

Nov 01, 2020 | Mickey Klink

The Need for Vision

James 4:1-17

Romans 15

[This is an imperfect transcript from a pre-recorded sermon. Our volunteers work hard, but we appreciate your grace.]

Good morning, Hope Church! Thank you for joining us for worship this morning. We want to welcome you, even if we're not gathering together this morning with you, we're glad that you're gathering with us via this medium. I do want to make you aware, though, that beginning this Sunday, beginning today, November 1, we are physically gathering and we're meeting indoors. Not only has it gotten too cold to be meeting outside, but in light of the guidelines that have been given, we have found a way to be able to meet indoors. I sent a midweek video, giving some of the specifics of that and if you haven't seen that I'd encourage you to watch it. But I want to just give you the big picture now, even in light of the new mitigation requirements in consultation with governing leaders, with the CDC, with the Winnebago County Health Department, with other local churches. By increasing our social distancing and by requiring masks inside the whole time, we are able to physically meet. These services will continue to be family services. Bring your children to these; you'll be in your socially distanced "setup" so please consider coming. I know some of you with health issues or risks are concerned, and will continue to meet online through this resource, and we understand that, but I want to let you know that we are doing everything we can to meet these guidelines. In fact, we are even having social distancing upon entering and leaving, guarding that social interaction that is understandably a risk for our people and for our community. So we want you to be aware of that.

Starting this Sunday, right now, depending on when you're watching this, we are meeting at 8:30 and 10:45. Each service has two venues to allow for the most social distancing. We long for when we can gather together without some of these restrictions, but we understand that we are part of a broken and fallen world. We understand that we are part of a community that we are called to not just minister to, but to love and show respect and care for. We understand that as part of the church family, we are called to love one another and care for one another. Even right now, with people in our congregation who have tested positive for COVID, and we are aware of that. So we want to do all that we can in this particular moment to reflect the light of the gospel and the love of the gospel, and I'm asking you to do the same. So, we hope that you're

comfortable and willing to come. We think that the measurements that we have set up are appropriate and good following guidelines, etc. I want to encourage you to come, if you didn't come this Sunday, because you weren't sure maybe come on November 8th and worship with us, but we are just glad that you're with us in this setting and venue right now.

I'm going to pray. We're starting a new series this particular week, I'm just calling it Hope Church 2025. I will explain that as we work through the sermon this morning, as I'm setting kind of an introductory talk this morning. As we look at a couple passages in God's Word. But, I want to pray for you and for our community and for our church family as we start our service this morning.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the grace of the gospel, and by that we mean the grace that we've received through our belief in putting our hope in Jesus Christ. Father, we ask for you to guide us as a church as an institution, an organization. We ask you to guide us to make wise decisions on how we love God, we love neighbor, and we love one another. Father, guide us also as a family, not just in this institutional sense of the church, Hope Evangelical Free Church, but as a family, Father, with brothers and sisters. This not engaging, or sparring even, over the disagreements that are flooding our time right now, Father, that we would have a unity grounded in the ministry of the Spirit. That that would be palpable between brothers and sisters, even among those with whom there is not an alliance and an agreement on certain political or practical things. Father, we ask for that. We know that you desire that, you've commanded that for your people, we ask by your grace to work in us in that regard. Father, as we look now to Hope Church 2025, as we think about looking down the road and being intentional and purposeful, fruitful and faithful, help us, Father, to rightly hear your word, to be moved by your Spirit and to direct and aim our activities in a way that is the most glorifying to you, and the most faithful to what you've called us to do. I pray all this in Jesus name, amen.

I'm starting a new series this week called Hope Church 2025. My sermon this morning is simply entitled *The Need For Vision*, and I'm going to start right away with my first of two points this morning and it's this. This series intends to bring clarity to the ministry of Hope Church in the years to come. Now, this is important for a church: that we know who we are, what we're supposed to be doing and, ultimately, how we're going to be doing it and where we're going to go. But, let me set a little context for you, that has been the engine that has led to the series that we're going to be in for the next six or seven weeks. Last ministry year, the elders asked me to lead us, and by us I mean not just the staff, but even the elders. They asked me to lead us in casting some long-range visional direction for our church. Now, in general, I have been allergic to visional talk,

maybe especially by church leaders, and here's why - I want you to understand I'm not against strategizing, I'm not against having a plan, it's not about just being ad-hoc in all we do. Visional language by church leaders has rubbed me the wrong way - here's why: in my thinking, the church has already been given a clear vision in scripture.

Even more, the church is not Google or Walmart or Apple, with quarterly goals and measurements derived from a free market economy. I just think that's important to state. We are an organization, there is an institutional church, we have assignments we're supposed to do, but the measurement tools, I think, have been way off. In fact, if I'm being honest with you as I go to pastors conferences and meetings, I am sorely disappointed by some of the interactions I've had, even in our own denomination, and I love our denomination. I feel like our church has affiliated with it in even stronger ways over the last few years, but even in our organization there can just be these measurement guidelines and goals that I feel go beyond what scripture is saying. In fact, it is so easy for us as a church to want to base or define success based on worldly models. In our minds, it is almost impossible for us not to think of success by means of size and dollars. It is just so hard for us not to think that way. That's because in every other organization, that's what they do. How many sales did we get? How many customers do we have? How many new office buildings have we built? We think in size, and we think in dollars. What's the budget of a church, what are the number of people that attend? Brother's and sisters, that is one of the least successful measurement tools to determine the success of a church. Some of the most faithful churches can be just a handful of people. They could have 75 people, but they're producing massive amounts of converts, or they're baptizing, they're discipling, they're evangelizing, they're loving in their community, even if they don't have a mega church with multiple campuses. We have to define it carefully. So when I would listen to some of these pastoral conferences, or some of them I would attend, I would hear things like "church growth", and I would hear language of growth and part of me would say "growing what?" More numbers? I won't say who the speaker was, but many of you may know his name. My first year here, a couple of elders and pastors and I went to a local gathering of a pastor's conference in the Chicago area, because it was close. We could drive there and do it in one day, and I remember that this well-known speaker of a church of thousands of people was going to give the three things for making your church better. And you know what number one was? A parking lot. If they don't have access, they won't come. The second was the production of worship, and the sound equipment, and the third was children's ministry. In this generation, security and enjoyment and entertainment for the kids. Now you tell me where you get that from scripture. You tell me where scripture is saying that. So, if we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in a parking lot facility, ease of access, a wonderful lobby with coffee being served, and donuts, and we've got our church merch and everyone's got their t-shirt on, they come

in and they're just totally entertained. We've got Chris Tomlin leading worship every single Sunday, and this is the best sound, and we've got a full screen going around the entire sanctuary with videos and clips, people laugh, and people cry, and we got the best kids area with a three-story slide where you can slide into the baptismal - and it's just so much excitement . . . Is that success? Is that what it looks like? What about making disciples? What about reaching the community?

So how do we define success? So, you have to know, when the elders, and rightly so, as we as elders talk about establishing clear directions - so that we're aiming all the tires, so to speak, in the same direction, all the heads, all the hands are working toward the same goal - the moment I hear visional talk, I'm like, it's not going to look like that. I feel like a lot of what we've been given is clear. At the same time, I do realize that even if every church is assigned by scripture to be a missionary outpost of the gospel, there are differences in churches that need to be taken into account. Not every church has the same resources. Not every church is the same blend of gifts, not every church, and this may be the most important, is in the same context for ministry. What does a church in Indonesia, a place I visited with a Muslim-dominated culture do, compared to a church in the inner city of Chicago, versus a church in north Rockford in the Roscoe-Rockton State Line area? If those aren't doing something different (and it's not different in preaching the gospel, it's not different in preaching, it's not different in the ordinances of Baptism in the Lord's Supper - those should be the same), but if they're not thinking about what it means to communicate the gospel, what it means to love on neighbor, what it means to display not just the special grace of God but the common grace of God - if those things don't look different, then something's off. While each corporate gathering may look very similar, the thrust of the nature of ministry can look so different in part of its details.

So, after spending time in prayer, doing some reflection on my six years of ministry at Hope Church, some reading and processing, I proposed to the staff and then to the elders (out of whom we did some revision and development), I proposed four visional goals for Hope Church. I actually shared those goals at the end of the last ministry year at our online May congregational meeting. Now, I didn't go into the details. I just kind of briefly stated them saying at the end of this year, fulfilling what the elders had asked of me to do, these were the goals that the staff had wrestled with in a January retreat, and the elders had wrestled with, and we talked through them. Here were the goals that we think fit the Biblical directions and the contextual situation of the ministry of our local church. So this series, Hope Church 2025, is intended to flesh these goals out. In conversation with the elders, it was believed that maybe the most helpful way to cast this vision, to explain it and to put some flesh on it, is actually to spend time on Sunday mornings. And I think there's wisdom in that, because we are a church family, it is not

just a few professionals doing ministry. It is the congregation doing ministry. If there is a goal for us to attain, if there's an approach that we're trying to follow befitting our context, then everybody, every member of the church (if that's not a plug for membership, I don't know what is), everyone who's committed to this local body, and this body is committed to them, should know where we're trying to go, so that we're all hands on. These goals have bubbled up from our church's unique history, our church's culture and our congregational makeup, including the ministry opportunities the Lord has directed us toward in recent years. And I'll be honest with you, in the providence of God, the timing could not be better. COVID19 has helped us see how these visional goals are needed now, more than ever. We have seen inaccuracies, and how we've prepared you to act in certain ministry, that the moment that the professional church is removed, and all that's left is the organic nature of congregational life, the moment that it is removed, there can be stuff lacking, and we realize, wow, we've got to clean this up. We've gotta grow in this area. We've got to empower our people to be stronger in this way. So, your pastor and elders have been assigned by God to shepherd you. That's our assignment. Again, that's why, when I think of vision, I don't think CEO. I think the CEO model of church is unbiblical. I think of under-shepherds, under Christ, the Chief Shepherd, that Christ has said we want you under-shepherds to lead the people, under-shepherds, assistant to the chief shepherd, and this under shepherding involves both articulating and implementing vision, that fits our church context and needs. This series will flesh that out for you.

The last thing I want to talk about this morning, and share a couple examples of this from two Biblical texts, is this, and this is my second point. Before I share what the vision of Hope Church is, we need to understand why a vision is needed at all. Why do we need a vision? I just want to end with four brief comments, four brief reasons why we need a vision.

The first two come from Romans, chapter 15. If you have your notes with you there that maybe you printed out or you can grab a Bible, look at Romans 15. I'm going to read just a few verses from Romans 15, verses 18 to 21, and then I'm going to share with you two reasons from Romans 15 why we need a vision. Here's Paul near the end of his letter to the Romans - and he says this in Romans 15:18, "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ . . ." Then he says this in verse 20, " . . . and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Here's the first reason why we need a vision: a specific vision for ministry is Biblical. You specifically see Paul in Romans 15 having a particular mission. He doesn't just say, "listen, everyone is supposed to do the exact same thing", he doesn't say that. In fact, he says this in verse 20: "I make it my ambition." Now, that word ambition sounds like something we would say, like I'm ambitious for something, I want to pursue, I want to achieve. But the same word could literally mean "I make it my mission, my focus." You can even translate it more loosely as "my specific task", like what I'm assigned to do is going to look different than my brother Peter, or my brother John. My task in light of God's larger kingdom work, and the ministry of the gospel, is to minister the gospel in this way. A specific vision for ministry is biblical.

A second point we would say from Romans 15 and still in verse 20, is this: a specific vision for ministry is how we contextualize the gospel. Again look at verse. 20. I make it my ambition, my mission, my specific task to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation. Now, that's interesting, isn't it? For him, he wants to make sure that the gospel is being spread and deepened in every particular place. In fact, he's intentionally not going where the gospel has already been preached. His particular mission, his assignment, is to preach to the unreached peoples. That not only gives warrant for a specific vision for ministry that is Biblical, because Paul did it and explained so here in Romans 15, but also that a specific vision for ministry is how we contextualize the gospel. That's a big word, contextualizing. Maybe the kids sitting here hear that big word contextualized. It just means put it in context. Let it fit the situation. To contextualize, is to apply the gospel in a culturally sensitive way. Knowing a people, knowing a history, knowing their loves and their hates, even knowing their idols. Meaning a good shepherd will come to every single church. They will learn the loves and the hates of people, they will learn their customs, their values, their beliefs, their cultural practices, the habits of the people, they will see areas of strength and they will see areas of weakness and they will seek to grow them up in the gospel. To make them faithful disciples specifically in ways that need to be improved upon. Like reading with my fourth grader. She reads well and I'm thankful for that, but when she gets to a word she doesn't know, she will guess. We saw the same trait in our older kids when they were a similar age, and so literally, if I'm reading with her, when I'm not just saying "okay read the words", I'm contextualizing, knowing who she is. So if a big word is coming I'll say, don't guess, don't guess, don't guess, don't guess and she'll smile a little bit. We make it a fun event, but I'm trying to encourage her to slow down on the big words. That is me as a dad, contextualizing the teaching of a young student to be able to to learn, to know, to be a disciple of literature, knowing how she is tempted to act, I try to preemptively speak into it to develop habits that make her a more mature reader. If that is true for reading, why would it not be true for a Christian life? We

contextualize all the time. For my wife and I, if we were to take two of our kids, for example, when it came to disciplining two of these kids, they could not be more polar opposite. One of our kids, they were so strong and so tough. I remember if there was a moment of discipline and their face would be all crunched up and their fists would be clenched, and they'd be looking at me, and we're talking when they were two or three years old. I've got another child. I come to that child and I have to know that if I even just slightly raise my voice, any level of disappointment, they can collapse and just feel so crushed. So, with each of these kids, it might be the same kind of raising them up, the same kind of training, about something with cleaning a room, or it's your turn to do the dishwasher, or how you interact with your siblings. With one of them, I literally have to put on a lifting belt and a flak jacket, and I'm going in because it's going to be a strong battle. With the other, I'm bringing flowers and candy and I'm bringing pillows and lots of hugs. And yet I'm trying to reach the same goal. What is the goal? To raise them up to know the truth! That's contextualization. I am still being a father to each of these kids, but I am doing it with a fatherly sensitivity. We need to have a pastoral, shepherding sensitivity to our context, and your pastors and elders need to know areas where you've got your idols. You've got the things in Christianity that you really really love. The things of the Christian life that you're all behind, and the other things that you need to be spoken to. I was encouraged recently by the feedback I got from that politics sermon that was entitled *The Lord Laughs*. I appreciated that many people were thankful for that, but at the beginning of that service, I said this: "There are times when your pastors need to speak to the brokenhearted. There are other times when your pastors need to speak to the hard-hearted." And there is such truth in that, and contextualization is knowing when and how to do that. So there are the first two: the "why" of vision - it's Biblical, and number two. it's how we contextualize the gospel.

Last thing I'll look at quickly is James 4:13-17. I'm going to read those and I'm going to give our last two "why" reasons. James chapter 4, starting in verse 13:

"13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

The third "why" comes right out of verse 15, where it speaks about the Lord's will. A specific vision for ministry is how we seek and submit to God's will. James 4 is not saying that we don't do planning. Quite the opposite. It's saying that when we plan, we speak in a way, we work in a way. We assume all along, every step of the way, that it is

the Lord leading us. We believe, for example, that God's word has given us direction to which we should listen and seek guidance. We know that God's Spirit is moving and directing us, and that we should be listening to walk in the Spirit. As my good friend Ken Birding recently wrote in his book. It's helpful for me to even think, what does it mean to "walk in the Spirit"? What is life in the Spirit, what is leaning on the Spirit, and trusting in the Spirit? We need to be doing that, and I believe we have. A specific vision for ministry, is how we seek and submit to God's will. Lord, what do you want us to do? We are a missionary outpost. We should be caring for our people. How can we help them be better disciples? How can we help them love God, love neighbor and love one another more? What do we need to do to be preparing them to love the Lord, with all their heart and soul and mind and strength? Lord, I know that's what you want us to do, but how do we implement that in their lives? What are ways we can make some adjustments, even as Casey said, *semper reformatta*, always reforming? What are some ways we can reform so that people love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, even more? So that they love God, neighbor and one another in more clear and verifiable ways? Help us, Lord! Notice, that's both contextualizing, but it's also seeking the will of God.

The last thing that James says in verse 17 of James 4 is this, it's a stark comment: "so whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." And we go right past that or we miss it because of the "if the Lord wills" - it's easy to focus on verse 15, but verse 17's comment is significant. A specific vision for ministry.

This is the fourth "why" - a specific vision for ministry is how we confirm we are doing the right thing. A vision connects our church and its ministries to what the Bible already makes clear a church is to be and do. Are we doing the right things to raise up disciples? I know we've done them for a while, and I know they're fun, but are they the right things to make disciples? To love God, love neighbor, love one another? Before I could share the "what" of the vision of Hope Church 2025, I wanted to explain the "why." What were my four reasons? A specific vision for ministry is Biblical. It's how we contextualize the gospel. It's how we seek and submit to God's will. And it's how we confirm we are doing the right thing. We're going to end our time in a song called *Be Thou My Vision*. The song is way broader than just speaking about a vision that a local church would adopt to be faithful in making disciples and being disciples, and being on mission. And even though it's broader than that, it speaks to it. The very first part of the song says this: "Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart. Naught be all else to me, save that thou art." I want nothing else to be significant to me, but who you are. "Thou my best thought by day or by night". That's a statement of focus, the most important thing. Help me align myself to you by day and by night. I align myself to you. And listen to this last line - "Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light". We want the Lord to be this

vision for us, under whom and within the light of God, that all else is seen and made visible. Brothers and sisters, that is my hope for this particular series. That's my hope for our church family. That's clearly the hope that the pastor elders have assigned to me and to our staff, and it's a hope that's not just a professional staff or elder kind of role. This is something that the congregation is supposed to do, that we are on mission, declaring the gospel in word and in deed, declaring the special grace of Jesus Christ and the common grace that God made us, in his image, to declare and share with the rest of the world, and specifically our community, and we want to do that well. And this kind of a vision is not just a cute thing that a Google staff conference would have or something Walmart would put on a banner. It's how a church is Biblical. It's how a church contextualizes the gospel, it's how a church seeks to submit and know God's will, and how a church confirms it is doing the right thing in all it does. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for your Word. You minister to us. Thank you for the gospel. Again, we thank you. Help us as a church family to be faithful to see what we're supposed to do. To seek your will and to know ways that we can do better. Always reforming, as Casey taught us last week. Always reforming to be the faithful people of God in a missionary outpost, a local embassy of the kingdom called Hope Evangelical Free Church. Father, thank you for your goodness to us. Guide us in this process. That not just staff and elders would catch and understand the direction you're moving our church, but that all the congregation as one local body of Christ would be on mission together in harmony by the Spirit. I pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.