

“Our Main Goal”

By Chris Ulrich

Sunday, February 9th, 2014

It's good to see everybody this morning. This beautiful—another cold day. I was looking at the temperature read-out on the dashboard this morning, and I noticed that it was 11°, and, I've got to say that, I think that's the temperature I've seen more than anything else this winter. I mean, back in November, I look up, it's 11°; I look up, it's 11°—or less. One thing is for sure, spring is almost here. Not prophesying, just saying, like you said, Rob, it's only a couple of months away. How many watched the Superbowl? I've got to say, what a terrible game. That's not going to be the message this morning, but it was just absolutely atrocious, I guess unless you're a Seattle fan. Do we have any Seattle or Denver fans here? Somebody's from Seattle? No, you're not. Well, my congratulations, or my condolences; I guess I have to put it like that. In a lot of ways, I'm glad that the football season is over, because of the tension. I like it, it's just not something that's non-stop...

One thing that we can say, when we look at the Word of God—and I'm kind of jumping into a point that is not the message, but it's going to be one of the main thoughts. It's not about gimmicks; it's not about short-cuts; it's not about taking the easy way out. It takes dedication and a desire to seek God for answers. Is there anyone who's currently in the military that's here this morning? Okay, but, for those of us that were, remember there was an expression called, “gun-decking.” How many remembers or have heard of that? It basically means to short-cut, to do something to create the appearance that the job is done, but it's really not. I think one good example would be painting over rust. You could say, “Oh, yes, see? the job is finished.” You look back and you know good and well that, after time goes by, all of the sudden that rust starts to seep through. It looks good and looks complete but it will come back to bite us. That's not the main message today, but wanted to introduce that point because it will come up later.

The theme for this month, as Andy had read earlier:

***Galatians 4:7** Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

That's all fine and well and it's good to know, but how does it apply to us and how do we make it personal? Well, we have to look at what promise or promises are we talking about?

Parrish preached last week, and one thing that stood out to me was how we're all going to have an epitaph. I know that might seem a little morbid to anybody on the outside, but for those of us who have a hope in God, it's something that we look at it as long-term, that's the reality of it. It's not something that we sit there and look at it and dwell on it every single day, like, “Augh.” It's something that we're aware of. You also talked about how we get to be an heir, the journey of an heir, that God is the One who will make us heirs, and that the heir has to be taught how to be an example. Those are some strong points, and they definitely stood out.

So we see that God has many promises for us in this life; I guess if I summarized it in a nutshell—especially if you look at Deuteronomy chapter 28 (and we're not going to read that), it's a lengthy chapter, and it just talks about the blessings of God that we can receive if we do His will, if we seek to do that which is right, or the curses of God if we don't. If we don't keep His commandments, if we choose to be idolaters, or whatever ways we could be transgressors in this life... But what's that promise that everybody is striving for, not just Christians? I'm actually going to read just a couple of passages here from the Old Testament, if you'd like to turn with me, if you have your Bible. We have to keep in mind that, if you look at the history of the Old Testament, and, I mean, it's three times the length of the New Testament. I mean, you're talking about something that was thousands of years that led up to the time of Christ. You look through, and you see Abraham, you see Isaac, you see the struggles, and

how they came out of Egypt, and the things that they went through, but the promises that God kept, but also the miracles that he brought them. You look at Egypt, now, as a country—I'm talking geographically speaking—it's just about all desert, and I've got to think that it wasn't always like that. You look at those plagues—and here's where faith comes in—we've got to have faith to believe, even when it seems like, "Oh, that's impossible." I mentioned a couple of months ago about the seeming impossibility of the miracle of the fishes and the loaves (Matthew 14:14-21). I personally wasn't there, but I believe it. I look at it like, if Christ took five fishes and a couple of loaves and fed five thousand people—or seven thousand in a different account—it just seems absolutely impossible, but I believe it, because, with God, all things are possible.

Job 14:14 *If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.*

There was a song that we did several years ago, along those same lines, 'When My Change Comes.' Again, what we're talking about is, what was the promise that they had in the Old Testament? We're going to get into that. I'm just going to touch on a couple of verses here, because I'm building to a point.

Psalms 16:10 *For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

So, again, this was a time when there wasn't a covenant that had been established that said, "I promise you this eternal life." But, it was something where people that had had a relationship with God, or even the strangers that actually decided, "I'm going to go with Israel. I'm going to go with them because I know that's where God's people are." That's the distinction between them and basically when God said, "I'm giving you a land because the inhabitants that were here before were basically engulfed in idolatry or iniquity." God cast them out. God saw that He had some people that were going to follow Him. I realize, and we all get it, that there were transgressors there, too, but, ultimately, it was a matter of God saying, "These are my people; these are the ones that have decided to do what's right."

Proverbs 10:25 *As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.*

Even in the Old Testament there was just enough faith and belief that God wouldn't leave us in the grave forever. None of us was there and experienced that, but I have to think that as human beings there had to be just enough uncertainty that people would sometimes wonder exactly what happened after this life. But there wasn't any Biblically written promise other than trusting in God is the best way to live.

So, even back then, people had an understanding that seeking God, praying to God, serving God, had it's benefits, and, for those that didn't, there was an end. There was an understanding that there was an end, but it was a bout having faith that God wasn't going to leave us in the grave forever. None of us was there to experience that, but I have to believe that there was just enough—at times—uncertainty. I mean, we've all—I've got to think—there's a little bit of uncertainty, especially when you're in a difficult situation. I'm not going to stand here and say that I've been close to death, and I suppose that, for people who have been in bad accidents or have had very severe illnesses, there is some uncertainty, and just enough trusting God, having faith in God, and even scariness. It's still a matter of, I'm banking on this being right. I'm banking on it being true. You look at the other end of the scale, where all the opposition—everybody who's trying to disprove God, or disprove Heaven, or disprove everything—and after a while, it's like, "Well, what do you believe?" and they start talking about the god particle, for what reason? Okay, if you've found something that you're going to sit there and say, "This is something from

which it all originated,” it’s still from God. It’s still God as the Creator, and these are His rules. These are the standards that God has. You look at it from a standpoint, like, in the New Testament, it talks about, “...We keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.” (1 John 5:3) It’s not a matter of, like, we’re trying to sit there and think that, “Oh, this is the absolute most grudging life, or most difficult, or most challenging...” It does have its challenges; there’s no question about it. But then, you look at it like, what are the benefits? they far out-weigh the challenges. Then we start looking at—I’m going to read one verse, here. We’re going to read Hebrews chapter 11, verses 1 through 13, but I want to read verse 13, because this, I think, drives home the point which the earlier three verses alluded to.

Hebrews 11:13 *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

Hebrews 11:1-13 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

I know that’s a lot of reading—that’s actually going to be our longest passage this morning. We look at the epitaphs of these people, if you will, that their main goal was to seek God and live a righteous life in Him. They did it without the promise that we have. Again, we look at, like, what the New Testament talks about, where there were different people who came up to Christ, and said, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” We understand that the Bible talks about the different components that we have to have as far as to be right with God as far as being born again. There’s nothing wrong with having goals, but that was their main goal, was to seek God, was to have a purpose in God. There isn’t anything wrong with having other goals in this life, and a lot of them for that matter. I’m talking about whether its professionally speaking, or whether it’s a relationship, or whether it’s family, or whether it’s just trying to learn a skill. Every year, I think a lot of companies will ask, “Well, what are your goals for this year? Okay, right them down.” We might have financial goals; I remember somebody telling me one time, “My goal is to get to ten-thousand dollars, as far as savings,” and I thought, that’s a good goal. It’s something that’s within the realm of possibility to do that. I think that it’s still tied in to what we have to as

Christians. It's not a matter of, "Okay, well, we'll just sit here and I'll just wait, and that's it. I'm just going to watch and pray." Those are important things, but faith without works is dead (James 2:17). We have to have some action, we have to have some plan, along with the physical goals, but we also have to look at it like spiritual goals. There's nothing wrong with having those goals, but is Heaven our main goal? We have to look at it like, I know that there's plenty of other things to do in life. How many channels or on TV, now when you think about it? "We can get you this package, or we can get you this package, and there's like 470 channels, or this package has 4,000 channels, and you can DVR this..." I'm thinking to myself, "I don't even know how to DVR one," and I consider myself to be somewhat technically-oriented, you know. Here's the truth: You can DVR up to four programs at once, and I'm thinking, "When are there four programs on at the same time that are even worth it?" That's my take on it; I'm just throwing that out there... If Heaven isn't our main goal, I—if it is our main goal, then that's good, but, if it isn't—we have to ask ourselves, "Why not?" What actually would supersede that? What takes precedence over eternal life being our number one goal? And, again, if you want to be financially well-off, that's important. If you want a healthy family relationship, if you like to travel, if you want to learn a new skill, those things are necessary. It all comes back to, one day we're going to stand before God, and that's not anything more than a reality, but it's also something that, as Christians, we look forward to. It's a matter of preparing ourselves; God isn't interested in us playing church or Him playing second fiddle to anybody or anything else. He's saying that we have to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. I'm not saying that there aren't things that pop-up, things that take some degree of priority or importance.

I also get that we live in a world that is filled with iniquity. It seems to be accelerating faster and faster. You think about what standards are now, as compared to what they were twenty years ago or fifty years ago. The Bible says that iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold (Matthew 24:12). And along with that wickedness there is greater and greater opposition to the holiness of God. I'm going to share something that I kind of thought I was going to—because I don't want to make it sound like I'm bashing this celebrity, okay? I think we all know who Miley Cyrus is, and this isn't about, like, wailing on her. I'm going to share something, I guess this was five or six years ago. I don't have teen-aged daughters, and I don't have that influence where I'm too worried about it, but I guess I'd say it like this: I remember there were a couple of us, we were working at the church building, and I think it was when we were in the process of moving. There were a couple of us that happened to be talking about football, and we mentioned the name, Joe Montana. Janita—how many remembers Janita? She was a little girl, she's the daughter of Jeff and Terri, they head up our fellowship in Charlotte, North Carolina. Cute kid. Anyway, she happens to overhear me and whoever else were talking, and as soon as she heard, "Montana," she goes, "Hannah Montana?" "No, that's not what we were talking about, but I know who she is." But, getting back to, this is something that—I was flipping through channels, a couple of weeks ago, and I get that there is an ungodliness in the world, and that is something that just seems to be pervasive, but they were doing, like, a short documentary on her. I stopped, and I said, "I'm just going to watch this for like ten minutes; I just want to know what they actually have to say." So, there was a song that she was doing, and these were the lyrics—now, take it as you will—but these were the lyrics: "It's my mouth, I can say what I want. It's my body, I can love who I want." I thought, well, the Bible says that we're bought with a price. The Bible talks about God's the creator; I can't just say what I want and think that there's not going to be any repercussions. I can't just sit there and live in the sin of fornication or adultery and think, "It doesn't matter. Nobody's catching up." Were going to get back to that in a moment here about how He's catching up to us. I know, Ken, you have a shop that, the kind of work that you do, you can't do short-cuts. You can't just sit there and say, "Oh, I'll just mask it over and make it as though..." The customer's going to find out, right? It might be some instant gratification, but, in about two months, "Hey, you know, this fiberglass is falling off the side of my boat!" Again, I don't want to make it sound like I'm trying to rail on Miley Cyrus, you know, I've got to keep her in prayer. I mean, I don't know her from anybody. I'm just saying this happens to be an influence of somebody that's popular... Again, it's not my cup of tea, as far as music; I'm just being honest with you, but it is the kind of thing that I realize that, if a kid like Janita had a real influence by somebody like that, what's she

thinking now? I don't really know. It's up to her parents to sit there and say, "Well, she's kind of doing this..." I'm not trying to get too far sidetracked on a commentary about that, but I'm going to say that we live in a world that, we do see a lot of opposition.

I'm going to speak candidly, because it's discouraging at times when we see so many reject Christ. I'm of the mind—and I think a lot of us are—I'm thinking that people should be flocking by the hundreds and thousands and millions to Jesus Christ, in repentance, in trying to get a better life. I'm not saying we need God any more or less than any other previous generation in history, or any other future generation, but I know that personally I don't even like to think about where would I be without Christ. We sang a song several years ago, "Without Jesus, Where Do You Think You'd Be?" That sometimes comes to mind, because I think, "It's hard to say." I don't know if I'd even be alive; I don't know if I'd be in prison... There could be a lot of extremes about how people could end up, but one thing I know for sure is that I wouldn't be inheriting eternal life. That's for sure. You know—and this isn't meant to sound as though I'm being critical of any particular preacher, but true Christianity is not a popularity contest. This isn't something where we should just dumb down or water down the message to the point where it's like, "Oh, you can do anything, just come to church." You hear a lot of this, "Oh, I'm religious," or, "I'm spiritual." I'm thinking, "How?" If you're not seeking God; if you're not looking at the Bible, anybody can make that claim, "Oh, I'm spiritual," "I'm religious," or whatever it might happen to be. But, again, when people cover up the truth, just in order to gain a larger crowd, we're going to see that at judgment. Again, this is not just me saying, "Oh, yeah, it's judgment of them," but it's more like I'd better make sure that I'm teaching it in its entirety and looking at it like there is a plan of salvation. We've got to uphold that, and we've got to adhere to that, and we can't compromise that. We can't just paint over the rust! Eventually, and the Bible does talk about—in the Old Testament—surely your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23). I look at that—to me—if I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing, it's going to catch up to me; it's going to be exposed. We can't take any short-cuts if we really want to go to Heaven, and that's the main goal. There's no short-cuts to it; Christ said that anybody who comes up any other way is a thief and a robber (John 10:1).

One thing: we need to do our best to reach people in our testimony, and seeking God and pray for wisdom, but compromising the message isn't going to be any way of doing it. The Bible teaches that straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it (Mathew 7:14). It talks about Noah and how that only 8 souls were saved by water. Now, I don't know what the population of the Earth as then, let's say it was five million (I don't know)... But, you look at when Christ, even when He was there, and you hear people say, "Oh, if I was around in Christ's time, I would definitely live for God." Well, you are; you are around in Christ's time, according to the Word of God! It said that He gave a hard saying, and what's interesting is that it doesn't say what the hard saying was, just that he gave a hard saying, and many turned and walked no more with Him (John 6:60-66). Of the ten lepers, only one came back to thank Him? (Luke 17:12-17) Again, you would think hundreds or thousands or millions of people would say, "You know what? this is something that I want to do." But God saves us one soul at a time, so, it's not like it's just some assembly line of people that come up and just, okay. I know there's examples—like on the day of Pentecost, there were three thousand souls saved (Acts 2:38-41)—but God saves one soul at a time. When Justin and Bianca came up here and shared—I appreciate that!—it's good to see people from different time frames, who are interested, who are taking it seriously, and I see that in them. Maria, I appreciate the song—I didn't understand what you were singing until Sonia translated, but that was good to hear.

Luke 21:19 *In your patience possess ye your souls.*

I know that's not the shortest verse in the Bible but it's pretty close to it, so I think it's pretty easy to remember. As hard as it is to practice sometimes, and I speak from plenty of personal experience, as far as sometimes feeling like I'm not the most patient guy. We need to have patience. I mean, it's one of those things where it's not like it's an easy trait. It is something that, it's a trait, it's a quality, it's a characteristic that we've got to have. I believe that, when we seek God for it, we'll get it. That doesn't

necessarily mean that, “Okay, I pray for patience,” and, instantly, you get the worst battle and conflict you’ve ever had; I don’t think it works like that. I’m not saying that it absolutely won’t happen, but, I’m not giving any guarantees. You know what? if God be for us, who can be against us? He’s not an enemy up there looking to trick us—if you say something, then you’re going to get the absolute biggest challenge ever; it doesn’t work like that.

James 5:7-11 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

I know that we all have different ways of expressing our faith; that’s one thing, that God made us that way. We’re not just a bunch of clones or robots... I know, Parrish, you and I were talking recently, and, how many of you have ever heard that every snowflake that has fallen is different? How many believe it? I do, but I’m not going to go counting them—especially this winter. I did look it up, and—I’m not saying this is the Gospel, it’s like you look it up in Wikipedia (it’s like a modern-day encyclopedia) and it explained, you know, in a realistic and relatively scientific way that, because of the shapes that there are, there’s like quintillions of different snowflakes, and to me, it’s just as mindboggling. I look at that like, that’s God. If God can make that, and He’s made every person that’s ever walked the face of the Earth as individuals, different in some way, and yet He makes a plan of salvation and He makes us a promise, but we’re going to be judged as individuals. I mean, that’s the good thing; that’s the comfort, and that’s part of being an heir of the promise is that we’re not going to be judged by somebody else, or this person or that person or our parents, or whatever. That’s also one of those things where I don’t know what everybody else has been through. Some people go through some of the most tragic, difficult... You know what? a couple of weeks ago, when Pastor Paine was here, and I’m just going to share this: He’s shared many times over the years about what happened to his mom, and I’ve got to say, when he does—For those who weren’t here, his mom had a cerebral hemorrhage when he was ten years old. He had a family that was, I think five boys and one daughter. He was ten years old when this happened. It’s heartbreaking, but he doesn’t share it in a way to try to garner sympathy; he just shares it, this is what happened, and this is how he dealt with it. It’s one of those things—my parents are still alive—I mean, I’m forty-six, my parents are in their mid-seventies, they’re still alive, but when I hear about that—and it’s not like he shares it every time—but when I do hear it, it touches me. It’s one of those things where it’s like, I’ll be honest, I don’t think I could have handled that when I was ten. I mean, I think I might break down—I mean, completely. That’s happened to kids; it’s like, “What happened to him?” “Well, he wound up in an institution.” Those kinds of things, I believe that God can restore, and I believe that there’s restoration and rehabilitation, and God can heal. I have to say, I didn’t go through that, but I respect that, and when I hear about other things that people go through, things that are difficult, that are challenges... Again, it’s a matter of being aware of it, and being respectful, and sensitive towards that, but looking at it like, “Well, what does God have for us in this? How can God be seen in this? How can I find God? What’s the understanding that I can get back on my feet, or learn something from this?” Sometimes things happen where it’s just, I don’t even know what to make of it. I don’t even know if I can find any words to say to offer comfort. Sometimes it’s not even a matter of words being spoken; sometimes it’s just a matter of being there, being somebody’s friend. But I have to ask, “Are we excited about Heaven? I’m not saying that you have to jump up, or start jumping around... Again, I want to use the snowflake analogy, because God’s made all of those different, and He’s made all of us different, and there’s different ways of expressing gratitude, and different ways of giving glory to God. I know, Sonia, I

appreciate times when—more in the summertime—like you mentioned the birds chirping early in the morning. I've got to say it's therapeutic. It's something where it's like, I hear that—not lately, but—I know in a couple of months I'll start hearing it again. It's one of those things where it's like, I appreciate that, and you give glory to God in different things. We give glory to God in different accomplishments that we have, or different skills that we learn, or different relationships that we have. It's one of those things where I can honestly say that there are times I just kind of shrug off that excitement. It just seems like it's taking so much longer than I thought it would take. Here we're going on twenty and twenty-five and then thirty years, and it's like, it just seems like, when you first hear it, when you first hear the message, and you obey the commandments of God, but then, I look at the time that it took Noah to build an ark. Again, that's one of those things where people might say, "A hundred years? People lived five-hundred years? I don't believe that." Okay. Let them not believe. It comes down to faith. You know, when the Israelites went through the Red sea, and God basically made a wall of water on their left and right hand, that was God. Then when they went through, and He brought those walls down on top of the Egyptians, I mean, you've got to think it's an absolute impossibility, but, with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). Looking at it from a standpoint of, okay, I've got to rekindle that excitement. I've got to look at it like, okay, I know I've sidetracked, or stepped off the boat, or I'll just keep doing whatever routine I've gotten into, and eventually it will happen, but... But I have to rekindle that. It's a matter of I know God's real. I know that He has a promise of eternal life, and none of us has ever been to Heaven. No one has ever gone there and come back and lived to tell about it. We've heard about these people that, they were on their deathbed, and they saw these lights, and... we've all heard that. I've never had that happen, I've got to say. There've been times when I've been like, "Uh-oh," and there's something coming at me, a truck or whatever it happens to be. But, it's one of those things where it's like hopefully, more than anything, it gets us thinking about God's promise to us, personally.

I'm closing, but I'd like to ask some questions in closing. Is going to Heaven our motivator that keeps us going when nothing else seems to make sense? Is it our inspiration when everything seems to get kind of boring and redundant? Things do. I mean, even say, like hobbies. I believe in having a hobby. Whatever it is that people like. I'm not talking about something that absolutely absorbs your time completely, but I think that you have to have something to look forward to, even in this life. I looked forward to when I got my driver's license. I did. I still enjoy driving. To this day, I mean, I've had my driver's license almost thirty years, I still do. I mean, I don't like driving in the heavy, heavy snow, or when it's really treacherous, but I still do. I like getting out on the open road—I've taken a lot of road trips in my life, and it's just been enjoyable. Looking at it like, are you looking forward to graduation? Are you looking forward to getting a better job?—Are you looking forward to a marriage? Are you looking forward to maybe reconciling with a family member, or whatever? Those things I'm talking about in the here and now, but looking beyond that, because eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard what God had promised to them that love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9), and that's something that's eternal, and it's something that's just beyond our wildest imagination. It's something that we have to believe, but not in the sense that we're being forced to, but looking at it like, okay, I believe it because I believe it. There was a time in my life when I didn't believe it; I didn't believe the Bible. When I would read it, I'd try to disprove it, and so there was even more confusion. Then when God just got ahold of my heart, and He showed me that He's a friend, a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Sometimes it's just a matter of toughing it out a little bit. When I was driving here a couple of weeks ago, I was grumbling to myself about something—I won't get into it, but—there was an expression, when I was growing up, like, say, my brother and I were going somewhere that we really didn't want to go; our parents would say, "Just make the best of it." How many have heard that before? How many have used it? Good. Just make the best of it because God's given us a promise and he will surely keep it. Let's thank God for that promise that He's given us. Give the Lord a praise.