The Gift of God for the Mission of the Church

Ephesians 2:10

I **want to start this morning by reminding those of us who have been toiling together through Ephesians the MASSIVE vision that Paul is giving**. God has sent His Son into the world to sum up, to reconcile, to fill, to restore ALL THINGS that have fallen apart from the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man. 1:10 – "***as a plan for the fullness of time to unite (sum up, fill, reconcile, restore) all things – things in heaven and things on earth***." We saw then in 1:22-23 that God means to bring about this reconciliation in part through the Mission of the Church: "***and He [the Father] put all things under His feet [the Son's feet] and gave Him as HEAD over all things to the church which is His body the fullness of Him who fills all in all."***

If you've ever been to an indoor water park…you know to be very careful around the massive bucket that hangs overhead. Once that thing gets filled, it's going to dump all over everything that's underneath it. So Christ fills the church so that we may then fill all things. The church is the vehicle through which God brings this restoration, this reordering of all things here on earth. And in 3:10 we'll see that the church is also the manifold wisdom of God expressed to things in heavenly places as well. This is a MASSIVE VISION regarding the mission of God' church. Now, eventually we will, God willing, get to 4:7-13 and what we'll see there is that Christ who we've already seen as the ascended Lord ruling and reigning over all things, fills the church with spiritual gifts so that Jesus might fill all things:

> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. **8** Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he ***gave gifts to men***." **9** (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? **10** He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, ***that he might fill all things***." (4:7-10)

Notice that Christ is the one who fills all things. He has ascended, and He is doing this THROUGH the gifts of the Spirit that He gives to men, to captives. That's us brothers and sisters! We were captive, but Christ has freed us, and now fills us through bestowing to us His Spirit and Spiritual gifts.

I was talking with Brian Calendine and Tedd Melton about this yesterday, and Brian stared out the window, leaned back in his chair and said, "This is a HUGE responsibility!" HE's right! This is a massive vision for the church and for River Ridge Trevor. We will either succeed at this mission or we will be a church whose lampstand is extinguished.

Now….this is a massive vision….BUT it's accomplished piece by piece. If you've ever worked in construction before, you know that the house is built brick by brick. For quite some time the finished project isn't seen. The work can be grueling. Sometimes you may even feel like you are getting no where or that your task carrying a wheelbarrow or swinging a hammer is insignificant. Everyone has a different task, and their task may at times seem insignificant. This is a lot like church planting! A MASSIVE vision, carried out by a chair set up here. A child taken to the bathroom there. A walking of the hallways on a Sunday morning to ensure safety. A work behind the scenes on social media. A pastry set out. A greeting at the doorway. An email sent. It's so easy to begin to see these things as TRIVIAL….they are NOT TRIVIAL. They carry out the greater VISION OF CHRIST FILLING ALL THINGS THROUGH THE CHURCH.

This morning is Serve Day. We are asking for all of you today to strongly consider how you might serve within the body of Christ here at River Ridge. Some of the tasks may not ***seem*** important. They are HUGE. In a moment we will have people around you who currently oversee or serve in some function of a ministry here at River Ridge…they are going to be here to take your name down if you're interested in serving.

My job now is to show you from the Word of God that if you are "in Christ", meaning, if you are born again, a follower of Jesus, God has entrusted you with three things to serve the Church and the Churches Mission here on earth, more specifically, here at River Ridge if you call this church your church home: God has given to each of you: "time", "treasures", and "talents".

First, God has given you *time*. Your time is no longer yours…it never really was. Your time is the Lord's. You are living on borrowed time. Paul constantly refers to himself as the "prisoner of the Lord". If you go to any prison and ask the prisoner who directs their time…they will tell you, "The warden directs my time." Praise God that we are prisoners OF THE LORD and not of a warden!

James is very clear that we ought to not boast in making our own plans without first consulting God:

> **Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— [14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. (Jam. 4:13-15)**

We should not boast in the plans that we make, as though we are the ones in control of our time. Instead, we should consult the Lord with all our plans. Proverbs 3:5-6, a very popular verse, says:

> **Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Prov. 3:5-6)**

In all your ways, acknowledge God. ***God what do you think about what I'm doing, where I'm going, what I'm watching, listening to, and what I'm doing with my time that is a gift from you***.

Now there are many here at River Ridge that have sacrificially devoted their time to the work of God through this church. My heart is filled with joy regarding the way they have sacrificially devoted themselves to the work of the ministry here at River Ridge. I want to get ***very practical and specific*** here so that we're clear as to what we're asking. The goal is to have everyone serve here at this church at least one Sunday a month. That's our goal. As it is now…and we knew it would be this way initially…we have people that are getting up very early and serving here at the church 2,3, in some cases every week. These people are the backbone of this church! I love every one of them dearly. But we have a small group of people doing most if not all of the work. ***I just want you to hear that because this can become a real problem if we don't honor people's time well and overwork them.***

You DO NOT COME here first and foremost to SERVE…you come here FIRST AND FOREMOST to receive! We don't NEED ANYTHING from you…we want to GIVE TO YOU! Come here every Sunday HUNGRY, THIRSTY for more of God. We want to spread a banquet before you where your time is well spent as you feed on the Lord. However, the Bible gives the principle that each should bear the load. Everyone should have a wheelbarrow in hand at times. There is an easy solution to this, but it will take

all of us to band together and serve together. ***God has given you time, He will hold you accountable to how you use it.***

Second, God has given you *treasures*. Your money also is no longer yours. Neither is mine! It has been entrusted to us by God and the Bible is clear that we are to be stewards over it. Paul tells us that everything we have received is from God so we should not boast about anything we've been given, and that includes money. In 1 Corinthians 4:7 we read:

What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor. 4:7)

Everything we have is from the Lord! Life, work, health, and the money we earn. The idea of J.G. Wentworth, "It's your money, use it when you need it", is only half of the story. It's really God's money isn't it? ***Now again, I want to be very specific and practical here***. This church would not be here and would not be able to function were it not for the faithful giving of God's people. River Ridge is not a denomination that receives money from some outside source. This church plant is being funded by the faithful giving that we receive and that Spring Grove receives on any given Sunday. By the way, I LOVE that we are doing it this way because we don't have the strain and challenges of a denominational structure that can at any moment begin to embrace or teach anything that is unbiblical. I just spoke with a brother at the wedding I officiated this last week in California and his heart is broken as he is forced to leave the denomination he is a part of because they are now embracing same sex marriage and the LGBTQ agenda.

We have our doctrine, we have a board of elders that are totally united about our doctrine, they oversee Kerry and I and hold us accountable to that doctrine, and we are free to teach what Scripture teaches unhindered from the worry of a denomination that can change its views and be tossed to and fro.

However, because we don't have the denominational structure, we depend solely upon the giving of the people of this church. Which I ALSO LOVE! This is the way the early church was! One of the things that excited me about doing a church plant is watching God build something from the ground up…a project of faith! This is how the early church operated. When there was need that arose within the church, Paul and the apostles would entreat the churches they planted to give! There was sacrificial giving, there was a sharing of resources, there was an understanding that all of the giving was going to the work of the Lord…and the church flourished!

It's not MY church or Kerry's church! I know NOTHING about what any of you give and that will remain the case. The church will be built as God sees fit. This is between you and God, but it is my job as your pastor to teach faithfully what the Bible says about giving!

All throughout the Scriptures we see that God's work here on earth is supported by the faithful and regular giving of God's people. There is a principle of "firstfruits" that is consistent throughout the Scriptures. In Proverbs 3:9 we read:

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your increase. (Prov. 3:9)

Whatever you earn, you immediately give a portion of that to the Lord's work. Our family has decided an amount that is withdrawn immediately upon receiving my check…because even though I'm a

pastor of this church, first and foremost I belong to this church just as many of you do. The NT teaches that the amount is something that you give "willingly" and "cheerfully" and "regularly". Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

> **whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:6-7)**

When you give regularly, willingly, not being forced, but cheerfully, God will cause you to reap bountifully. He will pour out more grace SO THAT you can give more graciously. In this way, we become a conduit of the resources that God gives to us! May the Lord direct you and your family as to how to obey the Lord in this way. I trust in the Lord to provide for HIS church!

Third, God has given you *talents* or gifts.

((Open the gift))

Have you ever opened a gift that had multiple gifts in it? You begin to pull out gift after gift and what do you do when you get to the bottom of the package? You run your hands around the bottom, you turn it upside down, you shake it to make sure you got everything that was hidden inside. You don't want to miss anything that is included in the gift!

Paul, in the book of Ephesians, has been speaking about the gift of God. He uses a phrase in Ephesians over and over to describe the gift – "In Christ Jesus". When you put your faith in Jesus, you receive Jesus as a gift, and all that is IN CHRIST JESUS is now yours as you have surrendered to Him. The gift can only be received by faith, and it is solely a gift of grace – God's divine favor that we do not deserve. But…it's important to know what's included inside the gift!

> **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us <u>IN CHRIST</u> with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3)**

Let's take a moment now to think back on what Paul has told us that we receive IN CHRIST JESUS.

You are chosen. "He [the Father] chose us **<u>in Him</u>** [Jesus] to be holy and blameless before Him." (Eph. 1:4).

You are adopted. "In love He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons **<u>through Jesus Christ</u>**" (Eph. 1:5).

You are Redeemed. "**<u>In Him</u>** we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph. 1:7).

You have been given Revelation. "making known to us the mystery of His will….which He set forth **<u>in Christ</u>**" (Eph. 1:9).

You are Inherited. "**<u>In Him</u>** we have obtained an inheritance" (Eph. 1:11).

You are Sealed. **"<u>In Him</u>** you also….were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." (Eph. 1:13-14).

You are Regenerated. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together **with Christ** – by grace you have been saved." (Eph. 2:4-5).

Now…one more gift for us to open from Ephesians this morning…

You are Created for Good Works. "For we are His workmanship, created **in Christ Jesus** for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10). Notice how Paul is arguing for good works here…If you are IN CHRIST JESUS, good works are a part of the gift! You are created in Christ Jesus for good works!

Works do not dispense the gift, but works are indispensable to the gift. Works are unnecessary to receive the gift, but works are necessarily included with the gift received. Works are not a prerequisite to the gift, but works are requisite to the gift! The essence of salvation by grace alone is ruined if we add works – grace is no longer grace (Rom. 11:6). Works do not earn the gift, but they are included within the gift.

Notice that Paul says you are "his workmanship" and that God has "prepared beforehand" works that you are to walk in. These "works" are done within the church as well as outside of the church, but they are for the mission of God here on earth. These works are the expression within and through the body of Christ of Christ filling all things through the vehicle of the body of Christ.

Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 12:27:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor. 12:27)

Paul goes on to speak of the different spiritual gifts that God has given to each member and how we are to use those gifts within the body of Christ. To receive the gift of God, Jesus, is to receive the gifts of God through His Spirit! ***God means for you to use those gifts within the church to work and be a part of His greater Mission in the world.***

You should know what your spiritual gift is. Mine are Teaching, Shepherding, and Evangelism. I sense God working through me in a special way when I attend to this work. I am to be devoted to the word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4). ***I cannot and ought not do the work that God is calling you to do***. Now Tom Moon CLEARLY has the gift of "helps". It comes very natural to him and he's good at it! Tom would HATE to get up here and preach a message to you…but you can't stop him from serving with his hands. My wife has the gift of hospitality and administration…she loves to serve people, have people in our home, and she LOVES to do spreadsheets…WEIRD! What do you love to do? What problems do you see in the church…that could be something that God calls you to resolve!

There are two types of Christians…those who see a problem and set out to be a part of the solution, and those who are birdogs. **Don't be a birddog** – pointing your finger at the problem waiting for someone else to solve it.

God has given us a Massive vision for this church. This church will be what we make of it together. IT's God's church, He will build it. We're praying for God to raise up people that are filled with the Spirit and gifted by the Spirit to serve alongside of us in this Mission to spread the glory of God in this region of the world and beyond. PRAY

Closing Charge – Serve Day

As you leave this morning, there are people around you who are ready to serve you and let you know about the different ways you can serve the mission of God in this church. Maybe you don't know where to start…just start somewhere. God will guide you.

May the Lord guide you now as to how you use your time, talents, and treasures to serve Him!

Now receive the benediction

Benediction – May "God…make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." (2 Cor. 9:8)