

Have you ever seen a miracle? I have. It's not like what most of us think of as a miracle. The Lord has allowed me the privilege several times to watch someone trust Christ, to move from spiritual death to new life in Christ. This morning though you are sitting in a miracle.

In 1955 Bethel Baptist which is now Grace Church began. A small group of believers involved in a Bible study felt the need to begin a Bible-believing church in the community. Our original property on Kendall Street was donated to the church by an elderly lady, Mabel Buttles. The church built the basement first and within two years added a second level.

Our world has changed. It was apparent that our old building was very inadequate for us to do ministry and reach our community with the gospel. It was too small. We were landlocked. You couldn't enter the building without having to go up or down stairs.

In 2003 the property we are currently on was up for sale. A few of our leaders looked at it longingly BUT we had no money, no plans and had barely begun talking about purchasing new property. Within the next two years, we put together a group to look for property to purchase. There was nothing to be had in the area within our price range or that fit our purposes. In desperation, I met with a friend and local realtor at a coffee shop. It was a very discouraging conversation. He told me that we were one of several churches looking for property and there was just none to be had.

At the end of the conversation, I asked about this property and my friend responded, "I own it." "How much do you want for it?" "It's not for sale. That land is my retirement plan." "Well, if you were to sell it, how much would you want for it?" "It's not for sale at any price."

Six months later I received a phone call. My friend's situation had changed. The State was putting in the bypass and a subdivision was slated east of this property. He asked, "Are you still interested in that property?"

There was great unity in our church. The vote to purchase these ten acres was nearly unanimous. There was excitement and passion for what God was doing. Please mark it down! When God is working, Satan will always attack. We voted on a Sunday night. It was full steam ahead. Three days later I received a phone call first thing in the morning from a friend in the ministry. He said, "Scott, what I'm going to tell you is going to ruin your day." Through various circumstances, he'd learned that our assistant pastor at the time had been involved in an ongoing adulterous relationship with a teen girl from our youth group. The assistant pastor was quickly terminated and ultimately ended up going to prison.

Remember, we'd just voted to buy this property. Some questioned whether we should move forward, but in faith we did. We paid off this property in seven years and began the process of raising money for a building. God's hand of blessing was on us! The Lord sent us a wonderful man, Bill Walter, to walk us through a Capital Campaign. And you as God's people sacrificed over and over again.

It took nearly a year to come up with an approach for construction. Our budget was \$1 million. The 1st estimate came back at over \$2 million. Lots and lots of cuts had to be made. It took much prayer and wisdom. We were blessed with a wonderful, godly building committee who put in countless hours. Essentially, we sailed through the construction process with barely a hiccup. In about six months this building was finished.

But we still had to furnish it and you gave and gave again. Our brothers and sisters at Springcreek Church in Pewaukee gave us \$20,000 for our AV system and helped connect us with one of the best AV designers in the State. Our plumbing contractor gave us money. Our general contractor gave us money for the building. My friend, Tom Price, who's on staff at Spring Creek told me, "Scott, we've gone through five major building projects and none of our contractors have ever given us money."

As soon as we were in this building, we knew though that we had a problem – a wonderful problem – there wasn't enough parking...and you gave again. We received a great quote on the work and because it took less time and material than the excavator thought it would, he gave us a sizeable discount.

This morning you are sitting in a miracle! God did it and we don't want to ever forget it. Many of you are new at Grace. We want you to know our story, really God's story. This is His building. This is His church. It's been a wonderful first year. So, what's next? Where do we go from here? Let's talk about that this morning. Let's start with by unpacking...

What is a successful church? Most definitions of what makes a successful church are very American, yet have little to do with what the New Testament teaches. Most measure the success of a church by *bodies*, *bucks* and *buildings*. Big crowd, great facilities and a huge budget. We might add a great worship band and lots of programs. Yet, none of those are biblical.

Let me stop for a moment and talk candidly about budgets. This building put us in debt and it's a concern. It's not huge though in today's economy. We're blessed with a very conservative Finance Team who keep us firmly planted fiscally. Currently, we owe \$740,000 for this building. In today's economy it's similar to buying 3 or 4 houses in this area.

We need to be wise with our money and always pay our bills. Did you know though that the New Testament says very little about church finances? We're not a business, we're a ministry. Our business is glorifying God by reaching our community and world for Christ and making more followers of Jesus Christ. If we'll focus on the "business" that God has entrusted to us of reaching our world, we'll never have to worry about the bills. You've probably heard that "God owns the cattle on a thousand hills." Dave Ramsey (**picture**) adds, "*God also owns the hills.*"

We are in the gospel "business." Last Tuesday night as I left our new members' class, I was overwhelmed with joy. It struck me that two of the individuals taking that class came to Christ at Grace, one of them just a few weeks ago. And one of the questions from that new believer was about how to reach a lost friend for Christ. That's our business! The gospel business!

We're sitting in a miracle and God's not done. Let me challenge you with something – **Pray Big about our debt!** That's all! Join me in praying that God will so miraculously pay off our debt so that He gets all the glory!

What is a successful church? **A successful church is one that faithfully fulfills the Great Commission.** God though has called us to a specific community and point in history, so how does that unpack in our situation? Please turn to Luke 10:25-37 (p. 869)

2. We must become the Good Samaritans of our world. The Samaritans were hated in Jesus' day. Today Bible-believing Christians are quickly becoming one of the most hated groups in America. We're caricatured as racist, sexist, homophobic, intolerant and hypocrites, and some of it's true.

Last week a news report came out about evangelical churches covering up child molestation. How horrible! When we talk the talk but don't walk the walk, we're hypocrites. Obviously, we're not talking about perfection. I am talking about a commitment to being godly and Christlike. I want said about me and I hope you want said about you, what was said about those early Christians: "*they recognized that they had been with Jesus*" (Acts 4:13). This morning we don't want to force the text yet a comparison to Samaritans has much merit in our culture today.

Samaritans spoke a different language. We speak a different language. How many of your unsaved friends talk about the Bible or what they're getting out of Bible reading? Lost people talk a lot about "hell," at least the word peppers their language. But other than when someone dies, how often do they talk about heaven? When was the last time you had a conversation with a lost person about being more loving, joyful, patient, forgiving, gracious or kind? We speak a different language.

Samaritans had a different value system. Christians have a different value system. We value purity, morality, godliness, generosity. Our retirement program is out of this world. We're concerned about where those around us will spend eternity. Your lost friends could care less about where you're going on vacation, much less, where you'll spend eternity. It's a different value system.

Samaritans had a different religion. The current buzz words are tolerance and pluralism. While we believe that you have the right to believe whatever you want to believe, we hold without apology to the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. We believe there is only way to heaven, committing your life to Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Earlier this month Pope Francis signed a document about fraternity with Muslims (**picture**) and has said, "*Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters...*" On a human level, we are brothers and sisters. Spiritually, we are from totally different families. The only way to be in God's family is by trusting Christ as your personal Savior.

Samaritans were from a different country. We're not from a different country, but we're headed to one. We have a different eternal destination.

Samaritans were hated. We must never, ever be hateful. Yet, holding to a biblical worldview will always result in some hating us. Because we hold to a biblical ethic and morality, we'll be hated. Increasingly, Christians are accused as being "*on the wrong side of history.*"

The religious men who walked by this victim left him to die. They asked, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" The Samaritan asked, "*If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?*"

Our culture has changed. While our *message* never changes, our *methods* must continually adapt. Some of you like me were told as a kid, "Finish your food. People in China are starving." Today parents tell their kids, "Finish your homework. People in China are starving for your job." If we're going to obey the Great Commission, we must continually adapt.

Most churches, whether blatantly or subtly, have an unspoken goal – "How can we be the best church in our community?" and they staff, budget and plan accordingly. A biblical church model though is "*How can we be the best church for our community?*" That one little preposition **for** changes everything. Most churches are internally focused. Sadly, many of them are dying. God has called us to be externally focused. What's the very first word in the Great Commission? **Go**, not stay.

It's like being on an airplane. When you're traveling, what do you want, an aisle or window seat (**picture**)? Churches with an aisle seat are focused on what's going on inside the church? Are they bringing the meal and drinks yet? When are they going to turn off the seatbelt sign? Where's a pillow...a blanket? Am I comfortable? Are my needs being met? An aisle seat church is focused on what's going on inside the church?

A window seat church is focused on what's going on outside the church. Study it for yourself. That was the early church. Christ-followers were known for their love, kindness and compassion to those outside the church. They served the people around them. They shared the gospel outside the church. The result was a 40% growth per decade of the early church.

David Bosch's (**picture**) research on the expansion of the early church pieces together "*a remarkable picture of the early Christians involvement with the poor, orphans, widows, the sick, mineworkers, prisoners, slaves and travelers. The new language on the lips of Christians...was the language of love. [it was a] natural expression of faith in Christ.*"

Changing seats isn't easy, but it's what Jesus has commanded us to do. We're to be externally focused. We're to go. As difficult as it can be to get the church to go out into the community, let me tell you something much more difficult – *getting the community to come into the church.*

If we have Jesus' heart, we're not looking for an audience to fill up the church. No, we're looking for an army to change the world. The early church stormed the gates of hell. Our mission hasn't changed.

3. We must be committed to being the best church FOR our community. Some of you are like me. I have friends who are atheist, agnostic, from various religions, pro-choice, gay, liberal...you name it. They know who I am and what I believe. But do you know why they are my friends? They know I care. They may think I'm crazy, off the wall, out of touch, on the wrong side of history. Yet, I try to continually communicate that I'm the friend that they can call in the middle of the night. They may despise what I believe, but they know that I love them.

Recently, I learned that a local company was going through a shake-up. I have two friends who work there. I talked to both of them and let them know that if things went south and they needed help with a job change, they could count on me to help them out.

We open the door to share our faith when our lost friends first know we care. That's what we're trying to do with this new building – communicate that our house is THEIR house.

Last week we let the Burlington Rotary Club use our building for a Family Game Day. A friend told me that when she told her children that they were going to Grace Church to play games, they asked, "How can you play games at church?" They'd never been in an evangelical church.

Like the Good Samaritan, we'll win them by caring first. That's why we share news of good things going on in our community on our church's Facebook page. You'll see it with this: [#4OurCommunity](#) or [#4Burlington](#) or [#4Waterford](#). We're seeking to communicate that we care, we're interested in our community and what's going on here.

How can we be the best for our community? We have to first know our community? We must know the needs and where we can make a difference. *They don't need our money, they need us.*

When my children were growing up, every year for their birthday, my Dad would send them the amount of dollars for that year. When they were 6, they received \$6. But they didn't know him. We went to see him a few times, but he never came to see them. He never called or wrote them, other than at birthdays. There was hardly any relationship with him.

For most of us, giving money is fairly painless and doesn't stretch us much. Giving money to help in our community can be a good thing, but it's not going to bring about much change. We change people when we engage with people. People feel their worth only when they're affirmed by others. Good deeds can be done from a distance. Good news can only be shared up close. God's love is a shared experience.

We could have a food pantry or buy meals for the poor. But what have we really done? We've filled stomachs, not souls. Whether you're hungry or well-fed, if you don't know Jesus, you're not going to heaven. Jesus got personally involved. He touched sinners and the diseased, and so must we.

The ***I-fit*** ministry we're starting is a great example of this. We could have given money to the Special Olympics. They do a great job. But we'd miss out on personal involvement and engagement. That's why we're asking you to come Friday night. Not just to serve but to engage with these families. They need to know they're loved by us because Jesus loves them.

We also chose this particular area, because for the most part, it's a subculture overlooked by churches. A high percentage of those with an autistic or special needs child don't go to church. They feel embarrassed and unwelcome if their child acts out.

That's the same reason we're having a ***Biscuit Brunch & Honoring Volunteers***. Many years ago I coached community basketball. It probably happened but I don't remember a parent or a kid thanking me for giving up lots of Saturdays. Think about Boy Scout leaders, Girl Scout leaders, coaches of various children's sports teams, FFA leaders, and

innumerable others. They're often unappreciated volunteers who willingly give hours upon hours. It's our chance to invite them so we can all say, "Thank you!"

All of us concerned about education. Did you know that if a child doesn't master reading by 3rd grade, they'll struggle the rest of their school years? Here's something that we can do. We can go to a local elementary school and listen to a child read. **Help them with reading.** If you're retired or a stay at home Mom, an hour a week can make a big difference in the life of a child. We've had a great relationship with Cooper Elementary over the years. The new principal, Jackie Syens, would love to have folk from Grace volunteer to listen to children read. If you're interested, note it on your Connection Card and I'll get you the information.

Some of you don't know what to do with your weekends now. Football is over. It's six weeks until opening day for baseball. What's the language of our community? *Sports*. There are almost 40 sports channels in America. Do you like to play sports? Do you like to walk? Would you like a Mom's play day inside? Open gym? **There's an insert about our Sports Ministry in your bulletin.** We want this building to be used. We want you to invite your friends. Maybe they won't come to church, but they'll come play basketball or co-ed volleyball or let their kids run around for a Moms' Playday. Do you want to start an exercise class? Play Pickle Ball. Jump in. Start something. Use sports to build bridges. Let's touch lives. Other than maybe belly dancing, it's wide open. The sky is the limit.

Conclusion: This isn't about being relevant, it's about being effective for the cause of Christ. What's considered relevant today will inevitably appear dated and tired in 20 years.

But people are still people. That hasn't changed since the Garden. Lost people have a need for meaning, for purpose, for forgiveness and love. Many ignore the message of Christ because churches insist on communicating it in ways that make little sense in today's world. Too often we've made the Gospel too difficult for a changing culture to understand.

Let me give an analogy: Imagine a missionary going overseas and saying, "I'm here to share the Good News, but first you have to learn to speak my language, learn my customs, and sing my style of music." It's obvious why this strategy fails. If we want to reach people in our culture, we must first understand them and speak their language. Paul said, *"I become all things to all men that I may, in some way, save some."* It's what it means to be like Jesus. You're incarnational.

That means if you're in Wisconsin, you should have a Wisconsin culture church. It means too that we need a 2019 church. It means mature Christians unselfishly limit their own preferences of what they think a church should look like in order to reach lost people for Christ.

Jesus said in Luke 5:38, *"New wine must be poured into new wineskins!"* In an increasingly anonymous, you're just a number world, people are desperately looking for community. The church must be a place where you belong, a family where, as they sang on *Cheers*, everybody knows your name. You and I may know the church is a community, but those outside our walls have never seen it that way. They've seen the distorted caricatures, but not a loving community. This is an opportunity for us to re-state the eternal truths of Scripture in a fresh, contemporary way. God invites us to join Him in His passion to reach this world. He wants us on mission and He's promised to give us everything we need to succeed.

Why don't we do it? Why is it so rare for a Christian to share the gospel? Why is it rare for a believer to invite a lost friend to church and out for lunch afterwards? Blindness. We just don't see it.

One of our favorite hymns is *Amazing Grace*. Yet, even after he'd accepted God's amazing grace, John Newton, the author of that hymn, was spiritually blind to a lost world.

On business trips, he'd spend several hours praying and reading the Bible each morning, with another round of prayers at midday. As a ship captain, he enjoyed long spells of solitude on deck, keeping a diary and recording that he knew no "calling that...affords greater advantages to an awakened mind, for promoting the life of God in the soul." His expensive cargo required extra officers and crew, reducing his onboard responsibilities. "I never knew sweeter or more frequent hours of divine communion, than in my last two voyages to Guinea, when I was either almost secluded from society on shipboard, or when on shore, when I have wandered through the woods reflecting on the singular goodness of the Lord to me."

John Newton wrote those deeply spiritual words while transporting African slaves and having his savings invested in the slave ship business. For more than thirty years after he left the slave trade, during which time Newton preached thousands of sermons, published half a dozen books, and wrote *Amazing Grace* and 279 other hymns, he didn't say a word against slavery. He was spiritually blind, blind to what is now so painfully obvious. Even though he penned the words, "I once was blind, but now I see," he didn't. Apparently, he only had the ability to see things up close. He was spiritually nearsighted. But when God opened his eyes, he devoted the rest of his life to speaking out and working to end the slave trade.

Why don't we reach out? Why don't we build gospel bridges? We have the same problem. We don't see lost people. We don't really see that if they don't come to Christ, they'll spend eternity apart from Christ. Too often we're missing what's right outside our very doors.

I know that I can be blind and miss lost people. It's time for us to ask the Lord to open our eyes and use us to reach our community with the good news that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Will you begin praying and asking the Lord to open your eyes? Will you do it today?

Let me encourage you to do four things as we tie this up:

Pray. Pray that God will open your eyes. Pray for the lost around you. Pray for the miracle of spiritual sight.

Determine to be a Good Samaritan Christian.

Third, **Get involved** with lost people. Use the opportunities that God has already given you. Start today!

Fourth, **Celebrate** – celebrate what God has already done and what He is going to do!