

Renewing a Vision for Shoreline Part 4 - Expanding the Kingdom of Christ

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Date: 23 November 2025

Preacher: Mike Loosa

[0:00] Hear the words of this liturgy. O Christ, exalted Prince of Heaven, O Christ, radiant King of Earth,! Your glories are everlasting.

! You are the living head of your body, the divine bridegroom of your church. You are the desire of all nations. You hold authority over death and life, over all peoples and kingdoms. Over all principalities and powers. All creation is your inheritance. You are the fullness that fills all in all. Through you all things were created, and by your redeeming works all things will be made new. All glory and power are yours, O Christ. You lack nothing. Indeed, you do not even need us, O Lord. You do not need your children, and yet you call us.

And calling us, you choose to labor in and among us. Accomplish your holy purposes through a most unlikely people. Who are we that you have chosen us to bear your name, O Christ?

[1:13] Who are we that you have invited us to serve as your hands and feet, co-laboring with you unto the quiet increase of your eternal kingdom? Apart from you, we have nothing to offer but our weakness and our insufficiency.

Yet when we bring these things to you, you delight in using our poverty to display your riches of grace, and our weakness to display your great strength.

For this we give you praise. Apart from you, we can do nothing. We prove this over and over. But when we abide in you and draw our life from you, we become as flourishing branches, nourished by your roots, coursing with your life, bearing much good fruit.

So let it be, Lord, in our lives and in our church. Good morning, everybody, once again.

I'm Matt. I'm happy to be a member of this church. And just wanted to share these things in our Life of the Church segment.

[2:30] If you're new here, please look at the back table and out front for resources and a way to get connected. We'd be happy to get to know you more.

Well, this week in the email, there was something sent out with regards to Thanksgiving, which we know is this Thursday. And if you would like to join another family for the holiday, reach out to one of us, one of the elders, or Christina, or respond to the church email.

If you would be willing to host someone, or if you're looking for somewhere to stay on Thanksgiving Day, please reach out. We thought this could be a neat way to embody what it looks like to meet needs of others and to care and love for others who might not have family or folks to be with on holiday.

So please take someone up on this opportunity, or please agree to host, if you're willing, and enjoy rich times of fellowship and thanking the Lord for his blessings to us together with folks from this church.

Now, once there have been folks reaching out to host or wanting to attend, Christina et al. will match the guests and find a place for people to go and to host.

[3:57] Well, this Sunday is the first Sunday that the Spivey family will celebrate their new child.

It was, yeah. Born on Tuesday, the 18th, Judah, Kyle, Spivey, was born.

Mom and baby are doing well. And the Spiveys are, quote, thankful for the beautiful provision of the Lord for his church and our prayers.

Stay tuned for details about providing meals for the Spiveys. Just two other things. Our congregational meeting December 7th is coming up quickly.

That's in two Sundays. Following the service, there's food provided. And we're going to vote on Jim Gancar's deacon nomination and have a family dialogue about the elders' vision.

[4:58] as we've seen these last few weeks during our time on Sundays and also a position paper on child baptism that we will be sending out very soon this week.

And some other details about the meeting will be included in an email. Finally, Dave and Lisa Ferris are being recommended for membership here at Shoreline and will be a, yeah.

they'll be affirmed during the Sunday service on 1214. They are a fun family with plenty of energy.

So, please meet them and get to know them and reach out to an elder if you have concern. With that, I'm going to send off those going to Shoreline Kids from age one year to second grade.

And those that remain, please pray with me. Heavenly Father, out of the abundance of your love,

you have created us, male and female, to point to you and your glory in all that we do.

[6:15] Our reason for existence is to exalt you. Yet, we confess our sin, failing to uphold our life's purpose time and time again, failing to live in ways that honor you, choosing to worship and submit to our desires, serving and devoting ourselves to created things rather than you, the creator.

From the depths of death and destruction, you have, by your generous outpouring of grace and mercy, which we do not deserve, given us opportunity to redeem the relationship that we have broken through faith in Christ, the King of kings.

Thank you, Lord, that through Christ's sacrifice, our debt is paid. Once and for all, having defeated death and raising from the dead, Christ has secured us in and on himself, the unshakable foundation, our fortress.

We now will never be subject to the spiritual death and eternal separation that we sinners rightly deserve.

We praise you that your forgiveness is adequate and our being adopted into your family is once and for all. I pray that today, as other local churches preach the same glorious truth, that the souls of sinners will drink from your fountain of grace.

[7:57] I pray that the redeemed will experience afresh these truths that ground their faith. I ask this for Community Baptist Church Groton Heights Baptist Church and Gallup Hill in particular and other local churches, other local brothers and sisters and gospel preaching fellowships.

Would your Holy Spirit soften and transform the hearts of the believers in our local area? That the testimony of those that we live, work, and interact with would be to the praise of your name and the truth of your goodness.

Christ, would you be our song and our greatest treasure? Now, as we turn to the preaching of your Holy Scripture, we petition you for insight and knowledge, for wisdom and desire to heed what we hear and allow it to transform our lives.

Would you work through your servant, Mike, for your glory and pleasure and for our good. Amen. Good morning.

Good morning. Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 67. If you need a Bible, there are some on the back table.

[9:33] You're welcome to take one and keep it as our gift. Okay. That's good. You all can hear me?

Psalm 67. To the choir master with stringed instruments, a psalm, a song. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us.

That your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the people praise you, O God. Let the people praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.

For you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God. Let the peoples praise you. The earth is yield its increase.

God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us. Let all the ends of the earth fear him. This is the word of the Lord.

[10:36] Thank you, God. Heavenly Father, we make this psalm our prayer this morning.

Father, would you be gracious to us and bless us, Lord. Would you make your face to shine upon us. And God, we know that that prayer is already true.

That you have blessed us in Christ beyond anything that we could conceive or imagine. And God, would you bless us that your way may be known on the earth.

That your saving power would be known among the nations. That the nations would experience the joy, the goodness, the peace, the everlasting hope of belonging to the family of God.

Father, would you speak to us now through your word for our good, for the good of the nations, and for your glory. In Jesus' name we pray.

[11:44] Amen. Good morning, church. My name is Mike, one of the pastors here at Shoreline. And so good to be here with you guys this morning. There were handouts on your way in.

If anyone didn't get a handout, they're on the back table still. So feel free to take one and snag one of those. I don't know, you know, if you're here visiting or just even if you've been here for a long time, I don't know, you know, your background of what church is to be like when you come in here. But some people think of the church as a bunch of individual matches that have been set aflame and then scattered throughout the community. And the problem is that a match is weak.

The slightest breeze or drop of rain can put out that fire. You know, we think here that a healthy local church should be more like a raging bonfire.

I love bonfires. You know, when a bonfire is strong and it's going, the wind could blow, but the bonfire just roars back even louder and fuller.

[12:53] The rain might fall, but the bonfire hardly even notices. And, you know, there may be sticks or logs on the outskirts of the bonfire that are fizzling out, but when those sticks or logs are brought in closer to the fire, they're set aflame once again.

And that, we think, is much closer to the New Testament vision for the local church. It's a whole community of redeemed saints united to Christ and to one another, living out that supernatural unity, worshiping Christ, building one another up in love, and that kind of community.

Like a bonfire in the dark of night, like a city set on a hill, Jesus says in Matthew 5. That compels the unbelieving world with its radiant heat, its radiant light.

It compels the world to likewise believe in Christ, belong to his family for their good and for his glory. We've stated this in past weeks like this.

The holiness and unity of the church is inherently missional. The holiness and the unity of the church is missional. It compels the unbelieving world. And also, gospel advancement is not only a byproduct of the church living out the one another's of Scripture, it's also something we're called to engage in actively and intentionally, as God continually aligns our desires with his, namely, for his kingdom to come and for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[14:23] Namely, for the glories of Christ and the gospel to be made known to the ends of the earth. We exist, church, to advance the gospel of Christ for the good of the nations and the glory of God.

We're in the fourth and final week of our sermon series, Renewing a Vision for Shoreline. As we've hit 10 years of ministry as a church by God's grace, we're taking a month, we've been taking this month of November to step back and to consider where God might be leading us as a body.

And so what I've been saying is, if you're new here, you've sort of entered in on a family chat, but we hope it's also helping you to understand what the church is all about and then what our specific local body, what our hopes and our desires for as a church.

And I want to remind the members, again, bring your thoughts, bring your questions to the elders regarding this vision. We want to hear your feedback. We mean that when we say that. And remember that, as Matt just announced, we'll be holding a congregational meeting in two Sundays, December 7th, and we're going to be, to a large part, engaging in a family dialogue about this vision.

So expect to see a separate email with the meeting agenda. So if you have your handouts in front of you, this will also be on the screen. In week one, Dylan, if you go to the next slide, we talked about how we've been established by God, right?

[15:48] By God's Spirit, through His Word and His Gospel, God has created and is building His church. And that church, the people of God, are first a people of worship.

And so in week two, we covered exalt. We exist to worship Christ for our good and the glory of God. And the people of God are secondly a people who edify, who build up one another.

That was last week's focus. We exist to build up the body of Christ for the good of one another and the glory of God. And finally, we come to the last part of the vision, Expand.

The title of today's sermon is Expanding the Kingdom of Christ. And the main point is simply, we exist to advance the gospel of Christ for the good of the nations and the glory of God.

We exist to advance the gospel of Christ for the good of the nations and the glory of God. Now we're again going to be flipping around in Scripture as we move from theological foundation to the practical outworking in the life of our church.

[16:53] So if you don't have a copy of God's Word in front of you, please do so. We have Bibles on the back table if you need one. And we're going to begin again by surveying the big picture in Scripture to see where this main point comes from.

Now you might ask, why are we surveying Scripture yet again? This is like four weeks in a row where we're just like working through the big picture of Scripture. And that's because we really want you to see that we're not just trying to come up with our own program.

Like using the latest advice from church growth gurus or stuff that's out there. We're seeking to follow to the best of our ability. We're seeking to follow God's plan for God's people because God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than ours and His plan is clearly what is best.

So that's really what we're after is what God has to say about what the church should be and then contextualizing that for Shoreline. And so yet, once again, we're going back first to the very beginning, the creation mandate.

So if you would go in your Bibles and look at Genesis chapter 1. We've quoted the same verses a couple times now. Look at verses 26 through 28. God created us, male and female, in His image, in His likeness.

[18:05] And then He commanded mankind be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. We see here that our purpose from the very outset was to glorify God by knowing Him and then making Him known.

Knowing Him and making Him known. By extending His gracious rule to the ends of the earth. That's right here in Genesis 1. From the beginning, God wanted His people to be about kingdom expansion.

Expanding His kingdom. But then we sinned, right? And after several generations, if you flip a few pages to Genesis chapter 6, the Lord describes humanity's state in verse 5.

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth. It was great in the earth. You see, humanity was more successful at spreading sin and death throughout the earth than spreading the gracious rule of God.

And so in righteous judgment, God wiped out mankind with a global flood. But in mercy, He preserved a remnant. To whom He then confirmed the creation mandate.

[19:20] He tells Noah, again, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And then in Genesis 11, at the Tower of Babel, we find the exact opposite occurring, right?

The people aren't filling the earth. They're trying to build a tower to heaven. And so God frustrates their plans. And it's right after that, Genesis 12, that God calls Abraham. So flip to Genesis 12. We see God's covenant with Abraham and Israel. In verses 2 and verse 3, this is huge for the rest of the redemptive arc of Scripture.

And I, so God says this to Abraham, I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse.

And in you, Abraham, in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. What a massive promise. Can you imagine Abraham hearing these words through you?

[20:21] All the nations of the earth will be blessed. This promise, this covenant, as we keep reading in Scripture, begins to be fulfilled as God

miraculously turns the offspring of Abraham into a nation, the nation of Israel.

And Israel, as we've seen, their holy priestly presence was intended to extend God's blessing to the nations. And so, you know, Psalm 67, which Tim just read, that so beautifully captures that longing for the blessing to be extended to the nations.

But Israel continually failed to live out her God-given purpose. She was so often led astray by the pagan nations around her rather than receiving and then extending the blessing of God to those nations.

But God had made a promise. He wasn't going to fail to fulfill his promise. And so, we find, next thing, God's promises through the prophets.

Now, we looked at some of these beautiful promises last year when we were in Isaiah. And one of the most amazing comes as God speaks to this future servant.

[21:33] Isaiah 49, 6 and 7. The Lord says to his servant, It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserves of Israel.

That's too light. I'm going to do something more. God says to the servant, I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

Now, this promise to the future servant of the Lord, it comes just a few chapters after God had offered this worldwide call. Isaiah 45, 22. God says, Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.

God's beckoning the nations. Now, at this point in history, Israel was in exile in Babylon. They were in desperate need of physical salvation and of spiritual redemption.

And so how could God's promise for Israel to be a blessing to the nations possibly be fulfilled when she lay there in exile? What God is saying here, he's going to raise up a righteous servant.

[22:40] He's going to raise up a suffering servant through whom salvation would reach to the ends of the earth. And that's servant, friends. We know. We know. His name is Jesus. And so we see the fulfillment in the gospels through Christ.

Yes, Jesus, the Son of God, became a man, bearing our burdens and our sorrows, taking on human form. And then he, the exalted one, became the suffering servant, bearing our iniquity and our sin on the cross.

And so now by turning to him, by trusting in his name, sinners are saved by his blood. Sinners become new creations in Christ and they receive eternal life with God and with all the saints.

And this gospel is not only for Israel, it's not only for Jews, it's also for Gentiles, for the nations, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.

Romans 10, 13. Paul's quoting there from Joel. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. And this is the mystery of the Old Testament, now unveiled through Christ for all to see.

[23:49] No longer a mystery. The question is, how though would the nations hear and respond to this gospel? And that brings us to the Great Commission, which we looked at briefly last week.

Right before Jesus' ascension, he gave this command to his disciples, which we're quite familiar with. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. Matthew 28, 18 through 20. So how would the nations hear and respond to the gospel?

How would God's plan for the blessing to his people to be extended to the ends of the earth be fulfilled? Through the church. Through the church. The Great Commission is the call of Jesus upon all his disciples, the church, to extend the gracious reign of God to the ends of the earth.

And the church does that by making disciples, by baptizing them, and by teaching them to obey Christ in everything. And you know, it's helpful to think about this, I think.

[25:07] The Great Commission is really an outworking of the Great Commandment. The Great Commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then just like that is to love

your neighbor as yourself.

The Great Commission is an outworking of that, which we actually saw in Psalm 67. Because the people of God love him, they long for his glory, they long for his fame to be spread to the ends of the earth.

And because the people of God love their neighbor, who is all of humanity, right, they love their neighbor, they long for and they seek after their neighbor's joy and salvation in Christ. friends, a nuclear bomb of mercy was detonated at the cross of Christ and its saving effects have been spreading to the ends of the earth through the church, which goes bearing this glorious good news of the gospel.

And just think about it, friends, if you're here and you're in Christ, you are evidence of that. Our church is evidence of that. 2,000 years after Christ walked this earth, we are evidence of that because by the spirit, by the grace of God, through the testimony of the saints over the last 2,000 years, God's saving mercy in Christ has come to us.

[26:24] We're evidence of that. And so we're then to continue that on. We're supposed to be the continuing vehicle for God's mercy in Christ to go to the nations as we go heralding this gospel.

We exist to advance the gospel of Christ for the good of the nations and for the glory of God. Now before I go any further, I just want to say if you're here this morning and you don't know Christ, you haven't repented of your sins and turned to Jesus by faith, today could be the day of salvation. Today could be the day of salvation. Come talk to me after the service. Talk to somebody that brought you to another follower of Christ and talk about what it means, what it looks like to trust in Christ in the gospel.

We exist, church, to advance the gospel of Christ for the good of the nations and the glory of God. Now flowing out of that, there are three key vision principles that we seek here to increasingly embody.

First, today and the 11th one overall, as you flip your papers over, we seek to be a church on gospel mission, on gospel mission. We seek to be a church earnestly engaged in the great commission gospel work of evangelizing the lost to the ends of the earth.

[27:48] Now we've already seen from Matthew 28 that this is the calling of Christ upon his disciples, upon all his disciples. And Luke records these words of Christ right before his ascension in Acts 1.8.

Jesus says to his disciples, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. And like those first disciples, saints, we today are empowered by the Holy Spirit. He's with us. He's in us. He's filling us. He's emboldening us.

He's giving us the words to say. We're empowered by him as we go bearing the torch of the gospel in a dark world. And as we do that, we're really continuing on the exact same mission and ministry that Jesus had when he was here.

Right? Christ came for a saving mission. Christ came to fulfill a ministry of reconciliation. After Jesus rose from the dead, he tells his disciples, John 20, verse 21, As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you.

[29:02] And Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5, he picks up on this thought. Paul sees himself and the apostles as ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Ambassadors are representatives, right, of another. They go in somebody else's power, in somebody else's name.

And that's what we're called to be and to do as Christians. We go, and you know, Matt just read that beautiful liturgy, we go as the hands and feet of Christ. We go bearing the name and the authority of Jesus Christ, filled with his love, filled with his spirit, and then beckoning the lost world to be reconciled to God in Christ.

The last passage I want to point to in this section is Romans chapter 10, 14 through 17. Paul says, how then will they call on him?

And this is after he's just said that everyone who calls in the name of the Lord shall be saved. Then Paul says, how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

[30:15] And how are they to hear without somebody preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

Paul's quoting from Isaiah chapter 50. This is the messianic age. The good news has come in Christ. And Paul says, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. In verse 17, he says, so faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.

Christians, we are those sent ones. We are heralding the life-saving message of the good news of Christ to a dying world. We are, some of you think you're in the, some of you are in the Coast Guard.

We're actually all in the Coast Guard. We are all in God's Coast Guard. Like, we're sent to hold out to drowning souls the lifeline of the gospel that they might receive Christ and be saved.

Perhaps a better picture is actually what we looked at in Ezekiel 37. We're more like Ezekiel speaking the gospel of life to dead, dry bones.

[31:23] That the Spirit might, through that word of Christ, raise the dead to life. We seek to be a church on gospel mission. So how does this vision work out practically in the life of the church?

Okay, these are the things that we are aiming for here. The first one, surprise, surprise, the aim of corporate worship. I keep talking about the priority and the aim of corporate worship. In the last few weeks we talked about two primary aims in corporate worship being exalting Christ and edifying one another and the third aim that we see, and we looked at this in 1 Corinthians 14, is to evangelize the lost.

We want unbelievers to come here. We have unbelievers coming here week in, week out. We want them to experience Christ. We want them to see the gospel on display to know that Jesus is risen and the gospel is true and to repent of their sins and believe in him.

Now this does not mean that the whole service is catered to the unbeliever because again, we've established the primary and secondary aims of corporate worship, but it does mean that we have an eye towards the unbeliever.

It means that we're not going to assume that everyone in the room knows the gospel and so we're going to present it clearly at some point every Sunday, usually multiple times. And we're typically going to have a specific call to unbelievers to receive Christ.

[32:49] And for the members, this means that you are encouraged to invite and to bring the unsaved to church because you can expect that we're going to talk about Jesus and present the gospel clearly.

You know, there's some in this room that when they first stepped in here, they were not saved, but through the preaching of the gospel and through the community of the saints, they have been redeemed by Christ, by the grace of God.

The second thing is we seek to have a culture of evangelism, a culture of evangelism. When we think about evangelism, in light of our, you know, American context of individualism, we very often think of only the individual effort.

It is certainly individual effort, but it is also so much more. So much more. Last week we said that the church is Jesus' discipleship program. Well, I'm here to tell you this week, the church is also Jesus' evangelism program.

The church is Jesus' evangelism program. Let me explain. First, yes, let's be active as individuals in pursuing the lost for Christ. Let's be all the time chatting about our faith in conversation with unbelievers and seeking ways to share the gospel and inviting them into our homes and inviting them to read scripture with us.

[34:11] Let's do those things. But also, let's realize we are part of an entire body that together presents a far greater witness for Christ. So bring those, here's one thing, bring those who are seeking to evangelize here so they can experience the supernatural unity of the body and the Christ-like love of the saints by which they know that Jesus is present among us.

seek to cross-pollinate as much as possible. What I mean is, invite unbelievers to events where believers will also be present like a birthday party or a game night or a meet-up at the park or a day hike or an evangelistic Bible study where you're intentionally bringing unbelievers and believers in

to look at scripture together.

Say, walk through the gospel of Mark. Strategize with one another. We should be doing that. Let's be strategizing with one another. How can we together witness for Christ in our context?

Be sharing stories of our evangelism efforts. Community group is a great opportunity to do that. Let's be spending time doing that and then praying for one another and praying for those that others are seeking to evangelize and then praising God.

When people share Christ, whatever the response, let's praise God for that because they're being faithful to share the word. and then when fruit is being born, let's praise God for that.

[35:37] Okay, the third thing is church planting. If the church is Jesus' evangelism and discipleship program and it is, then we want to see more healthy churches for the expansion of Christ's kingdom.

Now, we're going to talk about that more in the last vision principle. The last thing under this one is investment specifically in global missions.

Missions, it's not a word that we see in the Bible, but what it is though, we see the idea all over in the New Testament. It is evangelism across borders. Okay, think of missions as evangelism across borders and it reflects the worldwide scope of God's saving plan in Christ.

Christ. And so, if God wants his glory to be known to the ends of the earth and he does, right? If God wants that, if God wants the gospel to be proclaimed to all the nations for their joy in him and he does, then we should want those same things.

Like, we should be zealous for the things that God is zealous for. And so here, we support international missionaries through prayer. We support them through financial giving, especially those like Randy Matthews and the whole family who are committed to establishing and strengthening healthy churches.

[36:59] And we're so blessed to be partnering with them. And we do envision someday supporting them by doing short-term missions trips that are beneficial. Short-term missions trips can be damaging.

We want to do it wisely in a way that they would see as helpful to the work that they're already doing. And the Lord may be calling. The Lord may be calling. And we should be praying into this. He may be calling some right here from among us to go into international missions vocationally. Or to move somewhere to support the work of international missions as a lay leader.

The Lord might be calling some from among us. So let's pray into that. We want to offer up our lives for the Lord to use for his kingdom however he sees fit. And so we need to pray with open hands to the Lord.

So in all these ways, we seek to be a church on gospel mission. On gospel mission. Okay, here's the next thing. We seek to be a church overflowing in mercy.

[38:00] Overflowing in mercy. We seek to be a church continually extending the mercy of Christ to our community as his hands and feet for the meeting of both spiritual and physical needs.

You know, when Jesus calls his disciples to carry on his ministry in this world, he's calling them to not only a ministry of word but of deed.

Right? Jesus, in his earthly ministry, he met both spiritual and physical needs. Matthew provides a really concise summary of Jesus' ministry in Matthew chapter 4.

Feel free to turn there if you want. Matthew chapter 4. And this is right before Jesus is about to preach the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew says in chapter 4, verse 23, And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, teaching, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Teaching, proclaiming, healing. Jesus is fulfilling a ministry of word and of deed. Right? Now some might say, well, Jesus' healings were to validate his authority.

[39:14] And absolutely they were. Right? Jesus told the Jews, if you don't believe me, believe the works that I do. That's John 10, 38. And also, Jesus' healings were acts of mercy and compassion to individuals that were mired by the effects of sin and the curse, especially the poor and vulnerable.

And some might say to that, well, Jesus was teaching us that spiritually we're all poor. And again, I agree. Jesus was teaching that and we need him to save us.

We are spiritually bang for them. That's beatitude number one. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And also, Jesus was tangibly demonstrating how deeply God cares about the poor, the vulnerable, and the oppressed.

God is, Psalm 68, 5, a father of the fatherless and protector of widows. He is, Psalm 9, 9, a stronghold for the oppressed. God calls his people, Micah 6, 8, to act justly and in kindness and to love kindness.

Proverbs 31, 8, 9, he calls his people to speak up for those who have no voice, for the justice of all who are dispossessed. Speak up, judge righteously and defend the cause of the oppressed and the needy.

[40:38] Now, James gets straight to the point when he writes these words in James 1, 27. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James is calling the saints to holiness and to love, just like their God. A love that ministers to orphans and widows, extending the mercy of Christ to those around them most in need of it. You know, this is ministering, as Jesus himself called it, to the least of these. And to minister to the least of these, to clothe the naked and feed the hungry and welcome in the stranger and visit the sick and imprisoned is to do those things, Jesus says, to himself.

And it's to give evidence to the faith that we profess. We seek to be a church overflowing in mercy. And so how do we see this working out practically in the life of the church?

Well, the first thing that we seek is to have a culture of merciful service. A culture of merciful service. Paul calls the Galatians to do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

[41:58] Galatians 6.10 The one another ministry to which the saints are called certainly includes acts of mercy and service towards others within our own body.

And so when the world peers into the community of the saints, they should see a people who love each other sacrificially, who generously give to meet one another's needs, a place where the least of these are being cared for.

And just like a bonfire's heat and warmth radiates outward, that servant hearted mercy ought to then overflow to the world around us.

Now that's looked at times like our church organizing a meal train for someone's coworker who's grieving. I just heard of families here who are ministering to the elderly in a nursing home.

There's so many ways that this could look as we move forward as a church. But as the Lord grows us in compassion and in mercy, we will increasingly see and respond to the needs of others within our own body and then within the community.

[43:04] The next thing I want to mention is the office of deacon. Now that might sound weird to you, but listen, God actually cares so much about meeting practical needs that he's established the formal office of church deacon for this very purpose.

And at Shoreline, we seek to take this seriously. And so, we don't want to, one, overlook this important office by not having it. And secondly, we don't want to distort the office so that deacons are more like pseudo-elders.

God has called the elders to a ministry of the word and prayer, and God has called deacons to the ministry of service. And both of those are vital for the church's flourishing so that the gospel is on display.

And the deacons here fulfill all kinds of roles, and one of them is being ministers of mercy. And so, for example, it was a deacon who both provided and then coordinated care for Frank Mandillo in his final year of life.

And many of you, without the title, took part in that. And so, may the Lord continue to grow us in mercy for one another and for those around us. The African bishop Tertullian, writing around 200 AD, observed this.

[44:21] He said, it is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. Only look, they say, look how they love one another.

Last thing I want to mention in this section is that we seek to engage mercifully and wisely in relief, rehabilitation, and development.

Now, I'm borrowing heavily here from the book, *When Helping Hurts*. If you want to study more on this topic, it's about poverty alleviation. I'd commend you to that book. There are three different categories of the kind of care that might be called for when ministering to the poor.

Relief is urgent and temporary provision in some crisis. Rehabilitation would be the next step. It's restoring people and communities to their pre-crisis condition. And then development is a process of ongoing change that seeks to move the helpers and the helped closer to being in right relationship with God and self and others and creation.

And so at Shoreline, we want to mercifully provide relief and rehabilitation as the Lord leads us and when the situation calls for it, while especially focusing on long-term development efforts.

[45:41] Now, I want to say we have a lot of growth to do in these areas. And this is a vision for what we want to become. So there's ways that we're doing these things now, and also we hope to mature and grow. Like in all of these vision principles, we want to grow and mature and develop as a body.

But examples of relief efforts could be serving in community meals. There's a church that hosts community meals every Saturday. It could be serving there. It could be helping at local homeless shelters or donating clothing.

Examples of rehabilitation includes foster care, which lots of our families are engaged in here. helping rebuild homes after a natural disaster. Now it seems that the Lord has specifically led our church towards three developmental ministries.

Partnering with Anchor of Hope, which is ministering to pregnant moms and also families and being a voice for the unborn. We're growing in our relationship with them.

That's a beautiful ministry. That's developmental care. Legacy. We're so blessed to be a part of what God is doing through Legacy. We got to witness T'Angela's graduation and Allison's graduation a few weeks ago.

[46:50] It's a beautiful work. That's a beautiful developmental work that's going on right here. God has sovereignly joined us with them. We want to steward that. Third, adoption.

This is a beautiful way. Not only does it reflect the gospel, but it's providing developmental ongoing care. We want to support the families that are part of that and maybe grow in that as we move forward.

By God's grace, we want to grow in all these areas of ministry. We see here God's heart for the poor and how the gospel changes us to be a people of mercy, who extend that mercy to the world. We do that humbly recognizing our own poverty, our own neediness before the Lord. We never go as saviors. Christ is the Savior. We go to minister side by side with others.

If you have a burden, specifically, for Shoreline to grow in any of these areas, I just want to say, please come talk to me. Please come talk to one of the elders or one of the deacons, and we would love to strategize with you and to support you in that.

[47:53] You know, when the church has been at its best, it's these kinds of merciful acts of service that it has been known for. Kind of like the quote I read earlier, but here's another one.

In the fourth century, the Roman emperor Julian, this is a Roman emperor, he complained to a pagan priest that, quote, the impious Christians support not only their poor, but ours as well. Right? This is what God foretold through his prophet Isaiah would take place. If his people would act with justice and mercy, Isaiah says, then shall your light break forth like the dawn. It's beautiful. We seek to be a church on gospel mission, overflowing in mercy, and finally, multiplication minded.

Multiplication minded. We seek to be a church with a constant eye towards multiplication, intentionally raising up and sending out disciples and leaders for gospel advancement.

[49:01] The Great Commission is a commission of multiplication. And it's a multiplication that occurs especially through healthy churches planting more healthy churches.

This was the model of gospel advancement in the book of Acts. Raising up and then sending out leaders to plant more churches. In Acts 13, if you want to turn there and see for yourself, at the beginning of Acts 13, we find the leaders of the church in Antioch worshipping the Lord, and the Spirit sets apart Paul and Barnabas for the work of the gospel.

And so the church obeys the Holy Spirit and sends out Paul and Barnabas, and then they travel over the course of chapter 13, they travel throughout the region preaching the gospel and establishing local churches.

And then at the end of Acts 14, we find Paul and Barnabas at the end of Paul's first missionary journey, they are traveling back through those churches, strengthening the disciples and appointing elders over the churches.

They want to see those churches become healthy, reproducing churches. And so we see in Acts, as one author characterizes it, that the church is the origin, the means and the goal of missions.

[50:22] The church is the origin, the means and the goal of missions. This is what I mean. Missions begins with the church, right? The saints live out the one and others of scripture, they proclaim the gospel and word and in deed, they raise up disciple-making, disciples of Christ, and so by God's grace and spirit, the bonfire grows, right?

The bonfire, wood is getting added to the fire, it is growing. And then that church sends out faithful disciples and leaders out from among their midst to carry the torch of the gospel to others, right?

And so you take a few blazing logs and you separate them off to bring gospel light into the darkness. And the goal is for them to form another healthy local church, right?

Another raging bonfire as the Lord adds to their number. And that done over and over and over again is what has happened and that leads to kingdom expansion to the nations.

Now this mindset of multiplication, because we can talk about it, right? We can talk about it. And in practice, it's difficult. It will be difficult to separate and send out people from among us.

[51:32] And so it requires that we have the first half of the Lord's Prayer on our minds and on our hearts. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be whose name? Your name.

We want your name to be treated as holy in this world. Your kingdom come. Not ours, not shorelines. Christ, the Father's, his kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's the kind of mindset that we need. Okay, so how does this vision work out practically in the life of the church? Okay, we have several things here. The first is that we seek to have a discipleship updraft.

Okay, picture the I'm burning wood right now on my wood stove. Some of you guys might be picture the smoke is all the time going up, right? It's an updraft of discipleship. We want there to be a continual raising up of maturing of disciples and leaders.

And so one of the things, now we didn't intentionally do this when we formed this church, but we realized how wisely, you know, why it was done. Sorry. We have term limits on elders and deacons, right?

[52:38] First, it does give them a break. Yes, that is very helpful. But also, it's done because it creates this culture in which we're always looking to identify potential leaders and develop them.

We also have community groups. Those are spaces where we're seeking to put godly leaders in place to lead and to give them opportunity to teach the word and to spiritually care for others.

Kind of within that, we specifically want to raise up teachers and preachers of the word. Paul instructs Timothy, 2 Timothy 2, 2, what you have heard from me, speaking of the good deposit of the gospel that's been entrusted to him, what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

You see that four generations right there? Paul to Timothy to others who will teach others. That's multiplication. And it's by raising up teachers and preachers of the word. And so again, community groups are spaces where that's happening, are equipping classes, are spaces where people can use their gifts of teaching and be developed in those.

We also don't believe that the preaching should be kept to only the most highly trained and skilled. I would not be here if that were the case, right? I would never have had an opportunity to preach in the first place.

[53:59] We open the pulpit here to include other mature men who have a gift of teaching and preaching and we're seeking to train and to develop those men as preachers of the word.

Third thing, gospel partnerships. There are, and this is really exciting, there's a lot of gospel partnerships that have been forming among like-minded churches in this state and in this region. And it's all for the sake of gospel advancement. So we want, at Shoreline, we want to partner with other faithful, Bible-believing, gospel-preaching churches locally and globally, if God wills, to be a part of this gospel advancement work.

Because again, we're not about building the kingdom of Shoreline, we're about building the kingdom of Christ. And so, you know, one example of this is we've had members from here go out and serve with Builders for Christ, right?

They are helping churches construct church buildings, so that's one way. Another is we belong to, recently we joined the Connecticut Baptist Association. That is for the sake of gospel advancement.

[55:07] These are churches that want to partner together to help one another out, to be a resource together, to think about church planting together. There's several ways that I'm, you know, as a pastor, I'm specifically involved in meeting with and developing relationships with local pastors and pastors in the region.

And again, these are pastors and churches that want to see the gospel advance in Connecticut and in New England and beyond. And so that leads me to the next point, sending out to plant and revitalize churches.

We want to be a church that is prayerfully and strategically considering how we might participate in Great Commission gospel work by sending out believers from among us to do the work of planting and revitalizing churches.

churches. It's no secret. You all are here in Connecticut. You're here in New England. It's no secret that we live in a region of the country that has very few Christians and very few healthy churches in comparison to a lot of other parts of our country.

We want there to be more Christians and more healthy local churches. Amen? And so our desire, it's not for Shoreline to become a big church.

[56:21] Our desire is for Shoreline to become a sending church. That's what we want to become. We want to be like that church in Antioch in Acts 13 that sent Paul and Barnabas.

I mean, he was their best. They sent him out to go plant more churches. You know, the bigger a church becomes, the more natural it is for the ministry of the church to be handed off to paid staff and for the members to feel less and less like they have that Ephesians 4 responsibility that we talked about to do the work of building up the body.

Also, the more difficult it becomes for the pastors to actually know their flocks and shepherd them well. Now, we're not saying that it can't happen, just that it's more difficult for those things to take place and that it would probably take a team of godly mature elders that are gifted in ways that we just probably aren't at this church.

Now, we're thankful for many large faithful churches that we seek to emulate in various ways, but in this way, we're really choosing a different path. And so, to state it differently, if the Lord abundantly blesses Shoreline over the next, say, 20 years and continues to add to our number, we think that it would be healthier and more fruitful for the kingdom if there were, you know, four churches of 200 members rather than one church of 800 members.

We want to be an Antioch church. We want to be an Antioch church. We want to be a church planting, sending church. And so, that doesn't just look like planting more churches.

[58:02] It also just looks like being a, what we're saying, a net exporter. Okay, a net exporter. We want to give and to send. I was just at a New England pastor's retreat in October, and I was amazed.

Pastor after pastor that I met had very similar story. There are a myriad of pastors in New England that are solo pastors with no elders, with very few leaders co-laboring with them, of dying congregations.

And, you know, these pastors are, they're in the trenches, they're working hard. They want to see revitalization, right? They want to see converts for Christ. They want to see their churches not die,

but to actually thrive.

That's what they're after. And they could use help in the ministry work. And so, we want to be, I started to be like, whoa, like our church here is actually not the norm in broader New England. Like, I know we're down on the coast, there's more people down here, but in New England, this is not typical. We want to be a church that is willingly giving up our resources, that is giving up even our people to go and support church plans and church revitalizations in our region.

[59:18] Now, God has to place the calling on someone's life, okay? But we want to be praying into that, right? Like, we want to be, again, open hands before the Lord. God, do what you want with us for your kingdom. Now, we also realize, you know, this sort of like raising up, sending out is happening very naturally due to nothing that we're doing because of all you military personnel that come here and then God sends out, you know, via orders from the Navy and the Coast Guard, to other places.

And we are honored to have this opportunity and we want to steward this opportunity. And now one thing that I want to specifically say to you military folks is consider the gospel need that exists here. Consider when you're done with the military, coming back to New England and the great impact that you could have in this region if you came and stayed. Now, obviously, again, God has to place that calling on somebody's life.

And there are many factors that go in to where people land. But I just want to plant this seed and say let this region's need for the gospel be one of those factors that you consider.

Now, this finally leads me to our desire for a church building. Desire for a church building. In light of everything that I've just said, we've come to increasingly realize the strategic place that God has us right here.

[60:45] And so we don't plan on going anywhere. I mean, God can move us, right? But like, we don't plan on going anywhere. As long as Christ tarries. Now, we hope he comes back soon.

Amen? But as long as Christ tarries, we hope that this church becomes increasingly a gospel preaching, gospel displaying community that is raising up disciple-making disciples of Christ and then sending them out to advance the gospel in Connecticut, New England, to the world.

And so, of course, we don't need a church building to do that work. Okay? We don't need a church building to do that work. But we certainly think that it would aid.

Like, we think it would be a practical help, a benefit to this strategic work that the Lord's calling us to. And it's also a statement to this community. Right? It's a statement.

Hey, we're not a cult. Okay? We're here. We're not going anywhere. This isn't some fad or some club. Like, we really believe, you know, New London, Southeastern Connecticut.

[61:47] We really believe that Jesus is alive and he is reigning over his church. We really believe these things. Right? We believe this word. And so, to have a, you know, a more permanent presence here, it says those kinds of things.

And again, we can say those things without a building. I'm just saying that it helps to make that kind of statement in this area. And in our mind, you know, again, in light of the things we said about church size and all that, we're just looking for a building that has enough space for us to all gather together with some room for growth, probably 200 to 250 people max, since our desire, again, is not to be a big church, but to be a sending church.

And so, let's be praying for a church building. Okay? Let's be praying for that. And also, let's not kid ourselves that we need a church building in order to be a faithful church, because we don't.

And so, we're going to, again, we want to have open hands before the Lord. We want to wisely move forward. And the Lord will provide when it's His timing. We exist, Shoreline, we exist to advance the gospel of Christ for the good of the nations and the glory of God.

And so, again, in light of that, we seek to be a church on gospel mission. We seek to be a church overflowing in mercy. And we seek to be a church that's multiplication-minded. And so, you know, may the Spirit continue to heat more and more wood on this bonfire as we herald the good news of Christ.

[63:23] And may our heat and our light, may that radiate in mercy to the world around us, beckoning them to come and take part in what God's doing here.

And may our zeal for God's name, for His glory, may our love for the lost, may that lead us to spread this bonfire to the dark corners of the earth for the good of the nations and the glory of God. Please pray with me. Father, be gracious to us and bless us and make Your face to shine upon us that Your way may be known on the earth.