

*Treasuring Christ*  
April 25, 2021

Introducing the new Mission Statement to Byron Baptist Church

Every single person I know from Byron Baptist Church wants to see the Great Commission more greatly fulfilled in our city in our lifetime. Today, I want to use this sermon to teach one verse from Jesus and unpack what it looks like in our church as we seek to glorify God and share his good news.

I did not come in with a mission statement or a lot of vision talk because I wanted to get to know our church and our community. The staff and I kicked around ideas for a while before I took this statement to the deacons for their consideration and buy-in. Here's the statement: Treasuring Christ in worship, discipleship, and service.

That's it. If we treasure Christ above all and particularly treasure him in these three areas, I believe we will experience the joy and growth he intends, personally and collectively, in his kingdom work. Maybe we won't, but I can more confidently say that no one who has lived in the last 1,900 years has regretted treasuring Christ, worshiping him, engaging in discipleship for his name, or serving in his kingdom.

With that in mind, I would invite you, if you are able and willing, to please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word.

*Matthew 13:44: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

This is God's Word. Let us pray.

Why does our mission statement start out with the idea of treasuring Christ? As it turns out, Jesus talked a lot about money during his teaching ministry. The treasure principle captures well how a person should respond to the news that God himself took on flesh, dwelt among us, lived a perfect life, died in place of sinners, and proved his work satisfied the just wrath of God by getting out of the grave and appearing to more than 500 witnesses before returning to the right hand of God the Father. The kingdom of heaven is more than just Jesus coming to earth, but he is the greatest manifestation of it.

Matthew recorded Jesus' thoughts on investing in treasure this way in Matthew 6:19-21:

*<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves*

*do not break in and steal.* <sup>21</sup> *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Treasuring things in this life leads to loss. We all know it, we have heard the jokes, you know, like how there is no uHaul behind a hearse. Jesus compels us to invest in the next life. Yet, we all know it is hard to tell our flesh no and our future yes – especially when we are talking about things we cannot see – things that require faith. Yet, Jesus comes at us with those hard words: *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

We want to respond rightly to Jesus' words. So, where is your heart?

The kingdom of heaven brings the reality of the inevitable judgment of God. That's why John and Jesus both compelled people to repent. Far from a negative message, this call to repentance brought with it the invitation to be saved from the coming destruction of the world we know.

Jesus went further than John's message when he highlighted the already and not yet nature of the kingdom. You see, when Jesus started his public ministry, it became increasingly clear that the long-promised King had come. Yet, he did not fulfill all that the prophets had foretold regarding the future of Israel and the new creation.

Rather, the King's work had just begun. His healing ministry was part of the first fruit of the kingdom's inauguration. His resurrection was a significant first fruit along with his sending the Holy Spirit. The call on humanity was to respond to the rightful king by abiding in and living for his kingdom.

He likens his kingdom to treasure in a field. This person stumbles across the treasure, perhaps out for a walk, perhaps working for an employer, but when this person comes across this treasure, his right response is to joyfully sell everything that he owns in order to acquire the funds to buy the field. Buying the field gives him the opportunity to become the rightful owner of the treasure.

But before we consider this treasure further, let's consider why the kingdom of heaven is worth so much. There is an array of people in this room who have varying perspectives on just how valuable this treasure is. If you see the kingdom of heaven as of little to moderate value, I want to tell you this morning it is because you have not considered the holiness and glory of God rightly, or, at least, lately.

You see, the kingdom of heaven (which is Matthew's terminology writing to Jews, Mark and Luke refer to it as the kingdom of God, it is the same thing) represents God coming to earth to reign. Remember John the Baptist's message? He called people to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He was the forerunner to the Messiah's appearance. But God coming to earth in the flesh to reconcile sinners to himself is only good news if you appreciate the difference between a holy God and a sinful man.

The Scriptures tell of God's holiness. In Isaiah 6, we find these flaming creatures crying out in God's presence: "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." In Revelation 4, we find these four living creatures with six wings and eyes around and within, never – day or night – ceasing to say "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." This holiness is an exclusive claim as we see in 1 Samuel 2:2, "There is no one holy like the LORD, indeed, there is no one besides you, nor is there any rock like our God."

The problem of his holiness for us becomes clear when we realize that he is a righteous judge and we have messed up. Habakkuk 1:13 puts it this way: "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?" Oh friends, this righteous one will not sit idly by forever. A day of reckoning comes upon man's inevitable death.

And that is why we should treasure this good news that Jesus has come – that the kingdom of heaven has broken into earth. That there is coming a day with no more sin and pain, no more war and terror, no more rape and injustice, no more miscarriages and strife. There is coming a day where the Devil will meet his demise, where he will no longer be able to kill and steal and destroy.

And when we realize this kingdom has come, the only right response is to sell all that we have – our popularity, our pride, our power, our possessions, our time, our preferences, our talents, our money, and whatever else presents itself – so that we might be more heavily invested in the greatest news – the greatest reality – that his world could ever hope to know. Even now as Jesus reigns from the right hand of the Father, we join his kingdom work. We proclaim his good news.

God and sinners reconciled. Innocent blood spilt for the guilty. Enemies of God made children. The hopeless brought everlasting hope. The lonely invited into perfect fellowship. The rejecting creation becoming the accepted, blood-bought, redeemed. You see, the coming of a kingdom implies that there is a king. It is high treason to reject the good rule of a good king.

That means the King will deal with the gangs in the big cities, the slave traders in Europe, the terrorists around the world, the corrupt politicians, and it means that he will deal with you if you reject his good gift of a relationship through his sacrifice.

The good king has come. Buying into his kingdom is like finding a treasure that would seal your financial future – and yet this treasure does immeasurably more.

Think with me for a moment what it would be like to realize there is a buried treasure in a field. How deep must your hands feel into it to know it is worth it? How impressive must this King show himself to convince you to trust him?

Are you in a place to joyfully sell whatever the American dream has offered you so that you might enjoy the eternal peace, joy, love, and relationship that Jesus has offered you? Are you in a place to joyfully sell comfort and bear your cross, deny yourself, and join Jesus in his kingdom work in a secular world – his battle of light against darkness?

Treasuring Christ affects your calendar. Some of you need to delete things for the kingdom and others of you need to add kingdom efforts to your calendar. It affects the amount of sleep you get. It affects your money and your popularity too. Students, it means you will be less popular for the sake of the kingdom because of activities you excuse yourself from as well as because you befriend the friendless.

It is going to cost you everything. I do not mean I am about to shake you down for all your money. I mean we need to hold everything loosely. There should be nothing in our lives that is off-limits if the Lord asks for it. That is treasuring Christ and his kingdom.

Now, that we have considered why we might treasure Christ, let us turn our attention to these three key corporate areas to treasure him as a church in the years to come. We want to be: Treasuring Christ in worship, discipleship, and service.

At Byron Baptist we want to treasure Christ in our worship. We want to do this both on a personal level and a corporate level. In our personal life, this means selling some things. It means selling time on our phone or in front of the TV. It might mean selling some sleep. It is telling God that the worship he is worthy of – that worship which he will receive for all eternity – is a better investment than the pleasures of this life.

I am not telling you to seek zero pleasures, but I am telling you to make priority that which ultimately matters. You and I can make 100 excuses – we are really good at that, well I am just tired tonight – but that’s one of the many benefits of gathering weekly with God’s people. You know you are prone to sin – prone to seeking short-term pleasures. We are here week after week to remind each other that there is a holy God in heaven and he is worthy of turning the TV off and going to worship him and/ or going to bed so that you can rise early and worship him before the distractions of the day hit.

But we also want to worship him corporately. I want to briefly give you 4 ways to do that:

- 1) Be here. Sell the Sunday fun-day plans. I am not telling you that you can never have other plans on a Sunday, but King Jesus, the work of his kingdom, and the worship of this great God demands our regular, expectant attendance when his people gather to give him the praise he is

- due. Treasure Christ's kingdom by aligning your calendar to be a part of his body gathering to worship a meager one day in seven.
- 2) Sing. Sell your pride. Sell your preferences. Sell the fear that someone may see or hear you and think less of you. The sum total of all the opinions out there that matters is One. Your Maker is worthy of your joyful noise. And he is worthy whether you like the song or not. We seek to sing songs that reflect a diverse range of preferences in this room. We do that on purpose. I can assure you we could soon gather more people on this campus each Sunday if we split our people into two services and tried to appease different groups in different styles. But wouldn't that be a shame to split this local body of Christ into two? Senior adult, he wants you to love these crazy millennials well by singing songs to his glory that they like. Crazy millennial, teenagers, he wants you to love these senior adults well by singing songs they love well for his glory. The body of Christ is incomplete and less beautiful when we divide it up unnecessarily. Let me assure you, when every tongue gathers around the throne, there will not be a small subset of worship songs to be sung. Sell your pride and preferences. Sing.
  - 3) Pray. I know I pray for a long time in the pastoral prayer. I know it is not a hot church-growth technique. I also know it is the longest some of you spend in focused prayer all week. We are coming before the Lord seeking to have him be praised, seeking to confess our sin, giving him our thanksgiving, and seeking for him to intervene in our broken world together as a family. What if God answered those prayers? What if you committed to pray throughout the service that God would be lifted up and that hearts would be changed?
  - 4) Engage and Recharge. When we read the Word, pray the Word, sing the Word, or when we explain the Word: engage it. God's Word gives life. God, by his Spirit, uses the Word to answer those hard questions you have in the week. Sell the temptation to worry about the rest of your week. Engage the Living God for 75 or so minutes each Sunday and let him recharge you to send you out for his kingdom work. He will not send you ill-equipped, but you will need to lean in.

I have one more comment on worship before we move on. What if you just do not have a desire to worship – no desire to lean in? That's all the more reason to pray and fight to focus because it means you are not thinking about this Holy God and his glorious kingdom. We all tend to stray. One of God's glorious remedies is that he established that one day in seven his people stop all that they are doing and be refreshed in his goodness, worth, and love. If you are not feeling it, confess it to him and ask him for help. He is able! He is worthy!

We also seek to treasure Christ together in discipleship. We all know that Jesus' final command was to go into all the nations and make disciples of him. While our very presence here today is a testament to the great success of the Great Commission, we all walk around with low to medium levels of guilt because we do not feel like we are doing enough towards the Great Commission.

Now, we participate in his work when we give to the church or directly to missions' organizations, but we all know we need and want to be directly involved in the fulfillment. I have told you before, my working definition of discipleship is doing intentional, spiritual good to one another. Discipleship is taking personal responsibility for another person's soul's health. As we heard from Pastor Brad a couple of weeks ago, it is fulfilling Jesus' command to Peter to "feed his sheep."

I want us to consider two ways to treasure Christ in discipleship as members of Byron Baptist.

- 1) The command in the Great Commission that we baptize implies the clear need for evangelism. We have to sell our comfort to buy into this part of the kingdom work. We have to sell worrying about rejection. We have to buy the opinion of the One whose opinion matters.

We are about to restart our presence in the park. You'll have ample opportunities to go with others and get comfortable asking people how you can pray for them or asking them if they think they will go to heaven. These questions open doors to offer hope to people – and you know they exist – who are walking around hopeless in this world.

It means interruptions to your calendar. Yet, there's also a beauty to going with another brother or sister and getting to know people as you seek together to share the most important news in the entire world.

That being said, should the Lord grant us fruit from our evangelism, we will not be prepared unless we have people right here in our own midst who are growing in holiness, knowledge and faith.

- 2) So, the second aspect of treasuring Christ in discipleship is that we are expecting spiritual growth. How many of you feel confident to be handed a new Christian and be responsible for their early years of spiritual maturity?

My great concern in my first 14 months here is that very few feel confident in your ability to train a new believer to walk with Jesus. Well, let's think for a minute about the difference in what I and my staff can accomplish in training new believers and what 40 of us in this room could accomplish. One of the foundational beliefs of my ministry is that the church is not about me. I cannot accomplish what I want to accomplish. I certainly cannot, on my own, accomplish what God would have for Byron Baptist Church. Hear God's plan for my work as pastor from Ephesians 4:11-16:

*<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Do you see? Christ himself gifted the church with leaders to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. It is my job to push you towards growth that enables you to help others grow – to do intentional spiritual good to others – to take personal responsibility for their soul growth.

If that's not you today, I am asking you to sell the old way. I am not telling you to quit Sunday school, prayer meeting, outside Bible studies or anything else. But, if you have been doing these things for 5 years and you are not yet ready to walk alongside a new believer then most graciously hear me say: your personal plan is not working.

Friends, you want to be a part of seeing the city of Byron changed for the glory of God? Do not stay put. Be bold enough to tell me or fill out the form I will send this week that says you want to be on a spiritual growth trajectory that enables you to help others grow.

You are responsible before a Holy God to grow in his grace. Yet, we are also responsible to help others grow. Here's the reality – it is not that we have necessarily been doing church wrong for the past Century, but rather times have changed. People have no biblical literacy. Sin and temptation is everywhere. The country has moved from warm to Christianity to borderline belligerent.

What I need you to recognize today is that every new convert to Christianity will require many hours of intentional, spiritual work to help them re-form from a secular world view to a Christian world view.

Think about their views on sex, money, importance, parenting, self-worth, ambition, integrity, and on and on. We need to expect growth in ourselves so that we are daily being equipped to lovingly lead one another along in the discipleship journey.

Sell your complacency. That's the only requirement. You don't have to be a Sunday school teacher to be a disciple maker. You need to be hungry for the kingdom's work. Buy in to the hard work of holiness and growth.

Finally, this morning, I want us to consider briefly what treasuring Christ in service looks like at Byron Baptist Church. The ultimate example of selling comfort and joyfully buying the opportunity to serve comes from our Lord Jesus himself. In Mark 10, the Apostles James and John demonstrate their poor understanding of the kingdom of heaven when they ask Jesus to be able to sit on his right and his left when he enters his glory. Jesus teaches them that his kingdom is not like other kingdoms. He famously says in 10:45:

*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

If Jesus left the glory of heaven to serve and ransom his life, how must that impact the way we view opportunities to serve in his Church?

Now, I know that areas of service are a strong-suit of this church. I want to commend the dozens of you who kept this church afloat during the past decade and then most of you stepped your service game up in this pandemic as several of you have multiple responsibilities every week. Praise the Lord that you know how to serve.

The concern is if we are effective in the evangelism and discipleship I mentioned above, we are going to need even more servants. Now, those new converts should and will become servants, but new people do not start serving day one. Let me give you an example.

When I go play pick-up basketball or go to North Peach Park hoping to share the Good News of Jesus with someone, I pray that the Lord might send us the hurting, the broken, those who need and are ready to hear his Good News. But what happens when God answers that prayer? What happens if we find a single Mom with 4 kids and 2 of which have severe disabilities? It means we need 2-3 more volunteers in our children's ministry every Sunday and Wednesday. It means we need someone to invest in this woman's soul. It likely means some physical needs will need to be met along the way.

Do you see the beauty of the work? Remember Ephesians 4? The saints are equipped, led by a good example in the shepherds, to build up the body, to protect the sheep from false doctrine, to speak the truth in love, and Paul says in verse 16 all this: *makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Our Great Commission is to tell them the Good News, baptize them, and - the most forgotten part - teach them all that Jesus has commanded. It is a journey. It requires people willing to go to the park. It requires people giving money to fund ministry. It requires greeters at doors, people checking families in at the desk,



nursery workers, hallway volunteers, teachers, ushers, musicians, sound tech people, building maintenance volunteers, small group leaders, kitchen workers, and people willing to do all the random, unseen tasks along the way.

The call is to sell your energy, sell some of your flexibility and set your sights on service even as you set your sights on the great servant, Jesus himself. The danger is that some of you see service as your primary relationship to God. Even as I beg now for people to sign up to serve, I am aware that some of you need to slow down.

I do not know what faithfulness looks like for any single person in this room. But I know God by his Spirit will guide you if you ask him. I know, with Paul from Philippians 4:19 that: *my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus*. Ask him. He loves you. Jesus himself knows what it is to serve and still maintain vitality of soul and body.

I would like to close this morning with a few thoughts to tie these ideas together.

The reality is that there is more work to be done in this church and in this community than we could imagine possible. There are untold hours of work just to work through the sin patterns and problems in this room right now if half of us were honest and willing to seek help. And that's before we ever begin to tackle the sin problems of our surrounding community.

And yet, the kingdom of heaven is near. The king has come. His good news is still traveling to the far reaches of the earth. It is saving sinners every day. We look forward to the final fulfillment when he comes again, but, in the meantime, we keep on working.

We work hard to treasure his kingdom. We work hard to see where we are buying what this world is selling and we repent and buy more of his lasting work and worth.

We sell all the things that prevent us from enjoying our Maker when his people gather to worship. If we do not win another soul for five years, we will continue to gather and lift our voices because he is worthy.

If your discipleship efforts seem to fall flat on their face, we will continue to grow as his disciples because the godliness and faith we grow in will pay off for billions of years. We will continue to sell sin and buy his way in his world because we know that the wages of sin is death.

We will serve because Jesus served. If it was a good enough way for the Creator to live, it will be good enough for us.

So, friends, tomorrow I will send out a link that will give you an opportunity to check boxes in a form so that I may know who wants to play particular roles in treasuring Christ here. I know many of you treasure Christ in countless roles

already, but this is one more opportunity to make sure that you are telling Jesus he is your supreme treasure.

Some of you do not need to wait until tomorrow. If you are weary from making excuses in your worship, discipleship, and service, then you can respond in just a minute in your pew, at these steps, or with me in the front in committing yourself to treasuring Christ in every area of your life.

And if you came in here today and were not trusting in this Jesus as your only means of salvation – if you did not realize that he came to serve and to ransom his life for sinners – if you did not realize that God in heaven is immeasurably holy and that you need to accept the holy sacrifice of God's own Son in your place, then you, friend, can do that right now. Your sin simply confirms your need for a Savior. Come talk with me and we can discuss together this Savior of sinners.