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State of the Church 2019

Colossians Excerpts

Pastor Bryan Clark and Pastor Ryan Harmon

Good morning, Church. My name is Ryan Harmon. I'm a directional pastor here at Lincoln Berean, and just like Dave already told us, this weekend is a little different because this is our State of the Church weekend. It's kind of our kickoff weekend for all the ministries of the fall, and we think this weekend provides a really great opportunity for us to take a step back and maybe consider what it is that we're doing here together this morning. Why are we here, right? Why do we come to church? What made you get out of bed, put down that second cup of coffee or that twenty-second cup of coffee and come here and gather together? Why is it that we do what we do? If you're like me and my family, it's probably just kind of part of your routine. It's what you do every weekend, and that's a really good thing. It's a great thing to have those habits where your family just knows it's what we do—we go to church. But the downfall of that is that sometimes what starts to happen is you start to maybe lose some of the vision for why you're doing what you're doing—might start to lose and get lazy thinking about what is the purpose behind what we do? So, at Lincoln Berean we would say that our purpose—our why—is found in our mission statement. Do you know it? Because it's not the staff's mission statement, right? We just said the church is not the building; we are the church, and so this is “our” mission statement and so we want to read it together. We're going to put it up on the screen. We say at Lincoln Berean:

“Our mission is to glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ.”

That's our “Why”. That's the driving force behind what we do. Now of course this isn't some phrase that a bunch of guys got together twenty years ago and kind of said, “Hey, we should come up with something brilliant,” right? This is straight from the pages of Scripture. This comes from the Apostle Paul when he's writing to the Colossians. So listen to this verse: Colossians 1:28 where Paul says this:

We proclaim him, admonishing everyone in teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone complete in Christ. (*NASB, Colossians 1:28)

So, as we begin our time together this morning, we just want to unpack this mission statement a little bit. We're going to walk through it kind of word by word. So, we start this mission statement by saying *to glorify God*. Have you ever thought about what it means to glorify God? At a really basic level we could just say *to glorify God* is to give Him glory, right? It's to bring glory to Him.

Alright, we glorify God when we sing and when we think and when we talk. We do that which builds up His name...makes Him larger...enhances His reputation...enhances His status in the world, right? Every weekend when we gather together, when we sit under His Word, in submission to Him, we're glorifying Him. Each week when Mike and the team lead us in worship, just like they just did, we're lifting up His name; we're building up His reputation. We're talking about all the things He has done throughout history—His faithfulness over time—and what He is doing now and what He will do. All these things that we talk about, it brings Him glory. But we don't just bring Him glory by singing. We don't just bring Him glory by gathering together and submitting to His Word. We can also bring Him glory by participating in the work that He's doing, by joining Him in His mission.

So, we continue to glorify God *by seeking to present every person*. This word *seeking* is really important for us to remember, right? The filter through which everything kind of has to go, for us it's this idea of intentionality. Is what we're doing bringing us closer to the goal that we're aiming at? As we plan and we dream, as we dream up a ministry or put together something that we're going to do in a small group, is this helping us move towards this goal that is before us? And when we say *every person*, it's not just Lincolniters, not just Nebraskans, not just Americans, right? *Every person!* How many does that leave out? "No one!" That's everyone! In a world that divides so often—that has these distinctions of who's in and who's out—we just put all that aside and we say our aim is to present *every person*, right? Neither rich nor poor, black or white, male or female, Republican or Democrat, natural born citizen, or immigrant. These things don't matter, right? It's every person that we are aiming at. See, Christ is the great equalizer, right? The work that He finished on the cross puts aside all those divisions, and we want our mission to mirror the work that He's accomplished. Later on in Colossians Paul says this in Colossians 3:

There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, for Christ is all and is in all. (Colossians 3:11)

Every person! Does that include our neighbors? Absolutely! The kids that we interact with, the kids that our kids interact with? Yeah, 100 percent! The people we interact with? We go to coffee shops—we go to Scooters, Starbucks, wherever we go—does that include those people? Yes, 100 percent. Every person! That's the aim of our mission—to glorify God by seeking to present every person *complete in Christ*.

This last phrase, what do we mean by *complete in Christ*? I'll be honest: this is my favorite part of the mission statement. I love thinking about what it means to be *complete in Christ* because that is the destination of the Christian life. That's where we're headed. What God intends for you and for me is to bring us to completion in Christ. So, what does that mean? Well, even if you look at different translations of the Bible, you see these kinds of synonyms. So, some say *complete in Christ*; some say *mature in Christ*. It basically means *to become like Jesus, to grow up in Him, to start to look more and more like Him*. That's what God intends for you and for me.

See, God brought us into His family, right? He adopted us, made us His sons and daughters, in order to bring us into His family and grow us up into Christlikeness. And by the power of His Spirit, He's working this incredible work in each one of us, where He is transforming us internally so that we might look more like His Son. Our heart, our motivations, our mind—all of these things start to get transformed—and we look more and more like Jesus, and as Jesus increases, we decrease. That's what we are aiming at. That's what we mean when we say *to become complete in Christ*—to become more like Jesus. It's what I long for in my life, and it's what I long for in each of your lives, and it's what we should all long for in one another. We look at one another; we say that Christ would be formed in you. I long to see Christ increase in your life and, as a staff, we dream about what this would look like, right? If this dynamic would start to occur where people would come into the church; they come into faith, and then they'd come into the life of the church—the life of the body. What we do each weekend and throughout the week is where we grow up into Christ, and we're equipped, and then we're sent out on mission. And we dream about what that would look like if that were happening over and over and over again.

Over the years, we visualize this: We'll put the slide up on the screen here: We visualized what we call the *People Loop*: People come in; we help people find Jesus. They come to know Him for that very first time, and then as they come into the life of the body, they're equipped to know and follow

Jesus, and in that process they become more like Him, and then finally we go out—each of us goes out on mission—to reach others for Christ. And this dynamic loop continues forever and ever until Christ returns, and what an amazing thing that would be! All for God's glory!

This is what we are aiming at; this is why we do what we do, and it's a big enough mission that it requires each one of us to be engaged. It's not *my* mission; it's not *Bryan's* mission; it's not our *staff's* mission. It is *our* mission; we are the church! So, let's read this mission statement one more time together.

Our mission is to glorify God by seeking to present every person complete in Christ.

Now let's see how that takes place in our kid's ministry each week:

(Skit with children in a Sunday school class, and then presenting the need and opportunity for more workers in the kid's department by Bryce & Rosie)

(Bryan):

It's hard to imagine a more worthwhile place to invest some time and talent into the lives of these kids. I hope you'll really consider that opportunity.

One of the things we need to do this morning is to do an update on our fiscal year-end giving. So, our goal was 1.5 million dollars. Let's see how we did:

(Video shows graph reaching beyond the goal to \$1,535,973, followed by applause.)

So, there's a lot in there to celebrate. The obvious is: we end in the black, and keep moving forward. That's great, but you stop and think about this, and we've seen it many years—year after year—you're talking about a huge number: \$1.5 million this year. You're talking about a couple months; you're talking about hundreds of gifts—and nobody knows what anybody else is giving. So, what is the possibility of all of those coming together and, at a \$1.5 million-dollar goal, coming in within \$36,000 dollars of hitting the number right on the head. That's within 2.4 percent of just landing right on the number. So, to me, that not only reflects God's generosity, it reflects the sensitivity of God's people to give what God calls them to give—and that to me reflects the health of our body. So, there are a lot of things to celebrate in that number, and we really appreciate your generosity.

I want to do an update concerning me personally. I'm just getting a lot of questions about this. So, some of you are aware of this but as of April, I accepted the invitation to be the Bible teacher for Back to the Bible's radio broadcast. If you don't know what that is, Back to the Bible has been around a long time. It's a thirty-minute broadcast. It's five days a week Monday through Friday, and as of this last Friday we have officially launched it as a podcast. It goes across the United States and to about fourteen English-speaking countries. So, basically what they're doing is taking what we do together here in the auditorium, it gets edited for radio—and we have about twenty years of that stored up—so that's the material they use. And then at the end of each of those broadcasts is about a five-minute discussion about whatever the message was that day. So that means I go in once a week, takes about an hour; we record five days' worth of discussion and that's about all it requires of me. So, it doesn't really change my role here and it's just been a really humbling opportunity to be part of that. In addition then, they take the messages—the transcripts of the messages—and they just rewrite them, edit them into book form. So it doesn't read like a sermon, it reads like a book to make available to the listeners, and Back to the Bible has graciously made them available to us. So currently we have available Genesis, chapters one through eleven, the book of James, “Life after

Death,” and more to come. We have those available. They are \$5.00 apiece. For what it's worth, I don't get any royalty on these. I don't make a penny on them; the church doesn't make a penny on them. We get them at cost; we sell them at cost. We're trying to put the material into people's hands, and hopefully it will be helpful. So that's a part of what's going on. I just didn't want people to think I'm spending all week cranking out books in my office; (*laughter*) it's really not what's happening. So that's an update there.

The latest one we're working on is Genesis 12 through 25, and just going back through that material, I've been reminded that at the end of Abraham's life, what a remarkable life of faith and obedience! The word that's used to describe his life is *satisfied*, and I just think that's such a powerful word to think about—getting to the end of your story, looking back and being satisfied that you lived a life of faith and obedience—and you're ready to stand before God.

In January of 2010 we launched what we called a *Decade on Purpose*. It had six big initiatives. Next year we'll talk about those as the decade will be completed, and how we did with those. But the heart and soul of the *Decade on Purpose* was really encouraging, motivating people to think about the next ten years of your life—what's going to matter, what do you want to make sure you live for? We were trying to keep people from getting ten years down the road, looking back with regrets, wishing they'd have done it differently. So in ten years, what's going to matter? You don't get those ten years back. Live for the things that will last forever! So, in January of 2010, this is the video we showed to launch that *Decade on Purpose*:

“In 10 years, I would have read my last bedtime story.”

“In 10 years, I will be driving.”

“In 10 years, I am going to be you.”

“In 10 years, I am going to be a lawyer.”

“In 10 years, this house will be empty.”

“In 10 years, I'll be done climbing the corporate ladder.”

“In 10 years, I will be retired.”

“How much time do I have to teach my girls?”

“How much time do I have to make a difference?”

So, just in case you haven't figured it out, those three little girls—Dan and Natalie's three girls in the video—these are now those same three girls. (*Clapping*) So, the little girl in the video behind the steering wheel, honking the horn, playing with the keys, was Gabrielle. She's now sixteen, and ready to drive. Thank you, ladies! (*Clapping*)

It's just a reminder, time goes so fast! It seems like it was just yesterday that we were launching the *Decade on Purpose*. Ten years have come and gone, and the reality is you don't get those ten years back. If you wasted them, you wasted them. There are no second chances. It's just a reminder to live for the things that matter. So, as you think back over the last ten years, did you invest in things

that will matter forever? Did you waste those years? Probably like most, it's a bit of a mix of both, but the reality is: "Everyday matters!" Life is a gift and part of our mission—the heartbeat of the *Decade on Purpose*—was to do everything we can to encourage people to invest their lives in the things that will matter forever. Of course, that emphasis is going to continue in the years to come.

Many of you have heard this before, but if you think about a line that goes as far as you can imagine north to south, and then imagine this little slash on that line that is so thin you have to make it with a razor blade. It's so thin you can't tell the difference between ten years, fifty years, seventy years, ninety years, but that slash represents the duration of your life. In light of eternity, the duration we get is but a slash; yet God has graciously made it possible within that slash to invest our lives in something that will still matter a hundred thousand years from now. That's just a remarkable thing to consider. Sometimes we get this all twisted up and we think we're doing God a favor when we invest our lives in the things of God. But that's completely backwards. God has done us this remarkable favor by granting us the opportunity within that little slash to invest into something that will matter forever. What a tragedy it would be to not take seriously the invitation God has given us!

For me personally, something changed within me about twenty years ago. Many of you are aware when I was thirty-nine years old, I was diagnosed with a birth defect, a defective aortic valve. I had a procedure that was kind of brand-new-cutting edge; I think I was the twenty-seventh person to have it here, and it had only been done a few places in the world. So the day before I was scheduled for the surgery, I went in for a heart cath. I was supposed to have the cath, go home, come back the next day for the surgery. The purpose of the heart cath was just to figure out if there's anything else that needed to be done while they were "under the hood". (*laughter*) So I came in; they did the heart cath. I was laying on the bed; Patty was there, and the cardiologist came out and I made some comment. I think I was trying to be funny, and as often is the case, probably was not very funny, but it was immediately obvious he was upset. And the first words out of his mouth were, "Bryan, there is no human explanation for why you're alive." He said, "You essentially have a pinhole where you're supposed to have a valve. None of us can figure out why you're still alive." So that was one moment. They hooked me up to a bunch of machines. I stayed overnight; the next morning I was scheduled to be the first surgery. There was an emergency; I got bumped, so basically, I'm ready, prepped for surgery, got my game face on, and then you get bumped and have to just wait. I don't remember what it was—four or five hours. So, there's not much you can do but just think, and I found myself processing, "If this is the end of my story, if this is the finish line, I had this overwhelming sense of peace," a little bit like Abraham. Just a satisfaction that I had given my best shot to invest myself in the things that will matter forever and, if this was the end of the story, I was fine with that. I'm ready to meet Jesus. Well, the surgery went well, and everything was fine.

That got me fifteen years down the road, and I had another surgery in 2013. They did a lot of repairs. Everything's good; I'm feeling great, full speed ahead, but what changed in me is the realization that I'm on borrowed time, and that there's a very clear reason why God has kept me on the earth. There was also this sense that when I do get to the finish line, I want that moment again where I have this satisfaction of knowing I've given it my best shot, to pour myself into the things that matter, and I'm ready to see Jesus. But I also feel like part of my mission—why God has put me here—is not just for me, but to call us together to that mission so that none of us end up getting to the end of our story with regrets, wishing we had lived the one life that we get, differently. There are no do-overs. There's no going back. You get one shot at it. If you want to waste your life, that's up to you, but as we've said again and again, we're going to make it very hard to do so. We want to

call people to invest themselves in the things that will last forever. We want to get to the finish line without regrets, and know we lived the one life that we got for the things that will last forever.

Now that shows up in lots of ways. It shows up where you work, where you go to school, in your neighborhood, your family—hundreds of different ways. But one of the things that we all share in common is our responsibility to steward the gospel—the message of Jesus that so changed our lives. We talked about that this spring in the series called “*Compelled*”. We gave out the *42 Seconds* book. We reminded ourselves, “Don’t make it harder than it needs to be. Don’t make it more fearful than it needs to be.” We just make some of this stuff way too complicated. The last message in the series, Mark had a whole list of very practical suggestions. I encourage you to go back, re-listen to or re-read the transcript, but starting the weekend after Labor Day, we’re going to begin a study of the Gospel of John. John himself writes that the purpose for his gospel is in order that we might believe, and by believing, we might have life in His name. There’s so much in John for all of us, but it is a unique opportunity to invite your friends, the people you go to school with, people you work with, to come, to listen, to understand who Jesus is—that they might believe—and in believing, they might have life in His name. So, we really want to encourage you and will continue to encourage you that this is a great opportunity. It’s not complicated to just invite somebody and let’s see what God wants to do this year as we seek to be faithful and true to the mission as Ryan explained it.

I’ll guarantee you, right now, this morning—Sunday morning—there are people you go to school with, there are people next door, there are people that you work with every day, and they are empty and they are struggling and they are searching and they are wondering if they will ever find something that will satisfy that restless searching in their souls. We know what they’re looking for, and our prayers will be as faithful stewards of the gospel, that they, too, might come to believe that people around us all have a story—and maybe it’s a story kind of like Elisa’s:

(Video)

I’m 16 years old, sitting in the church I grew up in, being told that I had this laundry list of things that I had to do in order to be right in the eyes of God. Even though I had grown up hearing all of these things, as I started to think about them, it just didn’t make any sense. I just knew in my heart that it was not supposed to be this way, so I literally got up out of the pew and I walked out of the doors.

So, I am 24 years old now, and I am a single mom of 2 little girls. I had just had my youngest daughter six months earlier and my oldest daughter had just started kindergarten when she was out back playing and was hit by a motorcycle. So I am sitting in the car, in the back seat, with my grandfather driving us about an hour and a half away to reach the hospital that she was life-flighted to, and I can just remember trying to bargain with God that if you save her now, I’ll do this. I promise I won’t do this anymore. I just kind of reverted back to everything that I kind of thought I had learned along the way in order to kind of get His attention. You know, I’ll do this if You’ll just do this one thing for me. But then I lost my 5-year-old that day, and I can just remember the tremendous loss I felt. I don’t want to say the accident was a way for God to get my attention; I don’t think that is what it was, but I feel like it was a way for Him to let me know that He was worth pursuing.

So now it’s 8 years later, and my now husband is taking a job in Lincoln, and one of our main priorities was to find a church home. We showed up to Lincoln Berean. We walked in and there is this pastor on stage reading from the Bible, and then explaining it, and I can just remember

that feeling like, “This is where you are supposed to be,” and that then transformed into kind of this nagging feeling that I had, that I needed to get more connected. So, I took this huge leap and signed up for this class where I knew basically no one. I walked up the stairs and into this room to a group of probably 30 or 40 women, all standing around chatting. I had the pleasure of getting to know Stacy, Renee, Courtney, Keisha and Piper, and they transformed how I viewed myself because of their willingness to share all of the things that weren't going perfectly in their lives. I grew up knowing all of the things. I knew “X” “Y” and “Z,” but I never knew how they related to me, like nobody ever sat me down and goes, “Listen, you are a sinner, and that’s who you are. That wasn’t who you were meant to be and you know this is how that can then be changed.” I never really understood that you had to take that step and acknowledge that you need Jesus as your Savior, and that was just never something that was ever conveyed to me. So, as I walked with these women during this time, and watched them become more vulnerable and honest, I realized that, “Yeah, I can’t do this on my own; I need Jesus. I need Him in my life. I need Him to save me from myself.”

I don't think that there are words that I could use to describe the difference that Lincoln Berean, Selah—one of the Women’s Ministries Bible Study classes—and Pastor Clark have made in my life. My whole life I've been in this process of trying to find God in my story, and I just want to tell you, “Thank you for teaching me what grace is and what it looks like, and for showing me the little pieces of you that I have come to know are the little pieces of Jesus showing through!”

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