

A Dream for the Church: ChurchNext

Posted by Bob Young

Introduction

Lots I want to say. Frankly, must admit, have been heavily influenced, informed in these thoughts by Dr. Prentice Meador. The points are his, the heart is mine.

Background in the church. Love the church. I remember....preachers, songs and hymns, VBS, gospel meeting, memory work... Learned to love the church.

But honestly, the church of my childhood is history. Church of today is not church of 1960s. Most know that, most recognize, times have changed. Some huge cultural shift has taken place, almost like changing of tectonic plates in earth. This cultural change has created world to shock grandparents.... I-phones, internet, global, interactive, experiential church, emergent, not dream of mission opportunities we know today...

My mother died 20 years ago this Thanksgiving—think of what she did not know, or barely knew of our world. Can preach to 100s in Guatemala, Honduras; rapid travel to almost any place in the world.

Ask fresh questions, not fear answers, no reason to fear.

Deeply love this church. Life is not always easy. Wonder if we make mistakes in life. But God confirms. Special memories, sacrifices, mission fields, love this church. Has special place in our hearts. So what say?

The Nature of the church. “Tomorrow’s church; ChurchNext.” Think about the church of future, not about yesteryear. What do I see in the future, for this church, for the church generally. Encourage you to take notes. But above all, need open hearts. All, open hearts to teaching of word of God this morning. Use our time well, serious, honest thinking.

Where should we go? The Bible. Be more biblical! To do that, some key shifts must occur. Jesus said, Mt. 9, no one sows a patch of unshrunk cloth on old garment.... Also true with wineskins. If do this right, both are preserved. Pour new wine into new wineskins, and in so doing, we preserve both.

What key shifts need to take place?

-----Move from church to Christ. I love the church, but this is not about us, not about this church. Not about us getting the credit. How often fail to cooperate because we wanted to make sure c/c got credit? How many opportunities have we missed? Make certain we get the glory, get the credit. Church of tomorrow is about Jesus, not about us. We are powerless. Power is in Jesus. Don’t talk to neighbors about the church of Christ, talk to them about Jesus. There’ll be time to talk about the church, but cannot draw people to a church. Draw people to the son of God. This is Paul, 1 Cor. 2:2. I only preach Jesus. Let Jesus be our topic. We are church that believes in Jesus. Jesus is dividing point between those that follow him and those that follow the Muslim faith. Mark my words. Jesus is the dividing point, not God, not church. Jesus. We must get this message right. Talk about Jesus, draw to Jesus. Jesus is the power, savior.

-----We must move from sect/club to community. We have rites, symbols, but have own language. Vocabulary. I can tell if you are a member of the church of Christ in 5 minutes or less. I know the words, vocabulary. I know how to talk. Know inside, rites and rituals, need to move to community. We are far too white, too unlike our world. World of future is not white. What is our message to the world? We need relationships, connections, multi-sites? How be biblical? How can it be biblical to have two bodies in one community? Who is going to minister to our community, our world. Think way outside the box, to make community as NT church did.

----Move from rules to relationships. Churches of future, small groups, goes back to late '70s, small groups all over NT, no church building, congregations meeting in house churches. Move from sectarian rules to relationships, is biblical and right.

----Move from words to images. Gutenberg, word culture. I grew up in word culture. Today, image culture, internet, Facebook, TV, etc. Live in image word, motion, story, parables are so "in". Images, word of God is a story. Tell the story of Jesus—to children, neighbors. Moving to images.

----Move from consumerism to involvement. Church of future will be participation, balance, equipping body life, personal involvement. How will you be involved? Fill this place with Hispanics, American Indians, poor, deprived... Find the folks, teach them about Jesus. Tell the story... Use this building, figure this out, how touch those God brings into our paths? Everyone must find gift and participate. Churches that cater to members to make them happy will not be here in the future. Consumerism is not the way you run a church. Not work at church.

How get there? Five principles from Bible. How get to tomorrow? How think outside box? How use different folks? How get there? Principles.

We must see God. We must hear God and answer God—we must be people of worship. We must view worship differently. Worship as whole life, not Sunday event. Rom. 12:1-2. Paul is not talking about Sunday morning assembly. Whole life is sacrifice, present self entirely, in every place. This is our priestly duty. Worship is not only Sunday event—is entire life, not conform to world, but transformed. Then will please God. Church of future must see worship differently. Not put all of eggs in Sunday basket. Change our lives, lifestyles, business, relationships, attitudes, families... That compartmentalization has cost us dearly. Built church buildings for that event, set up rules about use, debates about what can do in building. Whole thing is built on false foundation, because worship is not an event—it the entirety of your life. Relationships, families, neighbors, honesty, respect, deal with people. Worship never was a single event. Then we got all kinds of problems—Satan had us where he wanted us. Let the Bible guide us.

We must see our community--we must become involved and active. We must see the "lostness" of our community and find motivation and purpose in sharing the good news of the gospel—evangelism. The Church must live out gospel, not isolated from world. Matt 5--City on hill, salt, light. God's vision of church is to life out life in world where people can see and hear it. Not isolated, not just assembled here, develop own vocabulary, rites, rituals, live the gospel in the world. Live it out—not hunkered down in fear. Be everywhere, be in this community, talk to everyone. Church should not be in fear, unless we are isolated and sectarian. Never become merely a business—live out the gospel, relate to everyone in this town. The challenge of being the people of God is to be in the world, not of the world.

We must see our world--see beyond ourselves. We must focus on Globalization, not issues. Matt. 28:18. All nations. God's plan is to move the gospel into the world, not about our issues. What do in this auditorium? Is this an auditorium? Sanctuary? Our issues must turn God off. Not issues with him. Our job is to go into the world and preach Jesus, not merely to become debating society. Give me a church that works, and I'll show you a church that doesn't have time to debate. God not going to ask about position on anything. Matt. 25—what did you do? We don't have a position—not before God. Did you teach, baptize, then disciple, teach them to follow Jesus, did you know the promise of Christ.

We must see the possibilities of the future. We must hear God's call--leadership of future will be by influence not control [1 Thess 2]. Leadership is by influence, not power. Not by board of directors, by shepherds. Select these men—here are their characteristics. Paranoia is not a characteristic of NT shepherds. Not interesting in control, what others think, but be gentle, guide the church, shepherd with sheep. Leadership like shepherds feeding and caring; right in middle of flock. Elders not go to heaven because they made every elders' meeting, or by quality of decision making. Our guys need help, need understanding, fresh, new. But these men love the church, love the flock, have a vision. Imperfect, yes, but let's become what God is calling us to be.

We must see ministry. We must answer God's call--We must use a People-releasing process, not top-down structure. Lk. 22:22ff. Not top-down. Greatness is in service. Slavery. Release the folks in this church—find gifts, talents, be involved. Find the blessings of God in your life, give that to God. God is the source of talents, use those talents and resources to his glory, in the ministry of this church. There are needs around the world. How release people in this church to do God's work? To serve.

Take Homes

Be a church that encounters and wrestles with the Word of God. Wrestle with text, rest of life. Not true that once we have some of the text down, we have it all down. Not true. Gets deeper and deeper, fascinating, goes beyond. Not like chemistry, history, more like philosophy, not statistics, not get down the formulas. Talking about attitude. Love the text, pursue the text. Forget attitude that says this is in, this is out—no I've got it. Bible study—don't need it, got it down. Stay in the word, close to word, struggle with word, reexamine. God's word is profound, deep well to build faith.

Be a church that lets people see and experience Jesus. Have the perfect name—churches of Christ. What do we talk about? Do we talk about Jesus? Do people see us as consistent? We are about Jesus. We can do this.

Be a church that speaks the language of our world/culture. Can we talk to those around us? Know how to talk to those around us? Do you know the language of your community?

Be a church that releases Jesus to a waiting world. Look at nations where Jesus is needed, where people are receptive, where folks are listening. Go. Go to our world, go to our neighbors, go to our community. Find those interested—they are all around us.

Not be self-absorbed, talk to self, act for self, visitors pick it up. This is not for me, this is not about me. No place for the smug, prideful, isolationists. Release folks, greater vision. You are now free to spiritually move around the world! Because you are the church of Christ.