

Core Part 2: Guiding Principles that Make Us Distinct!

Week 5: We Reflect the Reality of Heaven

I. Before we get too excited about next weekend, we're concluding our series, Core Part II in which we've discussed 5 out of the 10 Core Values that make us distinct. Not that we have the market on any of these. That's not what we're talking about when we say distinct. Our Core Values when pulled together, like the image from combined puzzle pieces, describe who we're prayerfully seeking to be as a church family. These Core Values are all aspirational in nature. We have not arrived fully at any single one. But as we seek to be a church that is pushing through boundaries to share God's story from Norfolk to the nations, these Core Values are common language principles that serve as the guardrails along the path toward the vision and mission God has called us to.

A. It's a bit of an aside here, but it's worth explaining. One of our Core Values is:

[Slide]: We Inspire Through Grace

1. Jesus's earthly ministry was during the Roman occupation of Israel. It wasn't a great time to be in Israel. Yet the command Jesus gave more than any other was:

[Slide]: Do not fear! (Matthew 28:10)

2. If ever there was a time to motivate through fear, Jesus could have done it.

Yet, He chose to motivate through grace. Bold, courageous, amazing grace!

B. There are some in our world today who are making a lot of money and gaining a lot of power through a very old scheme. That scheme is making people afraid and presenting themselves as the solution to the problem. Sadly, many churches and ministries take this route. But we can't do that here at Tab. Why?

[Slide]: We Bend to the Book

1. Jesus commanded us to "not fear" more than any other command, so how could we manipulate through fear and still say we're bending to the Book? We cannot.

C. Do we see how the Core Values work together? Take some time to truly look over these statements, because it's where we're headed as a church. The elder team or staff can't be the only people who are carrying the DNA of our Core Values. We all are a part of the work.

II. Today we're looking at the Core Value:

[Slide]: We Reflect the Reality of Heaven

Like the other Core Value statements, this value is rooted in Scripture, and we take this value from Revelation 5:9. Here's what that says:

Revelation 5:9 [Slide]: 9 And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Let's read Revelation 5:10 as well:

Revelation 5:10 [Slide]: 10 You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.

A. Keep Revelation 5:9-10 in mind and let's read the description of our Core Value statement, We Reflect the Reality of Heaven:

[Slide]: We believe heaven will reflect the beautiful diversity of God's creation. Heaven will be a place our diversity will be celebrated, and we seek to celebrate what is to come here and now. As we unify around our One Lord and faith, our differences are not viewed through a lens of division, but through God's diverse design to elevate the power of the cross. We aim to become an increasingly diverse church because a unified diversity reflects the heart of God and benefits us all.

Let's iron out a few definitions of key terms.

1. The simplest definition I found of diversity is this:

[Slide]: A range of different things

That's a pretty good basis for our discussion.

2. There is another key word in the definition that we need to consider as well, and that word is unity or unified. Here's a simple definition of unified that works well:

[Slide]: Brought together as one

- B. Combined, we aren't just seeking diversity, we're seeking a unified- diversity. In our instance, we are seeking to be a unified-diversity of people and perhaps some of us in this room are asking some very honest questions. Why is this so important? How do we even go about experiencing such a place? What would a church representing a unified-diversity look like or be like?

Let's unpack this passage in Revelation 5.

1. Big picture, Revelation is a prophetic vision given to the Apostle John on the island of Patmos around '95. Not Saved by the Bell '95; A.D. 95. Some treat Revelation like a crystal ball, but to me it's more like looking through a stained-glass window. We see the likeness of things without seeing in full clarity. John is describing the indescribable. There is some debate on how the events will unfold, but there is no debate on the reality that these events will in fact unfold and the result will be God making His dwelling place among people! In Christ we have eternal life to look forward to which the Bible describes as a complete and uninhibited communion with God and those in Christ! Congrats you're all experts in Revelation now!
2. Back to Revelation 5, John has a vision of the throne room of heaven, and he sees Jesus receive the scroll with 7 seals. A scroll with 7 seals was the way a will and testimony would have been executed in the ancient world. This is Jesus opening God's last will and testament that initiates the End Times events resulting in our final eternal state. Jesus alone has the authority to open the scroll because He alone has already secured the victory! He accomplished that on the cross 2000 years ago! He has the authority to open this scroll before the service ends today and might very well do so! Yet God has a heart for the nations and it grieves Him that any person would perish without knowing Him.
3. This part of the vision is Jesus taking the scroll and the posture of those in the throne room just before Jesus begins to open the seal. Those in the throne room fall down before Jesus in worship and they pour out an offering at the feet of Jesus. Do you want to know what the offering is?

[Slide]: Prayers of the saints

- a. If we ever think that prayer is a waste of time, this should change our perspective quickly!
Even when we don't get the result we think we should, there is no such thing as a wasted prayer!
 - b. As those prayers are being poured out, John experiences a worship service like nothing anyone has ever experienced! We get a vision of what worship in heaven will be like! If we're given the reality of what we have in store, why would we not want to get a head start reflecting that reality in the here and now?
4. The first response of those in attendance is a declaration of the One who takes the scroll. He alone is:

[Slide]: Worthy

Worship is a declaration of worthiness. It's the Greek word "axios" which means "weightiness." What are we going to give the most weight to? The old English words of "worth" and "ship" which we combine into worship are a combination of words that mean "cutting lose" and "turning toward." This worship service begins with a declaration that all has been cut lose and we turn to You - because You alone can open the seals. Jesus can bring about the final consummation of the victory of God, why?

- a. [Slide]: Because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. Revelation 5:9
5. Why are we a church that reflects the reality of heaven? Because in Christ we all have the same destination and it's to be gathered as one at the feet of Jesus! To reflect the reality of heaven we must begin by acknowledging the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the One worthy of our worship!
- a. We naturally gravitate toward people who look like us, think like us, vote like us, spend money like us, etc. But just because we gravitate naturally toward something, doesn't mean it is the best thing for us. I naturally gravitate toward Pollard's fried chicken, but after 10 or 11 pieces I start getting a little queasy!

b. I have a strong conviction that diversity within a local body of believers is a vital indication of the overall spiritual health of that body. And I say that because when I look out over a group of Christ followers, and I see people of all different backgrounds, it demonstrates the unifying power of the cross. When I pull up to a church and everyone has the same minivan, I keep going! There's nothing wrong with having friends that are "like" us, but what I will say is that if two people have the common bond of being brothers and sisters in Christ, that is a more profound bond than anything else. We should be intentional and genuine about diversity. And we do that by focusing our worship on Jesus!

6. Paul says in Galatians that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Does that mean that once we become a Christ follower it negates any other identification we may have? No, it doesn't! But what it does mean is that above all we see ourselves and those around us through the lens by which Jesus sees us! This is why unity in the church is so important. Above all, and only in the power of God's Spirit, we seek to see one another as Christ sees us.

7. Our racial and ethnic identity are just forms of diversity, but I'm going to talk about it, because that's the emphasis in Revelation 5:9. John is experiencing this worship service to come and those around the throne are praising and singing, and they (those around the throne) can identify and celebrate that heaven is made up of folks from every tribe, language, people, and nation! Some things about heaven we'll have to wait and see when we get there, but one thing is for sure, God doesn't morph us all into one homogenous mass! Heaven will be a place in which we're unified in our worship of Jesus resulting in a celebration of our differences!

a. I'll need to explain this statement, "we don't want to be a church for diversity; we want to be a church of diversity!" All of us come into the room or join online and bring with us a certain way of doing things from our upbringing. Some of that has to do with our family of origin, our race, or the location of where we grew up.

(1) For diversity -- When a majority is in place, it can be easy to determine how things are done and we'll welcome someone who may be different, but with the understanding that they need to conform to the majority way.

(2) Of diversity -- A church of diversity says that our majority way will be an all-out pursuit of Jesus Christ and in that pursuit, we're all willing to be open handed, so that God may bring about something entirely new in us all!

C. There is something holy and good about our differences, because they don't go away in heaven! We learn to truly see one another through the Image of God, and we celebrate our differences. We want to be a church that reflects the reality of heaven. We're very much in process, but it's happening! What God is doing in this place is truly amazing! I've never been a part of something as beautifully-frustrating as what God is doing. Beautiful because what God is doing could only be a work of His Spirit. Frustrating because it still is a difficult task to keep us unified and moving together. He's bringing young and old, black and white, Brazilian and Indonesian, rich and poor, democrat and republican, Alabama and Auburn, together in a united mission! We have hand raisers and halleluiahs sitting next to ice cold intellectuals, all expressing their worth and worship in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We've got a tremendous challenge to keep reflecting the reality of heaven, but it is worth the climb!

D. As the Apostle John is experiencing worship in the throne room of God, he heard those worshiping say:

Revelation 5:10 [Slide]: 10 You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.

1. This unified-diversity from throughout the nations has been commissioned to reign on the earth. Say what? I believe the next event to happen on God's End Times calendar is the rapture of the Church followed by a 7-year period of tribulation.

If you're not pre-tribulation and pre-millennial like me, it is all good!

Or if you're like, what is he talking about, all good too!

But we have to do something with Revelation 5:10, because it's God's word.

a. I believe this is a reference to the 1000-year reign of Christ in which we'll also participate!

The full manifestation of Jesus's kingdom will be actualized on earth during this period, and we'll get to experience it! At the end of the 1000-year reign, Satan will be released one final time before being eternally cast into the lake of fire.

b. After Satan has been defeated once for all, the Great White Throne Judgement. Those who have rejected Jesus Christ will be judged, but it won't be arbitrarily. It will be a judgement of their works in comparison to the holiness of God. This will result in an eternity separated from God in hell.

Please don't make the choice to rely on works. We don't have to.

Accept the grace of God through Jesus Christ today.

c. After the Great White Throne Judgement,

Revelation 21 gives us a final taste of what is to come for those in Christ:

Revelations 21:1-4 [Slide]: 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

2. If we're thinking about just riding it out until we die, so we can go float in the clouds, we're not thinking about our eternal state right. The more I soak in the Word, the more I realize that the grand narrative of God's salvation isn't about snatching us up to heaven, as much as bringing heaven to earth. Do we get this? God is truly going to establish His kingdom on earth through His Son Jesus Christ! And He is gathering a multitude of worshipers from every tribe, language, people, and nation! We have the privilege of getting a head start now!

3. One day before too long our Core Value statement:

[Slide]: We Reflect the Reality of Heaven

will reach its expiration date! We won't reflect the reality of heaven on earth forever.

Listen to the prayer that Jesus prayed in Matthew 6:

Matthew 6:9-10 [Slide]: 9 Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. 10 Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

One day soon the reflection will be no more, because the reality of heaven will be done on earth!

The kingdom will have fully come!!

E. A unified-diversity of worshipers celebrating our differences for all eternity as we unite together in complete and uninhibited worship of our Savior and King!

For now, we can only reflect, but let's lean in with all we have. I want to get a head start today for that day!