view.

At baptism we were given a glimpse of who and what we are and we repented. Over time God has shown us more. True repentance should make us realize that we are all in the same place. No one is better than anyone else. We all have our issues that should compel us to treat each other humbly and with compassion at all times.

A godly community should be a place where we can talk about anything without fear of judgment. It's easy to look at the Bible through our opinions rather than the other way around. We must be a safe place for ourselves and others to learn and grow.

There is no place for grudges, revenge, or drama with God in charge. There is no place for fixing other people or for teaching people lessons. God has us covered. However, there is a huge responsibility for modeling a better way. And by our example others are convicted.

Paul describes the characteristics of a godly community. What it is and what it isn't in Galatians 5:19–23:

Galatians 5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If we all individually avoided these things, then it would make room for—it would make possible—a community characterized by the following:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

If we consistently practiced these nine things, people couldn't help but notice that there was something different here. It is so contrary to our human nature. We would create a disturbance in the force. If we just practiced self-control alone, we would have a major impact. The problem is, we've all found loopholes. We've figured out a way to justify practicing variations of these qualities.

Paul adds at the end of verse 23 that "**against such things there is no law.**" That means you can take these to the extreme. There's no limit. No one is going to call you on it. No one will say, "Hey, knock off all the kindness." "You're being way too peaceful." Paul says knock yourself out. And we should.

The Bible is meaningless to people, the gospel message is meaningless unless it translates into a better, more meaningful, life and better relationships. Our good example provides the integrity of the message. If people can see the measured approach to life, the sense of purpose, the appreciation of all life, the generosity, and the self-control that we exhibit—then it has relevance in their own life.

Preaching the gospel through example doesn't require perfection, but it does require a heart that can be molded and shaped. A humble person can forgive and repent. And like King David becomes a person after God's own heart. David's approach to God allowed him to live a life for the ages. A life that demonstrates submission to God.

It's not about proselytizing. It's about living your life with God's help, as close as you can to His instructions. It's living a life that other people want to learn from. It's not the instructions they see, it's the result of those instructions. It's a personal demonstration that God's way works. It's not showy, it's not in your face, it's not aggressive, it's not controlling.

When we are living as God instructed, then the phrase "God's way works" is not hollow. It has real meaning. When people can see the result of living God's way of life, it creates a clear picture of why God made salvation possible, why He delivered us from sin, why he is using His firstfruits, why Satan has to be put away, why Christ is returning and why He is going to set up His kingdom here on this earth. He wants all of mankind to experience what God's people represent – a microcosm of His way of life. The gospel has relevance only when you can see that it works.

The most compelling reason for living God's way is not the punishment for what happens if you don't, but what it brings if you do.

God wants people to see the results of living His way and say, "I want that. Help me get that. I want what you have."

Sometimes we find young people in their late teens or twenties thinking that God's way has no relevance for them. It's like they start out believing that God is the way and then we educate it out of them by our example. The contrast between living God's way and doing your own thing has to be vivid. It has to be tangible. Is our life creating that contrast?

We don't want young people to marry within the Body of Christ because they are told to. We want them to find it inconceivable to do anything else because they know that that person they want to marry will live a life pleasing to God and thus bring about the best marriage they could possibly have. "I want to marry inside the Church because I want a marriage just like my parents have." Is that our example?

Jesus expressed His thoughts on this. And he pulled no punches in Matthew 18:5-7:

Matthew 18:5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

6 If anyone causes one of these little ones (those who believe in me) to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

7 Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!

Jesus says that, of course, people will turn away for their own reasons – such things must come. But we must be careful it is not because we are creating a toxic environment that no one would want to be a part of. That means letting go of self. Jesus felt very strongly about this. Are we curbing our own desires for the sake of those that are weaker in the faith?

We must live our life so that others would not dream of not being plugged into it.

Is your marriage something that other people want to emulate? Is God's Church something that other people want to be a part of? Do other people find your relationships refreshing?

A person doesn't become convinced of God's way of life because of a great article or a well-produced video. And I'm not implying that we shouldn't strive for those things. At the same time they aren't turned off because there isn't a good article on tithing. God may use almost anything to guide someone to the truth, but what convinces them is what they see in the relationships among the people in God's Church. What they want is the result of living God's way. "If tithing gets me there, I'll do it. I'm in." Our example is the most compelling gospel message there is. There is nothing more effective.

To be clear I'm not against using media. I support radio, video, web sites, magazines, booklets, articles and private jets. Well, maybe not magazines. But a gospel message that is preached through media that is not based on the firm foundation of our

godly character is of no effect. There's no integrity in the message. It's been too easy to hide behind media and think we are pleasing God.

Sometimes we think that if God would just give us more, then we could really do something big. If we just had some really talented people with some serious resources, then we could do something really big.

But here's something to consider. Sometimes God guides us to what we need to see and do by what He withholds. If we were faced with abundance on all counts we might be tempted to create a giant media machine. And as I have said, it's easy to hide behind a big work and never get down to preaching the gospel in the most powerful way there is. And, unfortunately, God's people do that very thing over and over again. It's time to do something different. Maybe people didn't stick around in the 90s because there were just too many alternatives that looked just as good.

It's not we can't because we don't have. It's we can because we don't have. God is guiding us to a deeper understanding of His word and our responsibility to each other. And the result of that preaches the gospel more completely than any other method we can imagine.

The Bible is full of detailed instructions about how to do that. If media was the most important part of the gospel, then I suppose the Bible would be all about that. It, of course, gives us principles for doing that. But that is not the main focus. It's about the part we don't really want to do. In fact, we dance all around it, pretend we are doing it; tell others they should be doing it. But we must be more committed to making sure that we are what we should be. And that comes from deep down inside of us. It's the heart that has to be addressed. It's a heart issue.

When people look at what we as God's people are about, we want them to think:

"I love the way you set a high standard based in God's word. It gives me something to shoot for."

"I appreciate that you are all struggling, that you have hurt and pain. It gives me hope because I too am struggling."

"I love the fact that you don't condemn each other because that would crush me."

"I love the fact that you give each other space like God our Father does, because it gives me a chance to grow without becoming discouraged."

If we don't get community right, then we aren't getting the bride ready for Christ and we are not preaching the gospel.

If we are to be good stewards of our calling, we must see ourselves as members of a community. Everyone has a part to play. This, no doubt, requires a community of leaders.

If we understand that Christ is the head of the Church and He has a divine plan, that means we don't always know what He is doing. Our thoughts are not His thoughts. It also means that while we know that God placed us here for a reason, we have no idea how important we are to that plan. We have no idea how important it is to that plan that we respond correctly to whatever we face in this life.

Our role is not always out front. Our dot may not seem important. We may not know what our dot means to the overall plan of God. But when you take your dot and my dot and connect it with all of the other dots, then an amazing picture is formed.

All of us together form a picture of what could be. So each of us have to be personally accountable for what we do, how we think, and how we treat each other.

The picture is damaged if just one dot is dimmed, lost, or misplaced. We have a responsibility to each other for the good of all – for the image we are creating. A godly community is a compelling statement for God's plan for man.

We all have the same human nature and we all have in front of us the solution to it. It truly is a situation where when one does well, we all do well. And when one is sick, we all suffer.

The reason is that we—together—make up a story. One person may be a fluke, but together our lives create a powerful argument for God's way of life. A tangible picture of God's way in real time. In 3-D. It is our collective story that is a powerful.

In Matthew 5:13-16, Christ discusses our function in this world:

Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

We are the message. God has called us to deliver it to the world to glorify Him—to illuminate His plan for mankind. We need to continue to grow so that we are creating a godly community that others want to be a part of. Then when God opens people's minds, He will have something to point to.

This is the same mission God gave physical Israel. It is our mission too. Nothing has changed. ❖