

## **“What We Really Want”**

Luke 4:1-13

February 21, 2010, 9 am

Take a moment and think about what you really want in life. Think about the things you really need to do, to obtain, to accomplish in this lifetime for you to be able to look back in your old age and say, “I did everything I wanted to do. I have lived an amazing life.” For some of you, it might be the ability to retire early. For others, it is gain the respect of your peers.

I always wanted to make a difference in the world – I managed to do that in biomedical engineering through a research project that has eliminated a surgery that was pointless and damaging. But I’m still here so I have new goals, and new dreams.

But what makes us a Christian is not what those goals and dreams are, nor is it if we are able to accomplish them all or not. No, what makes us a Christian is our desire to dream God’s dreams and make His goals our goals. We have to sublimate ourselves and lift up our Lord instead. As John the Baptist once said, “I must decrease so that He might increase.”

The challenge for the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a simple one, though: Christian attendance and membership is decreasing in America. It is on the rise in Africa and China, but in the West, people are leaving the church. And so we start to try to figure out what is wrong.

Some churches fire their ministers. Others give them longer tenures so that they can work out their visions. Some change their worship style. Others put out webcasts of their services. One very trendy church had “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” type buttons on all their pews so the congregation could answer polls instantaneously during a sermon. Traditional churches are selling their property and building ultra modern facilities without stained glass and organs but with video projectors and amazing sound systems. We are doing everything the modern world is suggesting – reading business and secular leadership texts to divine their secrets. And we are praying that things change. All for the glory of God.

But we don’t read the Bible. The Bible says we are to go out. The Bible says we are to invite, to share, to witness, to love. The church says come in, the seats are nice and comfortable. The music is pleasant. The sermon is non-threatening. Our theology is quite accepting. We want to accommodate you.

Even listen to reasons people have for leaving our church: I’m not being fed. I didn’t feel comfortable. I was looking for a contemporary service that I could remain anonymous in.

The church has become another consumer driven business. We are fighting for a small group of believers who bounce from church to church looking for something. And we are desperately trying to be that church.

But Christ said no. **YOU ARE THE CHURCH.** Not this building, not the preacher, no the choir, not this physical address, but all of us collectively are the church. And our job is not to fight over believers, but to reach out to the unbelievers. This is the dream of God for His church: that we would bring all the lost sheep back to Him. That we wouldn’t measure our growth or our

attendance but would seek how many lost had been found, and find where the lost were and go to them.

So many of our vision sessions are about trying to get people here, but that is absolutely unbiblical. It's not there. Why do we want to do this? We have been tempted with being lazy. And we as a church – not just us, but most every church in America – have succumb to the temptation. Evangelism is about bringing people here. It is about spectacle. Jesus said go out. We say, no, God, you bring them here.

My son, Mills, has a bad habit of climbing on things lately. And I have a bad habit of playing this computer game called "Age of Empires". And I will see him trying to climb a book shelf, and will say, "Mills!" And he will look at me, smile, and go back to climbing. I will say, "Mills, No! Come here." All the while, I'm playing my game. He ignores me completely. In order to get him off the shelf, I have to get up from my game, and walk over and tell him no. Then he gets it. Mills isn't disobedient – he just has no reason to really believe me when I tell him no if I'm not willing to move. He is slowly learning to believe that he will be trouble if I tell him no and he keeps doing it, but he isn't there yet. But I can yell all day from the sofa or the computer and it won't do much good. I have to go to him.

The world is no different.

Satan said to Jesus, "I have a short cut for you. You want the world to love you – I can make that happen. Just worship me, and they will worship you. You won't have to go through pain, you won't have to be rejected, you won't have to die. This is easy."

I'm not saying the church worships Satan. I am saying we have been tempted with an easy way that is totally ineffective. We as a church rarely have events out in the public. What things we do in the public eye are usually done by a small group of people, not nearly the 1300 members of our church – more like 13!

We have to think about have we been tempted to do nothing and then blame the pastors, blame the Methodist Church, blame the membership committee, blame the evangelism committee, blame the greeters and ushers, blame everyone who we can think of – or are we ready to do things differently?

We all have dreams for ourselves. We all know basically how to make those dreams a reality. The only thing in our way of making them happen is ourselves.

We all know God's dream for His church. We may even know how God wants to use each one of us to make that dream happen. But are we doing His will? Are we seeking to make His dream a reality? Or are we looking at every church around us hoping to find an easier way, a better way, so that we have to do virtually nothing at all? That we don't have to suffer any pain, any rejection, any work at all.

What makes us a Christian is dreaming God's dream and seeking to make them a reality. Anyone can dream big. Not everyone can make dreams real. God can do that. God can use us to do that. But do we really want that? Are we prepared to do His will? Or have we just succumbed to temptation?